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LEVIATHAN

SEXUAL POLITICS

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DEAR READERS,

I am thrilled to bring to you the second and final Leviathan issue for this academic year. The theme of this issue, along with the interpretative and critical collection of articles contained within, takes much inspiration from Kate Millett's formative piece of radical feminism: 'Sexual Politics.' For those unfamiliar with Millett's work, Sexual Politics (1970) focuses on the omnipresence of male authority – which has become 'legitimised' through tacit acceptance of patriarchal traditions – along with the functioning of power within sexual relationships. Perhaps most significantly, Millett postulated that 'sex has a frequently neglected political aspect,' and in doing so inaugurated a discussion broadly seeking to understand, criticise, and analyse the principles underpinning the distribution of power between the sexes and within sexual relationships. The pieces in this issue amplify the depth and breadth of this ongoing discussion.

Supported by the Edinburgh Political Union, myself and the team at Leviathan have tried to inspire wide-ranging and diverse conversation, providing students with a platform to critically consider the substance and form of 'Sexual Politics.'

This issue opens with Rob Robinson's timely piece examining the increasingly contentious nature of legal and media discourse surrounding queer, trans, and non-binary people, which tends to misrepresent these individuals as predatory and dangerous. Ewa Zakrzewska's then analyses the domestic and transnational experiences of LGBTQ+ Polish migrants through a focus on both lived experience and the personal views of Polish LGBTQ+ youth on their own migration. Examining the intersection of culture, experience, and patriarchy, Keisha Frimpong demonstrates how the continuing practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) across some African nations is rooted in entrenched teachings about sexuality, which itself is a product of traditional patriarchal norms.

Remaining within a similar thematic focus of gender-based violence, Johanna Nesselhauf analyses the relationship between gender inequality and gender-based violence. To facilitate this, Nesselhauf presents a case study on femicide in Honduras to draw together her focus on gender-based violence in private and public institutions, the silencing of women, and the role of intersectionality. Analysing arguments made by scholars of feminist theory and the constructivist school of thought, Stanley O'Brien considers which political theoretical perspective is most useful when seeking to address the issue of sexual violence in war.

In a wonderfully explorative piece, Sophia Georgescu demonstrates how mushrooms – as a valuable source of life and culture – pose a challenge to patriarchal dominance. Milly Holt then discusses why abortion bans in the US sustain a racist and sexist society. Holt's central argument is hinged on how the consequences of abortion bans reinforce inherently racist, sexist, and economic disparities across the US. Considering the quite contentious issue of sex work in feminist discourse, Karoliine Pärlin examines liberal, radical, and intersectional strands of feminist thought, and how they elevate or silence different voices in the broader sex work debate. Looking at a similarly contentious issue, Esme Patton reviews gender bias in di-

vorce courts. In particular, Patton highlights that gender bias can be viewed on both sides of the spectrum i.e., regarding both mothers and fathers.

Three longer pieces will supplement this issue in its online format. First, Jade Taylor employs an intersectional feminist analysis to demonstrate how liberal feminism's focus on the achievement of individual rights through a legal framework is insufficient when seeking to attain social justice in sex work and reproduction. Through a comparative analysis of anti-feminist discourses in Hungary and South Korea, Rosie Inwald discusses how the distortion of masculinities under such rhetoric has disrupted efforts towards gender equality. Finally, Julia Bahadrian considers gender in the realm of global politics – which has in recent years witnessed a slew of 'successful' and transformative female leaders. To explore this, Bahadrian analyses existing literature, along with a range of factors such as environment, the Covid-19 pandemic, and gendered power dynamics. These three articles can be found online at: http://journals.ed.ac.uk/leviathan, under the 'ISSUES' tab.

On a personal note, I will be graduating this summer and therefore moving on from Leviathan after three years on the team – first as Regional Editor, then as Chief Regional Editor, and finally as Editor-in-Chief. Though this period has not ever been without challenges, it has been intellectually stimulating and personally rewarding throughout. In particular, Ethan and I are immensely proud of the work we have done this year to give the journal a new stylistic direction, supported by the rest of the Leviathan team, the Edinburgh Political Union, and our friends at the Edinburgh College of Art.

Finally, I would like to welcome next year's Executive Committee: Jay McClure as Editor-in-Chief, Grace Hitchcock as Deputy Editor-in-Chief, and Devrath Jhunjhunwala as Treasurer/Secretary. I encourage each of you to take this opportunity in your stride, whatever challenges it might bring.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue of Leviathan. We have certainly enjoyed producing it.

Sincerely,

Liv Billard
Editor-in-Chief

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Defanged Queers, Transgender Monsters: How Legal and Media Discourse Frames LGBT+ People

Rob Robinson

Rob Robinson examines the increasingly contentious nature of legal and media discourse surrounding queer, trans, and non-binary people.

Contemporary legal and media discourse around queer, trans, and non-binary people has become increasingly visible and contentious. Frequent misrepresentation plagues trans and non-binary communities, who are presented as predatory and dangerous (Gwenffrewi 2022, 79). Queer voices are increasingly pushed towards reproducing the hierarchies of heterosexuality required by hegemonic masculinity. Why? Because queer, trans, and non-binary identities, by their very existence, are considered threatening. Hegemonic masculinity requires a specific type of masculinity to be glorified socially: it defines itself above femininity and masculinity that are non-dominant in society (Connell 1995, 77). Historically, homosexual masculinity has been structurally subordinated to heterosexual masculinity (Connell 1995, 78). Similarly, gender ambiguity arouses both disgust and desire, particularly when the ambiguity is from a feminine or androgynous man, or a trans woman (Connell 2020, 8). Consequently, the power structures involved in hegemonic masculinity are threatened if femininities or subordinate masculinities become socially accepted. There can be no hegemony if there are multiple ways to be masculine, if femininity is equally varied, and nothing is dominant.

This battle over hegemonic power takes place across many facets of modern society. This includes the way the legal system constructs queer, trans, and non-binary people as legal entities, and the way media discourse presents queer, trans, and non-binary people. Each area attempts to reinforce the power structures which support hegemonic masculinity, promoting conformity and punishing deviance from this enforced norm (Connell 1995, 77). This does not occur in a vacuum because legal and media discourse often overlap. Legal systems tame the potential threat of queerness to the structure of patriarchal relationships, and the media often perpetuates a moral panic around trans and non-binary people.

"There can be no hegemony if there are multiple ways to be masculine, if femininity is equally varied, and nothing is dominant."

The definition of the word 'queer' demonstrates the way in which legal systems in the UK and USA are inadequate in defining queer identities. To be queer is not simply to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual, as queerness is ambiguous and purposely hard to define (Stychin 1995, 141). Primarily, queerness can be understood by what it is against: the fixed categorisation of sexual and gender identity that resists binary oppositions such as homosexual/heterosexual, single/married, or male/female (Stychin 1995, 144). Given this, the opposite of queerness is not heterosexuality but heteronormativity, which is an understanding of the world where the category of heterosexuality within a patriarchal structure imposed by hegemonic masculinity is the norm. Here, the immediate issue with the legal system becomes evident. For example, the American legal construct of 'male' or 'female' contains expected sexual behaviours which are assumed to be universal, and these are inherently challenged by non-heterosexuals (Stychin 1995, 32). This results in the prosecution of works considered to be homoerotic through obscenity laws, such as performance artist

"Queer voices are increasingly pushed towards reproducing the hierarchies of heterosexuality required by hegemonic masculinity."

Karen Findlay, who lost funding due to her 'homosexual works' despite not identifying as a lesbian (Stychin 1995, 16). Since queerness is a further rejection of categorisation, it pushes back against these rigid boundaries that are both unnatural and limiting (Stychin 1995, 148).

This is evident in the realm of sexual, family, and reproductive legal rights where legal discourse defines queer identities as exclusively gay or lesbian (Stychin 1995, 31). Whilst there have been legal improvements, such as the decriminalisation of homosexuality in some countries, many other rights have been granted only insofar as the individual complies with the heteronormative assumptions of what a right should look like (Garwood 2016, 9). For example, when same-sex couples have been granted the right to marry and to have a family, this directly mimics the existing legal structure for heterosexual couples. Marriage law in the USA, for example, was so heteronormative that the language employed did not actually bar same-sex couples from marrying. Legal barriers to same-sex marriage only began to appear when same-sex couples sued for the right to marry after noting that the laws did not actually specify the gender of spouses (Calhoun 2005, 1024). UK legislation to enable same-sex couples to have biological children via IVF privileges those who are married and requires a process completely identical to heterosexual couples who are experiencing infertility (Garwood 2016, 11). Non-normative families, such as polyamorous relationships or single parents, are restricted (Garwood 2016, 11). The latter legislation's imposition of heteronormative structures into queer relationships forms a new binary – the 'good' and 'bad' homosexual family. The 'good' family is non-threatening and does not

"Legal systems tame the potential threat of queerness to the structure of patriarchal relationships, and the media often perpetuates a moral panic around trans and non-binary people."

challenge hegemonic masculinity or heterosexuality. It reproduces the patriarchal binary couple, with one partner playing the role of 'husband' and the other 'wife' (Garwood 2016, 10). This limits any children's exposure to subversive, non-normative relationships. The 'bad' family, deviating from the 'good' family in any way, is legislated out of existence. Since it faces multiple barriers to producing children, it is thus considered incapable of reproducing itself or exposing another generation.

Thus, legal definitions reinforce the constructed heteronormative hegemony. Rights-based discourse was a primary form of resistance within the mainstream movements for non-heterosexual people, resulting in increased rights and decriminalisation (Garwood 2016, 9). However, these increased rights brought increased visibility, threatening the dominance of hegemonic masculinity (Garwood 2016, 9). This visibility becomes particularly threatening in terms of the existence of gay men, especially gay men who are non-feminine. In this scenario, refusing to be subordinate (and thus effeminate) is a direct challenge to the heterosexual male hegemony (Connell 1995, 78). These gay men are made visible in society, having gained rights, and challenges to their legitimacy become more difficult due to their codified status within the law. Thus, the queer 'other' is transformed by the legal system into the lesbian, gay or bisexual person, depoliticised and reconstructed with the same power dynamics that exist for heterosexuals: they become homonormative (Garwood 2016, 9). No longer a threat to the heteronormative hegemony, they are instead brought within it, categorised, and defanged of their fluidity.

The threat, instead, is moved elsewhere. With queer identities legally reduced, defined into sexualities and homonormative relationships with little threat to hegemonic masculinity, the threat to the heteronormative hegemony comes from those who defy gender. Whilst the concept of queerness holds space for those who do not conform to gender norms, the legislative constructions (such as those in the USA and the UK) designed to constrain queer expression do not. Additionally, defying the idea of a gendered dichotomy questions masculinity as a distinctive, biological trait. This implies that gender is complex, behavioural, and learned (Connell 2020, 101). Hegemonic masculinity thrives when it is accepted automatically and unquestioned, hence the preference for the construction of gender as one of biological inevitability (Connell 1995, 77). This is why legal and media discourse around trans and non-binary people portray them as threats. This is to an extreme level as trans and non-binary people have been pointed at as evidence of societal collapse, misogyny, and capable of overthrowing the natural order simply by existing (Gwenffrewi 2022, 79). These are not marginalised voices: one of the most prominent individuals to invalidate the transgender experience is the author J. K. Rowling, who states that trans people have engaged in malicious and sustained assaults on the concept of womanhood akin to those produced by Donald Trump's presidency (Gwenffrewi 2022, 79). If trans people are allowed a space in popular discourse at all, it is when they perform their gender to the stereotypes allowed by hegemonic masculinity, much as homonormativity enforced heterosexual power structures onto relationships. For example, Christine Jorgensen, a high-profile trans woman from the 1950s, noted that she had to behave in an exaggeratedly feminine way, displaying no traits that could be considered masculine at all (Skidmore 2011, 276). These portrayals, however, are getting rarer and instead portrayals favouring the representation of trans people as predatory predominant; the 'transgender monster' looms far larger (Gwenffrewi 2022, 80).

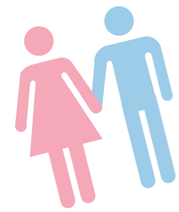
"With queer identities legally reduced, defined into sexualities and homonormative relationships with little threat to hegemonic masculinity, the threat to the heteronormative hegemony comes from those who defy gender."

The best example of the way in which media and legal discourses interact with trans and non-binary identities is the public discourse around the Scottish Government's current attempt to simplify the Gender Recognition Certification (GRC) process. The Scottish Government is not introducing any new rights for trans and non-binary people, nor changing any definitions of trans and non-binary people or of sex. Rather, the legislation de-medicalises the process of acquiring a GRC, a right which trans people have possessed since the Gender Recognition Act 2004 which allows for marriage and death certificates to be issued in their identified gender (Scottish Government, 2022a). Trans people have had the right to use appropriate single-sex spaces since the Gender Recognition Act 2004. Additionally, they are protected by the Equality Act 2010. This legislation does not change either of these acts (Scottish Government, 2022a). Non-binary people remain relatively unprotected by law, with their identities not recognised on a legal basis (Scottish Government, 2022b, 23).

Popular media and legal discourse, however, would imply that the Scottish Government is attempting to legislate to allow sex offenders to attack women and young girls. J. K Rowling, in her essay originally entitled 'TERF Wars' (TERF meaning 'Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist'), stated that to allow this legislation to pass would allow men to access female spaces in order to prey on them sexually (Gwenffrewi 2022, 93). False parallels created by conflating trans women with male sexual predators shape discourse to imply that they are identical.

The repeated insistence that predatory men will use the upcoming legislation to force access to women's spaces in order to commit sexual crimes is baseless. Legal scrutiny was unable to find any evidence for this having occurred in nations with similar legislation (Scottish Government, 2022b, 21). Additionally, none of those making these claims could provide any evidence of the existence of men claiming trans identity to prey on women (Scottish Government, 2022b, 21). If a cisgendered man attempted to sexually assault a woman, the power structures of hegemonic masculinity protect him and make it far easier for him to do so (Connell 1995, 83). If he were to deviate from this and become an 'other', those power structures would no longer protect him and he would become a target of those same power structures. The hegemony of heteronormativity does not permit deviation. Arguing that someone from a position of great protection and privilege would try and remove this protection in order to commit a crime is nonsensical. Gender-based violence occurs from a place of power towards a subjugated party (Lombard 2018, 2). It should also be noted that this debate centres entirely around trans women, whereas trans men and non-binary people are excluded entirely.

"The hegemony of heteronormativity does not permit deviation."



There is a long history of white, cisgendered, and privileged women utilising the privileges of white, heterosexual, hegemonic masculinity to criticise the transgender experience (Curry 2018, 3). When this happens, the targeted group is often portrayed as violent and subhuman, a threat to the sanctity of white women (Curry 2018, 3). This can be noted in the case of Black men, where their disadvantage is discounted or said to not exist, whilst that of relatively privileged white women is exaggerated (Curry 2018, 3). Essentially, heteronormative hegemony is based on hierarchy. The hegemonic masculine ideal is most prized. However, there are ways for those with subordinate identities to utilise the power of hegemony to benefit their standing at the expense of those beneath them, or with multiple, intersecting identities. In the case of trans and non-binary people, this often includes using feminist theory to position trans women as an oppressive majority who undermine female identity, despite the fact that cis-gendered people vastly outnumber them (Phipps 2020, 133). Trans men, if noticed at all, tend to be stereotyped as misguided women who need to be rescued from predatory men, feminising them, as in J. K. Rowling's 2020 essay. Given the similarity in tactics to those applied to Black men, it is not surprising that the vast majority of these trans-exclusionary feminists identify as white and come from a position of privilege, such as J.K. Rowling (Phipps 2020, 150). There are situations where the intersection of identities can create a new category of experience (Crenshaw 1989, 139). This is equally applicable to situations where an individual is the aggressor. Why is this intersection of identity important? Because trans and non-binary people ultimately threaten hegemonic masculinity at its root. Trans-exclusionary feminists fear, consciously or unconsciously, that they will lose their relative positions of privilege within the hegemony and so act against those of lower privilege (Phipps 2020, 160). This includes working with individuals who actively seek to destroy feminist gains, such as anti-abortion activists and anti-sex worker groups (Phipps 2020, 137).

The hegemony of heteronormativity does not require violence, so much as a successful claim to authority. The fact that this defence is mounted with such vitriol and violence exposes its inherent weakness. Violence of this type tends to occur when the authority is being questioned and failing, as an attempt to police those individuals who are deviating from the hegemony's desired norms (Connell 1995, 77). This is demonstrated by the false claim by trans-exclusionary feminists that trans individuals reinforce the gender binary, resulting in a shift of criticism towards trans people rather than hegemonic masculinity (Phipps 2020, 140). This claim ignores the fact that trans people are extremely critical of the gender binary due to their increased awareness and exposure to its structures (Phipps 2020, 140). The underlying reason behind these claims is biological essentialism, claiming that bodies which possess a penis are inherently violent (Connell 1995, 45). This supports the traditional views of hegemonic masculinity, where men are supposed to be active, sexual, dangerous, and prone to violence (Connell 1995, 69). Conveniently for hegemonic masculinity, trans-exclusionary ideology is only applied in such definitions to non-white people and trans people, never to the rich white conservative men, the group who benefits most from the power structure (Phipps 2020, 31).

Queer people are defanged by homonormativity and trans and non-binary people are targeted by the power structures that support hegemonic masculinity. This is achieved by attempts at confining queer people within a legislative structure that does not allow them to be transgressive, and by positing trans and non-binary people as a threat.

"Queer people are defanged by homonormativity and trans and non-binary people are targeted by the power structures that support hegemonic masculinity."

However, these attempts demonstrate the underlying weakness of hegemonic

masculinity and the social forces entwined with it, although they have real and catastrophic consequences for people within these groups. The hegemony is failing. As more queer, trans, and non-binary people become increasingly visible by defining themselves and resisting these power structures, the more they will attempt to push back and the weaker the hegemony will become.

To paraphrase the slogan popularised by Queer Nation: We are here. We are queer (and trans and non-binary). Get used to it.

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Artwork by Henry Wolff

Queer Migration:

The Lived Experiences of LGBTQ+ Polish Migrants

Ewa Zakrzewska

Ewa Zakrzewska analyses the domestic and transnational experiences of LGBTQ+ Polish migrants to understand the factors that inform migration patterns amongst this group.

'I would like to be able to hold hands with my girlfriend in public, get married, have children or simply just earn more money than in Poland'

~ 18-20-year-old lesbian student living in Warsaw

According to the Rainbow Map & Index, the benchmarking tool that ranks countries on their LGBTQ+ equality policies, Poland is among the six countries in Europe with the weakest protection of LGBTQ+ rights (ILGA-Europe 2022). The LGBTQ+ acronym stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning/Queer, but encompasses other identities such as asexual and intersex. In this study, the word 'queer', an umbrella term that refers to different identities, will be used interchangeably with LGBTQ+. While the legal status of LGBTQ+ people in Poland has not changed since the political party Law and Justice came into power in 2016, the intensification of anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric by the Polish government has been prevalent (Chojnicka 2015; Yermakova 2021). Anecdotal evidence suggests that the rhetoric's impact on the LGBTQ+ population has led to many young people leaving the country (Pronczuk 2021). Sexuality and gender identity are dimensions that are understudied in the context of transnational migration, especially with regard to discrimination, a sense of belonging, and the current political climate in Poland.

For that reason, this research project asks: how does the lived experience of young LGBTQ+ Poles (aged 18-25) impact how they view migration? This question shall be used to analyse the relationship between 'lived experience' which includes emotional, political/legal and material dimensions, and 'views on their own migration'. By creating a better understanding of how the lives of young Poles are impacted by being LGBTQ+, better programs supporting this group can be implemented. Thus, this research project consists of a survey that targets young queer adults currently living either in Poland or abroad and aims to understand the particular challenges this group faces due to the context that they find themselves in.

"By creating a better understanding of how the lives of young Poles are impacted by being LGBTQ+, better programs supporting this group can be implemented."

Literature Review

As the two dominant research approaches in the field of migration studies focus on the socio-structural position and cultural identities of migrants, sexuality and emotion have not been systematically analysed (Boyle et al. 2014; Brettell and Hollifield 2014; Stark and Bloom 1985). Although Binnie (1997), building on Evans's concept of 'Sexual Citizenship' (1993), investigated the role of space in the construction of sexuality, this contribution was only accompanied by a small growth in the literature on queer migration. Tackling this under-researched dimension, Mai and King (2009) argue that love and sexuality are important considerations that frame and inform how people experience migration and belonging. Thus, to complement the dominant economic and cultural paradigms they advocate for a "sexual and emotional turn" in migration studies by adding a dimension that emphasises the embeddedness of emotions within materiality (Mai and King 2009, 296). The scholars argue that entirely separating love, the gendered view on responsibility for one's family, and the desire to improve one's economic status, is difficult.

This perspective is a vital addition to the literature and has served as the basis for exploring the experiences of non-heterosexual migrants in the Polish context with themes such as queer visibility and the ability to live a "normal" life (Mole 2019; Stella et al. 2018; Szulc 2019). As most research implicitly assumes that the average migrant is heterosexual, these qualitative, questionnaire and interview-based studies provide original contributions to understanding the experiences of the LGBTQ+ Polish migrants in the EU and the UK. The UK, as the main destination of Polish migrants after 2004, has been the focus of an extensive body of empirical research on Polish migration which discusses social networks, identity construction, social mobility, and the impact of Brexit (White 2016). Nevertheless, sexuality and love has been omitted in this academic discussion, which is regrettable as people with queer identities might be especially affected by emigration to a country that is considered to be more LGBTQ+ friendly.

Mole (2019) analyses the narratives of Polish migrants living in London and identifies two modes of queer migration: domestic migration, predominantly to Warsaw, and cross-border migration. The findings also show that sexuality has either had a direct or an indirect impact on the respondents' decision to move. The most comprehensive research on the matter of LGBTQ+ in the UK has been done in the 'Queer #PolesinUK' report by Szulc (2019). Based on the responses to an online survey and in-depth interviews, the report highlights how LGBTQ+ Poles navigate different cultural contexts as well as demonstrates how this group has been impacted by Brexit and the lack of legal rights in Poland. Crucially, Szulc's (2019) work highlights how important it is to learn more about this particular group through research – the experiences of queer Poles are omitted, for instance, in The Office for National Statistics (ONS) reports which estimate the reasons for migration abroad. Related to this need for understanding migrant experiences, a study by Stella et al (2018) unpacks the notion of what living a "normal", better life means for Eastern European LGBTQ+ migrants in Scotland, an aspect identified by many in the 50 interviews

conducted by the researchers. The dimensions of this concept are material and emotional security as well as the normalising effect of law and policy. These encapsulate the main currents in the literature on migration and also serve as the analytical framework of this study.

However, something that all of these studies fail to analyse in depth is how the increasingly hostile political climate toward the LGBTQ+ community might affect the lived experiences and migration decisions of young adults. A Critical Discourse Analysis of the language of the Law and Justice party offers insight into how the queer community has been 'othered' and made into an enemy by the government (Yermakova 2021). Several studies show that domestic norms associated with LGBTQ+ rights are connected to the frames that portray the group as a threat. This includes rhetoric such as 'us vs. them' and reinforcement of the heterosexual, Catholic Pole as the norm (Ayoub 2014; Chojnicka 2015; Yermakova 2021).

As none of these studies make an explicit connection between the intensification of homophobia and the choice to migrate, this study intends to provide questions that will reveal these considerations. Furthermore, as no research has focused on the experience of young adults specifically, in the context of both domestic and cross-border migration, there is a gap that needs to be filled.

Methodology

The sample for this study consists of 36 self-identified non-heterosexual Poles between the age of 18 and 25. The responses were gathered through convenience sampling - an online survey was sent out to participants accessible to the researcher and was further distributed by snowballing. The questionnaire was also shared on social media to avoid only reaching the respondents who are openly queer. While convenience sampling is inexpensive and easy to carry out, it comes with some disadvantages. The sample represents the views of a specific group, mostly full-time students in big cities, that is not representative of the entire population. The survey was available in both Polish and English to broaden the participation among respondents.

Findings/Analysis

Overall, more than half of the respondents (56 percent) are full-time students that are between eighteen and twenty years old. Only five percent of the respondents work full-time. The biggest share of the respondents (48 percent) live in a city in Poland, the second biggest share (24 percent) live in a city in a different country, and the third biggest share lives in the Polish countryside (fifteen percent), meaning that the group living in Poland (73 percent) is overrepresented in the sample. There is a wide range of sexualities represented and there is a relatively even distribution between them, with bisexuality having the highest response rate (38 percent). While no self-identified trans people are represented in the sample, 22 percent identified as queer, which could include non-gender conforming and trans identities.

In order to cover all the dimensions of the IV the questions were separated into two paths, dependent on whether the individual lives in Poland or abroad. This division was crucial for obtaining valid results as these two groups might have very different experiences and views on migration impacted by their own mobility.

Community, Public Visibility, and Politics

All the respondents who live abroad were either satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the access to the LGBTQ+ community in the place where they currently reside, which contrasts with the respondents living in Poland (40 percent satisfied). Among the migrants, only one respondent living in Scotland listed that they have faced challenges related to discrimination. While this low number might stem from the normalisation of LGBTQ+ rights in the UK, it could also be connected to the underrepresentation of respondents who live outside of the big cities (Stella et al., 2018). There is, however, a considerable difference between how safe this group would feel expressing their gender or sexual identity in the street of the place where they currently live (100 percent), and their hometown (eleven percent). Among the Poles living in Poland, 60 percent would feel safe enough to express their identity in public which is a good indicator of how a person perceives the level of acceptance. The findings about identity expression are supported by the belief among 54 percent of the respondents that the average Polish person is 'unsupportive' of LGBTQ+ rights. As challenges to being LGBTQ+ in Poland many listed things like 'fear to express myself freely' and 'the gazes of old people living in the countryside/smaller towns'.

'I feel like we can protest how much we want, but it will never change the huge amount of homophobia in Poland'

~ 18-20-year-old lesbian student living in a big city in Poland

All of the respondents read the news about Polish politics at least a couple of times a month, which indicates that they are informed about the political situation. Importantly, both groups have very similar views on how supportive the different political actors in Poland are towards LGBTQ+ rights; the government, the right-leaning opposition and the Catholic Church are deemed to be 'very unsupportive' by 75 percent, 90 percent, and 85 percent, respectively. Moreover, 89 percent believe that LGBTQ+ acceptance in Poland has been impacted negatively by the

actions of the Law and Justice Government. These perceptions mirror how the discursive discrimination of the LGBTQ+ community by the government has constructed this minority group as the "enemy" (Yermakova 2021). About 50 percent of the subjects living in Poland said they experience discrimination, and 70 percent in both groups believe that Polish law rarely protects LGBTQ+ rights. The most common suggestions of legislative change among respondents were civic partnership, adoption of children, protection against anti-discrimination and marriage equality. Nevertheless, among those Poles who would consider migrating abroad, most were uncertain whether those changes would impact their decision to leave. Most respondents indicated that they would not want to leave because of family and friends, and this demonstrates that even though legal protection might be an important consideration, the emotional dimension might also play an important role.

Economic Considerations and Domestic Migration

Although migrants believe that Poland has exciting job opportunities (66 percent), they all agreed that the place where they currently reside provides them with better job prospects. Moreover, all of the migrants indicated that they are unlikely to move back to Poland in the next five years, two-thirds of them will 'definitely' stay abroad and one-third will 'probably' stay. Content analysis of the written responses about the most important reason for staying abroad shows that 75 percent list reasons related to economics such as 'work opportunities' and 'uncertain economic prospects' in Poland. The political situation, with emphasis on LGBTQ+ rights as well as the reasons relating to the 'narrow-mindedness of the Polish population under the Polish government,' was also present in most of the responses. The story told by the respondents who live in Poland seems to be slightly more complicated. 26 percent would consider moving to a different city due to studies or work, 48 percent would maybe consider it, and 26 percent do not want to move. Most who claim that they do not want to move domestically say that they live in Warsaw and that they do not intend to relocate because 'it does not get better than this', 'I love Warsaw' and 'Warsaw is probably the most progressive'.

'Being a gay man in Poland is not as terrible as it may seem (...) More and more people are educated, open-minded and accustomed with the LGBT community'

~ a 21-23-year-old gay student living in Warsaw

This is in line with Mole's findings (2019, 8); "domestic migration to Warsaw and other large cities was thus motivated by the desire to come out, reinvent themselves as nonheterosexual". Yet, if the life in the city does not meet these expectations, many do move abroad (Mole, 2019). A big share (65 percent) of the queer Poles would consider moving to a different country (for 25 percent that is a maybe), and for 23 percent LGBTQ+ related reasons would be important. Nevertheless, as in the case of the cross-border migrants, work-related reasons are the most prominent, but it seems like the personal circumstances dictate the final decision to migrate.

'I want to live in a global city where there are more professional opportunities and people are more open-minded. (...) With the current authority it's difficult to afford a decent, not paycheck-to-paycheck living'

~ a 21-22-year-old gay student

'I would like to become a writer and the Polish language is what I'm the most comfortable with'

~ an 18-20-year-old queer student living in a town in Poland

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study is a part of the "sexual and emotional turn" in migration studies (Mai and King 2009) and the small but growing literature on Polish LGBTQ+ experiences with regard to domestic and transnational migration. As no previous research has focused on this particular age group and conducted an in-depth investigation of how lack of legal rights together with the intensification of hostilities against LGBTQ+ people impact the youth, this project elevates a group that has not been studied. The limitations of this project include low internal validity, low external validity, a small sample size, as well as lack of representation of trans individuals. Thus, while no causality can be established, the survey has shown that even though the socio-economic considerations seem to be prevalent when young Poles debate migration abroad, their personal identity and location in the country also plays a role. Many who live in Poland do not want to leave their families behind, but at the same time the lack of positive feedback and hope for the future is tangible in many written responses. The fact that the ones who are already abroad do not intend on coming back in the next 5 years is also very telling. Therefore, the patterns in the answers of this particular sample, show that love and sexuality in fact have an impact on the views of young LGBTQ+ Poles on mobility and that many are drawn to LGBT+ friendly sites, whether abroad or in Poland.

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Artwork by Alexander Dalton

Female Genital Mutilation: A Cultural 'Rite of Passage'?

Keisha Frimpong

Keisha Frimpong examines the intersection of culture, experience, and patriarchy to demonstrate how female genital mutilation is rooted in entrenched teachings about sexuality and traditional patriarchal practices.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a sexually violent act involving the partial or total removal through cutting or burning of female external genitalia (Sakaria et al 2020). UNICEF has reported that at least 200 million girls and women continue to live with the sexual trauma caused by FGM, and more than one in three girls between the ages of fifteen and nineteen are currently affected (UNICEF 2023). Throughout history, patriarchal teachings have controlled women's sexuality and diminished their sexual freedom. Approximately 30 African countries forcibly subject girls under the age of fourteen to FGM as part of what is culturally believed to be a coming-of-age ritual, considered necessary to prepare a girl for adulthood and marriage (WHO 2022; Black and Debelle 1996). This essay illustrates how the cultural justification for FGM is rooted in patriarchal teachings about sexuality and argues that global activism can end FGM by changing cultural attitudes towards the practice.

Female genital mutilation is not a medical issue, it is sexual politics. The vast majority of scholarship discussing FGM uses medical language, and in doing so, sexual assault is dismissed as a cultural practice and categorised as a medical procedure. The Guttmacher Institute's former executive editor, Frances A. Althaus' titled her 1997 article, 'Female Circumcision: Rite of Passage Or Violation of Rights?'. By using the term 'rite of passage' Althaus suggests that FGM is necessary for a girl to enter womanhood (Andro and Lesclingand 2016). Additionally, Althaus continuously refers to female genital mutilation as 'female circumcision', falsely classifying FGM as comparable to male circumcision (Althaus 1997). Unlike the latter, FGM causes permanent irreparable changes to the external female genitalia (Berg and Denison 2012). Althaus' comparison to male circumcision dismisses the sexual violence and torture girls who undergo FGM are subjected to.

There have recent debates about whether 'female circumcision' or 'female genital mutilation' is the more politically correct term to label the cultural practice. Some scholars have warned that diminishing the term female genital mutilation to that of female circumcision disregards the sexual trauma endured in FGM, and therefore undermines the extremity of the practice (Chatterjee 2018). However, scholars Anika Rahman and Nahid Toubia have argued that by referring to the act as mutilation, the women are forced to dwell on their body as mutilated, acknowledging a sense of lost agency over their own bodies when they were 'cut' (Chatterjee 2018). While the label 'mutilation' accentuates the high level of violence involved in FGM, some communities like the Indian Bohra Muslim community who practice FGM as part of coming-of-age ceremonies have criticised the term for villainising their culture (Chatterjee 2018). Ultimately, such debates over terminologies highlight the sensitivity and complexity of the discussions around FGM with possible negative implications on a culture's reputation through condemnation of the practice. Nevertheless, FGM is a violation of human rights and its impact on victims should not be minimised over prioritising its phraseology (UNICEF 2023).

In addition to physical and emotional consequences of the cultural practice, FGM has sexist and oppressive implications (Earp 2016). FGM is performed to increase male sexual pleasure; an expression of gender inequality (Lancet 2018). The practice controls female sexual liberation, enabling older men to ensure the maintenance of a girl's virginity and her prolonged resistance to sexual partners (Andro and Lesclingand 2016). For FGM victims, penetrative sex is highly painful, particularly in the first few months as the stitches sewn are torn apart (Berg and Denison 2012). The erasure of female pleasure through FGM prioritises male pleasure, thus limiting female sexual freedom (Andro and Lesclingand, 2016). FGM, therefore, reflects patriarchal teachings that rank male pleasure over the inferior female and limits the sexual liberties of its victims.

> "FGM is a violation of human rights and its impact on victims should not be minimised over prioritising its phraseology (UNICEF 2023)."

Further, FGM is rooted in cultural identity and, therefore, laws banning the practice have been ineffective in communities in which FGM is considered favourable (Coyne and Coyne, 2014). For example, Sierra Leone has some of the highest reported levels of FGM in the world; Amnesty International estimate that 90% of the girls residing there have been subjected to FGM (2019). Bondo Bush, the Sierra Leonean term for the practice is carried out by the Soweis as part of an initiation ceremony into womanhood (Sharmilla, 2018). The Soweis are highly respected culturally as a female society residing in rural Sierra Leone, known for protecting their community's culture. These initiation ceremonies end with Bondo, after which the girls are considered women suitable for marriage and ready for sex (Jones 2018). Zorokong, the head of the national Sowei council argued that most Sowei will agree to an FGM ban but continue to practice Bondo as the initiation ceremonies are perceived to be integral to their culture, and the girls within it (Jones 2018). In addition, it is culturally believed that girls who undergo FGM are more valuable in the marriage market. For their fathers, it ensures that their daughter's virginity is sustained until they wed, whilst husbands have a means of ensuring their wives remain faithful (Coyne and Coyne 2016). In this way, FGM is a premarital investment which presents the young girls who have been victim to this violence as more attractive to wealthier partners, allowing marriage at an earlier age and increasing the parents' reputability as those of the same social category perceive them to have

succeeded in parenthood.

What's more, face-to-face activism was limited due to COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, consequently increasing FGM cases (Mabaiwa, Bradley and Meme 2022). School closures and strict lowdown measures carried out during the height of the pandemic saw FGM cases rise in Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia (Mabaiwa, Bradley and Meme 2022). In these areas when open, schools would protect girls from risk factors such as sexual violence and exploitation (Ibid). However, as health became a priority during the COVID-19 response recovery plans for survivors of FGM were neglected (Ibid). Likewise, anti-FGM organisations like Compassion International in Kenya and UNICEF in Ethiopia faced mobility issues due to lockdown restrictions (Ibid). Additionally, the pandemic saw marriage and bride price increases which subsequently led to a rise in FGM cases. Ensuring anti-FGM campaign work is sustainable during even extreme health crises must be a priority especially in areas where FGM is frequently practised, so that girls living in poor communities are not at a greater risk of sexual violence (Ibid). As the failure to prioritise the safety of girls in rural communities leads to a rapid increase in FGM (Ibid).

In extreme cases, girls who refuse to partake in FGM are seen as enemies to their culture (Coyne and Coyne 2014). In some communities there are consequences for not partaking in FGM, resulting in both physical violence and expulsion from the community (Ibid). Girls are often fear mongered and threatened with cultural exclusion if they do not comply. For example, in Narok, Kenya, the Maasai tribe uses the term 'entito' to insult the girls and women who have not experienced FGM (Mogoathle 2020). Resultantly, the Maasai have an estimated 78 percent prevalence rate of FGM, and the stigma and shame brought upon those who do not submit to the cultural practice is one of the greatest challenges faced by activists today (Ibid). This extent of manipulation into undergoing FGM is simply further control over the female body and reflects sexist beliefs that a woman's body is not her owns but rather falls under the jurisdiction of patriarchal society which forcibly submits women to male desire (Schimmel 2016).

Although FGM is predominantly practiced in African countries, it is also being practiced in England and Wales (Ali et al 2020). End FGM estimate that over 800,000 women and girls in approximately seventeen European countries have been victim to or are at risk of undergoing FGM (End FGM, 2020). Although FGM has been illegal in the UK since 1985, due to the predominant cultural belief that FGM is integral to a girl and woman's identity, it continues to be practiced in the UK today (Ali et al. 2020). Demonstrating the ineffectiveness of these laws, under the FGM Act 2003 it is illegal to take a UK national or resident abroad for FGM (Ibid).

Nevertheless, it is estimated that 10,000 girls under the age of fourteen were likely to have had FGM before entry to the UK (Ibid). Moreover, 87 percent of the FGM cases performed abroad were not considered illegal under UK law (Ibid). The UK justice system further fails to protect these children as FGM cases have proved difficult to bring to court and, so far, only a singular case has resulted in criminal punishment (Dyer, 2019).

In addition, when an FGM case was brought to family court rather than criminal court, the judge ruled that the victim's injuries did not meet the legal threshold for mutilation, despite the case falling under Type 4 classification, the most biologically harmful type of FGM (Ali 2020). With the majority of FGM cases in UK failing to result in criminal prosecution, legal action cannot be the only strategy to ending FGM (Dyer, 2019).

To end FGM there must be a global campaign to alter cultural attitudes (Mabaiwa, Bradley and Meme 2022). To achieve global FGM awareness, it is necessary to educate people on thephysical and mental impact of FGM to initiate the prevention of FGM in the communities where the practice frequently occurs (Berg and Denison 2012). UNICEF has dedicated the 6th of February the UN International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM to promote their Sustainable Development Goal of eliminating FGM by 2030 (Lancet 2018). Many activists have been campaigning in Europe, where FGM is generally less culturally significant than in African countries (Coyne and Coyne 2014). Therefore, in rural African communities anti-FGM activists campaigning must aim to debunk cultural beliefs (Mwendwa et al 2020). This approach to campaigning has proved successful in Meru county in rural Kenya where education on the negative impact of FGM has resulted in a substantial cultural shift (Ibid). Men within the Meru Country are now opposed to the practice and are even considered key influences in stopping the practice (Ibid). In addition, FGM activists like Jaha Dukureh, Erubti Woredo, and Ifrah Ahmed have used their personal experiences with FGM to drive and create campaigns promoting the end of this sexual mutilation (UNICEF, 2023). Activists with personal experience with the practice have proven successful in changing cultural beliefs as their acknowledgment of FGM as a harmful passageway to womanhood has enabled peer support and reduced feelings of shame for those who do not undergo FGM (Mwendwa et al 2020). Furthermore, recognising the cultural importance of the Soweis and working with them to reinvent their roles as guardians of traditional culture without performing FGM is another approach to preserving communities' cultural heritage whilst shifting cultural beliefs away from FGM and ultimately protecting young girls from sexual violence (Lancet 2018). By educating communities about the negative impact of FGM on its victims and simultaneously respecting the cultural importance of passage or rites, FGM is more likely to be eradicated within rural African communities where the legal implications of performing FGM are not of high consequence (Ibid).

In conclusion, FGM is a worldwide issue that continues to affect girls and women worldwide. Using medical language when discussing FGM only belittles the level of sexual violence accompanying the experience of FGM. Though the cultural practice is seen as a formal rite of passage from girlhood to womanhood, the mutilation of the external female genitalia is in fact a form of patriarchal control over women's bodies which promotes child marriage and further sexual abuse (Coyne and Coyne 2014). Solely legal change will not end FGM globally; legal bans and criminal punishments have hardly seen success in many countries, extending to the UK and Kenya (Dyer 2019). Instead, by raising international awareness through global organisations like UNICEF and EndFGM, making activism sustainable through school closures, and educating rural communities that practice FGM in coming-of-age ceremonies on how their culture can be preserved without FGM, the practice can finally end. Ultimately, the end of FGM is only one step closer to the end of other forms of sexual exploitation and violence against women and girls (UN Women 2017).

"Using medical language when discussing FGM only belittles the level of sexual violence accompanying the experience of FGM."

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How Gender Inequality Leads to and Manifests Itself in Terms of Gender-Based Violence: A Discussion of How Gender Regimes are Ingrained in Society and How the Patriarchal Nature of Institutions Enables Gender-Based Violence

Artwork by Maya Beauchamp

Johanna Nesselhauf

Johanna Nesselhauf presents a case study on femicide in Honduras to draw together her focus on gender-based violence in private and public institutions, the silencing of women, and the role of intersectionality.

Gender-based violence is deeply embedded into the world's history of inequality (Lombard 2015) and, while it can include violence towards any gender, it mainly affects women (European Commission 2021). The UN estimates that almost one in three women have been subject to physical or sexual violence at least once in their life (United Nations 2021). This article will analyse the relationship between gender inequality and gender-based violence. Firstly, it will examine how gender-based violence takes place in public and private institutions, particularly in the family and justice systems. It will then introduce the idea of a dominant male discourse that leads to the silencing of women. Moreover, the article will address the role of intersectionality by focusing on the barriers that women of colour and immigrants have to face, demonstrating how important it is to recognise intersectionality when conducting research on gender-based violence. Finally, it will present a case study on Honduras, which will bring together the ideas previously discussed.

"The UN estimates that almost one in three women have been subject to physical or sexual violence at least once in their life (United Nations 2021)."

Gender Inequality and Gender Violence

In order to discuss gender-based violence, gender inequality and the relationship between them, the meaning of gender must be clarified. Gender is the socially constructed difference between men and women that arises from the characteristics society attributes to them (Paxton, Hughes & Barnes 2021). According to Paxton et al.'s explanation of the socially constructed ideas of men and women, the latter are seen as inferior (Paxton, Hughes & Barnes 2021). This leads to the subordination of women, which is reflected by global gender inequality as well as gender-based violence. Gender inequality is the difference in rights and opportunities people receive based on their gender (United Nations, 2021). The European Commision defines gender-based violence as 'violence directed against a person because of that person's gender or violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately' (European Commission, 2021). It occurs in the following various forms: domestic violence, sex-based harassment, female genital mutilation, forced marriage and online violence.

"Gender is the socially constructed difference between men and women that arises from the characteristics society attributes to them (Paxton, Hughes & Barnes 2021)."

Violence in Public and Private Institutions

The three main institutions in which violence occurs are the general community, the state and the family (Lombard 2015). In the general community, incidents such as forced prostitution or harassment occur (Lombard 2015). In a study by Liz Kelly (1988), it was found that women most commonly experience harassment at work or in the street (Kelly 1988). For example, women may get verbally harassed by whistling or sexual joking (Kelly 1988). The state is a site of violence given its role in managing other institutions, such as marriage, and in manifesting the categories of gender regimes, such as the subordinate wife and dominant husband (Connell 2003). The state often shows patriarchal tendencies when manifesting social patterns. This is evident when considering how the justice system may accuse women of victimisation in cases of sexual abuse as a way of preserving male dominance. If a woman were to take a case of sexual violence to a judge, factors such as the women's clothing or her relationship status can be used as deciding arguments as to whether a crime was committed (Lombard 2015). The most dangerous sphere of violence is the family (Lombard 2015). Violence in the family includes various forms of abuse such as sexual assault within the household, battering and female genital mutilation (Lombard 2015). In fact, most violence against women is carried out in the family environment with more than 640 million women aged fifteen and older having been victims of intimate partner violence (United Nations, 2021). Relationships, whether familial or romantic, thus reflect the patriarchal nature of society.

The high rates in gendered family violence can be explained by the fact that the family is seen as a private sphere and therefore incidents of violence are likely to remain a 'private issue' and not be acknowledged as criminal (Lombard 2015). In fact, until the 1980s, domestic violence was considered a private issue in Europe even for the police, and it was only until 2011 that the Council of Europe adopted the 'The Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence' act, which acknowledges that domestic violence is not a private matter (Lombard 2015). So, while the recognition that the 'personal is political' is developing, a history of not recognising this issue still shapes the present. The home being seen as private, and therefore as something that benefits men, has enabled them - in a general sense - to assert their dominance freely in the privacy of the family. This concept shows how patriarchal gender regimes are ingrained in the private and public institutions of society, and therefore enable gender-based violence to occur.

The Dominant Male Discourse

Women that fall victim to gender-based violence are often also silenced due to the power of the dominant male discourse (Kelly 1988). Kelly (1988) demonstrates how language is used as a means of controlling women in cases of sexual assault. She explains there are certain stereotypes, such as the perpetrator being a stranger, that lead to commonly accepted but limited definitions of violence, which reflect men's idea of violence in a way that only the most extreme behaviours become deemed unacceptable (Kelly 1988). Therefore, many women often do not understand they were assaulted because the dominant male discourse has created a specific idea of what rape is (Kelly 1988). In this sense, sexual assault is minimised due to the influence of patriarchal culture upon its definition. Only the traditional idea that a stranger rapes a woman at night, outside and with a lot of physical violence which the woman tries to resist, is commonly accepted as rape (Kelly 1988). Currently, the further women's experiences differ from this 'common sense' idea of rape, the more difficult it becomes for them to identify their experience as a case of violence (Kelly 1988). This has further negative implications, as it continues to enable men to commit acts of assault, and these will simply be seen as typical male behaviour (Kelly 1988). Kelly (1988) gives the example that men frequently try to flirt with waitresses and expect this to be returned, arguing this can be seen as harassment. Moreover, waitresses often assume that reciprocation is appropriate and do not understand the abusive nature underlying such advances. This creates a conflict between 'men's power' and 'women's truth', which is often not recognised by the woman herself (Kelly 1988, 80).

Finally, women may also forget their experience of violence as a result of the lack of language to name the experience, which prevents them from making clear sense of it, thus forgetting it (Kelly 1988). It is important to note, however, that sometimes forgetting is simply a coping mechanism and it is not connected to the male discourse (Kelly 1988). This reflects how gender regimes influence language and also how the male discourse leads to the silencing of women, preventing them from being able to recognise gender-based violence.

The Role of Intersectionality

Another reason why gender violence is minimised is that women may not want to see themselves as victims, because if they do act in response to assault, they may encounter further negative consequences. There are various reasons, such as a lack of financial independence or cultural barriers, that prevent women from confronting their abuser (Gill 2018). This leads to the idea of intersectionality, which refers to how different factors of someone's identity are interconnected creating a source of marginalisation or privilege (Connell 2021). In terms of gender-based violence, someone's gender identity may 'intersect' with these additional factors in a way that prevents them from confronting the violence they have encountered (Gill 2018).

Crenshaw explains how intersectionality affects women of colour and immigrants with regards to violence. Women of colour tend to live in more poverty due to phenomena such as racially discriminatory employment, that lead to a financial dependence on the abuser (Crenshaw 1991). In cases where they do report the violence, women of colour might have to become financially dependent on friends and family, something that is not always possible because of a lack of external support or their own lack of financial security (Crenshaw 1991). In terms of immigrant women, there is often a legal dependence on the husband in order to receive or retain their citizenship (Crenshaw 1991). Therefore, when faced with the choice between deportation or enduring violence, many women will choose the latter (Crenshaw 1991). Crenshaw (1991) also elaborates on the role of cultural barriers. For example, many immigrant families live together with several generations and therefore there might not be privacy on the phone, nor the possibility to leave the house, making it more difficult for these women to seek help. Additionally, support services do not tend to cater for the language barriers immigrant women may experience. Intersectionality, thus, plays a significant role in gender inequality and gender-based violence, as it causes the latter to occur to varying degrees between different demographics, particularly affecting marginalised communities.

Inherent Flaws of Research on Gender-Based Violence

In order to create services that cater for everyone who suffers from gender-based violence, appropriate research must be conducted (Gill 2018). However, it is often the case that gendered social structures and institutions prevent this as 'researchers, advocates and organisations may often recreate the same power dynamics they seek to dismantle through silencing dissent and delegitimizing survivors' voices' (Gill 2018, 3). Gender-based violence as an intersectional issue requires intersectional analysis, which can only be achieved by including a diversity of people in the discussions and research. Nonetheless, those included are often people of privileged demographics with a history of institutional power: closest to the 'hegemonic man' (Gill 2018). This is a consequence of the gendered labour division as part of gender inequality, which leads to a higher proportion of men reaching these positions of

"Gender-based violence as an intersectional issue requires intersectional analysis, which can only be achieved by including a diversity of people in the discussions and research."

researcher, on issues that do not affect them (Gill 2018). This creates the message that the actual clients are the 'other', whilst the privileged and unaffected are the 'helpers', contributing to the idea that women are subordinate to men, which is a cause of gender-based violence in the first place (Gill, 2018).

The main issue with marginalised groups not being included in the research on their own community is that practitioners in the gender-based violence field are influenced by wider societal biases, which are inherently patriarchal (Gill 2018). They often do not consider the needs and interests of marginalised groups, and in turn the services created to help victims of gender-based violence mainly cater for a certain demographic: white, middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual, cis people. For example, many of the funds allocated to services for rape crisis victims are used for issues such as accompanying victims to court, however this is not of use to people of colour whose cases of violence rarely reach the court (Crenshaw 1991). Instead, communities of colour could benefit from more resources being allocated to information distribution, given that mainstream information channels do not always reach them (Crenshaw 1991). Consequently, it is vital to try and cater for all demographics rather than the most privileged ones, but this will not change until the marginalised groups become included in research on gender-based violence in the first place. This demonstrates how gender inequality is so deeply ingrained in society that research on gender-based violence also has a patriarchal nature, which prevents progress in the fight against gender-based violence.

Case Study: Femicide in Honduras

The ongoing femicide issue in Honduras is an example of how gender-based violence continues to prevail in communities of marginalised demographics. From 2005 to 2021 6,787 women suffered violent deaths, accumulating to an average of 28 deaths per month and one every 26 hours and 11 minutes in 2021 (The National Autonomous University of Honduras 2021). In comparison to the rest of the world the international female homicide rate of 2020 was 2 while in Honduras it was 6.6 (The World Bank,2020). When looking at Honduras Jokela-Pansini (2020) argues that these numbers of extreme gender-based violence can be partly explained by the high levels of militarisation in response to the high crime rates. Heavily militarised societies lead to patriarchal power regimes and norms that determine the understanding of protection (Jokela-Pansini 2020). In Honduras, these patriarchal norms are reflected by the femicide, which prevails to happen as women are granted little protection due their societal status (Jokela-Pansini 2020).

Therefore, in the patriarchal society of Honduras there are high levels of femicide. But, as previously discussed, marginalised communities particularly suffer from gender-based violence and therefore the femicide rates can also be partly explained by the extreme poverty that exists in Honduras. In 2018, 48.3 percent of the population lived below the poverty line (World Bank 2020). This is particularly the case for women, who tend to be at an economic disadvantage to men. In 2021, women with the occupation of housewife were the most affected by the femicide deaths, accounting for 63.5 percent of them (The National Autonomous University of Honduras 2021). This highlights how the demographic of women that tend to be the most economically dependent on their partners is also the most vulnerable to death by violence.

The alternatives for women to gain economic autonomy or financial security are often linked to criminal activity, particularly criminal groups and gangs (Portes and Hoffman 2003). 41 percent of the femicides in 2021 were associated with organised crime groups (The National Autonomous University of Honduras 2021). Gangs and drug cartels dominate the country and, as a result of the fear of violent repercussions, most cases are never reported (Herrera 2020). However, even if victims do report the crime, the government is often not capable of providing the necessary help, and the justice system is poorly prepared for gendered issues (Herrera 2020).

Femicide continues to be an issue, suggesting that not enough action is being taken. Factors such as extreme poverty and crime rates are not being considered in research conducted on gender-based violence. Most research on gender-based violence focuses rather on the causes of violence that occur within the Global North; extreme poverty is not a frequent cause of gender-based violence within the mainly privileged populations of the Global North. Thus, it is not a focus of research and most solutions that are developed do not cater to the less privileged demographics, such as Honduras. In turn, they continue to see extreme gender-based violence without signs of significant change or transformation.

Conclusion

Gender-based violence occurs in reflection of the patriarchal values of society, and in turn women are disproportionately more affected by it. The general community, the state, and the family are the main institutions where violence occurs, the latter being the most dangerous site as it is viewed as a private sphere. Gender-based violence continues to happen as the dominant male discourse leads to the silencing of women. Furthermore, it is an intersectional issue and therefore affects people to different extents. However, this is often not considered when conducting research on gender-based violence, thus often ignoring the specific needs of marginalised

"Heavily militarised societies lead to patriarchal power regimes and norms that determine the understanding of protection."

groups. This can be evidenced when looking at femicide cases in Honduras. Overall, there is a clear correlation between gender inequality and gender-based violence. In order to fight this issue more research needs to be conducted, but most importantly, appropriate intersectional research is needed.

"There is a clear correlation between gender inequality and gender-based violence."

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Artwork by Henry Wolff

Addressing Sexual Violence in War: Political Theoretical Perspectives

Stanley O'Brien

Stanley O'Brien considers which political theoretical perspective is most useful when seeking to address the issue of sexual violence in war

Alleged mass rape committed by soldiers in occupied Ukraine (OSCE 2022) has brought the issue of sexual violence in war back into the forefront of western discourse, but sexual violence is not an issue isolated to a specific army or state. Aspects of militarism and war encourage the exacerbation of this issue. Feminist theory shows its relevance in the diagnosis of sexual violence in war, considering how it perceives the male/female power dynamic, and the feminist contributions of the 'rape as a weapon of war' narrative which borrows from realism. Constructivism is also important to considered in order to provide a more comprehensive, holistic prognosis of the issue, in that, for sexual violence to be committed, societal norms against sexual violence must have been subverted through a complex process of military socialisation. Therefore, if war is an inevitable aspect of international relations, in addition to accountability and harsh punishment for its perpetrators, new norms, both in civil society and within military discourse, must be created to prevent sexual violence in war.

When discussing and analysing sexual violence in war, feminist theory seems the most relevant lens to view it through. International recognition of rape as a war crime came after the mass genocidal rape during the Bosnian War in the early 1990s, encouraged by escalating academic discourse spurred by second and third-wave feminism (Herzog 2011, 364-6). Armed conflict exacerbates existing inequalities of all types, therefore, in war, women are particularly vulnerable as male domination is amplified (Quénivet 2005; Gardam and Charlesworth 2000; Brownmiller 1975). Copelon argues that war intensifies the likelihood and brutality of rape as it desensitises people to suffering and encourages hyper-masculinity and oppressive force (Copelon 2011, 2-3).

A 2016 policy brief to the incoming Trump administration found that sexual violence in war is more likely when individuals are socialised in conflict to devalue women (Blair et al. 2016). Therefore, rather than being an inevitable consequence of male domination, sexual violence should be seen as a result of the gendered nature of experiences in war (Branche and Virgili 2012, 3-4). In armed conflict, masculinity is encouraged and inscribed in fighting an enemy (Winter and Boehm 2019). The masculine desire for superiority over an enemy is paramount to this concept, implying inferiority as 'more female'. This inevitably manifests itself in the treatment of women, and their bodies, are part of the conflict itself. Brownmiller (1975), a radical feminist scholar, claims that war provides men with the perfect opportunity 'to vent their utter contempt and disregard for women', allowed by the lack of both discipline and strict legal framework. The lack of legal discipline in war allows the disregard for the norms and laws present in civil society, as the lack of clear authority may create a safe space where perpetrators feel they can commit crimes without fear of consequence or punishment.

"The lack of legal discipline in war allows the disregard for the norms and laws present in civil society."

Misra (2015) identifies three functions of sexual violence as a deliberate weapon of war. The first is an interrogation technique where the threat of sexual violence may be sufficient to keep prisoners of war compliant (Misra 2015; Herzog 2011). The second is as revenge against the enemy. For example, as the Soviet Union advanced on Nazi Germany in 1943, commanders turned a blind eye to sexual violence against Germans, whose women's bodies acted as objects of revenge for the brutality of their occupation (Heineman 2011, 6). Misra's second function of sexual violence in war can be extrapolated as a means of pleasure for soldiers (Misra 2015). Unrestricted access to a woman's body has historically been seen as 'essential' to preserving troops' morale, or as a reward or compensation for participating in war (Hagay-Frey and Raker 2011, 1-2; Herzog 2011). Women's bodies are treated by some as sexual trophies to take from battle (Neill 2009).

"Unrestricted access to a woman's body has historically been seen as 'essential' to preserving troops' morale, or as a reward or compensation for participating in war."

The third and most important function is to dehumanise and degrade the enemy, in a way that proves the perpetrators' control, breaks conviction to resist, or suppresses any identification with the enemy. The aforementioned US Government policy brief recognises that sexual violence is used to suppress political and civic participation of marginalised groups, as seen in Kenya and Zimbabwe (Blair et al. 2016). Violence against the women of marginalised groups can serve to subjugate the entire group. In their study of the Guatemalan genocide, Sanford et al. (2016, 43) argue the systematic rape of Maya women supported the single goal of suppressing motivation for uprisings. Traditionally, in a society where women act as 'the property' of men, an invading army committing sexual violence proves to the defeated who is now in control (Hagay-Frey and Raker 2011, 2). The dehumanisation of a woman as a 'raped body' becomes symbolic of this. 'Rape-shame' refers to feelings of shame or guilt that a survivor of sexual assault may experience as a result of their trauma, usually manifesting in a mistaken belief that they are somehow responsible, or that they are 'dirty' or 'damaged' as a result. Bergoffen (2019) argues that only if 'rape-shame' can be disarmed, can rape as a weapon of war be disabled.

"Violence against the women of marginalised groups can serve to subjugate the entire group."

In a counter to radical feminist theory, Kramer argues that 'sexual violence cannot be cured by making men aware of how brutal it is. They already know how brutal it is' (Kramer 2000). This is not only because few men would deny the brutality of sexual violence in war, but because a great omission from much feminist literature is sexual violence committed against men, an omission Zalewski calls 'egregious' (Zalewski 2022). The endemic reality of sexual violence against men in war makes the 'rape as a weapon of war' narrative especially feasible, as, just like with women, it is used to belittle and intimidate the enemy, and can go as far as genital mutilation or castration (Storr 2011; Misra 2015).

The aim in sexual violence against men is to feminise the enemy by asserting absolute power and control through what Misra refers to as a 'slow and painful withering away of manliness' (Misra 2015, 8). Enforcing hierarchy and domination over enemy men feminises them so they can no longer fulfil the masculine role of a warrior (Zawati 2007, 33). Indeed, Zalewski even posits 'that a man can violently become a woman through sexed violence, reveals much about the violence of sexgender' (Zalewski 2022, 147). The feminist argument that sexual violence in war is based on a patriarchal power structure is vindicated here.

"Enforcing hierarchy and domination over enemy men feminises them so they can no longer fulfil the masculine role of a warrior (Zawati 2007, 33)."

Whereas feminism perceives sexual violence as inevitable in a patriarchal society, realism considers it an issue and tool of state security (securitisation), in that it considers rape as a weapon or tactic of the war itself. Rape in conflict is not universal, because of this, the scholars Baaz and Stern have suggested that it must be in some aspect avoidable (Baaz and Stern 2021, 111). One could argue that the securitisation of sexual violence in war, as with the nuclear threat, could help deal with these universal security threats (Carter 2010, 346-6). Nevertheless, feminist scholars such as Meger and Banwell problematise considering sexual violence a security issue as it depersonalises the lens through which we recognise those suffering (Meger 2016b; Banwell 2018; Baaz and Stern 2021). Through what Meger refers to as 'the fetishization' of sexual violence, she brings attention to the homogenising and commodifying tendency of securitisation, which creates an exchange for securitised objects – a tit-for-tat response – further entrenching the problem (Meger 2016a). In such a case, women's bodies have been 'nationalised, expropriated, and turned into a battleground', precisely what a feminist solution to sexual violence in war should fight against (Hagay-Frey and Raker 2011, 157).

The view of the female body as vulnerable and conquerable by a man – the basis of gendered concepts of war – is a constructed view. While there is an accepted norm against sexual violence in society, these sanctions and norms seem to be lost in war (Wood 2006; Danielsson et al. 2019). As such a cruel and brutal technique, it may be hard to understand why militaries resort to sexual violence. As Shue points out, 'no other practice except slavery is so universally and unanimously condemned in law and human convention', but it still occurs (Shue 1978, 124). D'Ambruoso (2015) argues that in a situation of war, the norms we take for granted in civil society, for example not to commit acts of violence or torture, can encourage the very opposite of what they prohibit for two reasons. First, leaders may believe that being unconstrained by norms could lend them an advantage over a constrained enemy. Second, by going against norms, leaders show that they are willing to make hard choices for a 'greater good', to protect their interests (D'Ambruoso 2015, 35). War elicits great fear, so having the 'courage' to use extraordinary measures at extraordinary times could be framed as 'heroic' (Walzer 2000, 251). Alleged sexual violence committed by Russian soldiers in Ukraine may be a prime example of this, connected to the idea that Russia's 'heroic' invasion is to protect Russians from a 'dangerous' Ukrainian regime (Putin 2021).

If norms are lost in war, one could argue that choices (to commit sexual violence) are not made independent of other people or social structures. This implies the possibility of absolving individuals who commit sexual violence from responsibility. While individuals make choices, their choices are often constrained by social structures and expectations (Sjoberg and Gentry 2013, 138). Dara Kay Cohen (2013) conducted a study where she empirically examined factors which may increase the likelihood of sexual violence in war. She found that it is no more likely to occur within commonly assumed scenarios such as ethnic wars, genocides, or in countries with greater gender inequality. The only statistically significant factor she found was what she terms 'combatant socialisation'. Armies that recruit new members by force, such as abduction, abuse, or press ganging, tend to be groups of strangers, and social cohesion must be encouraged to create a coherent fighting force. Cohen and Carter argue that rape, especially gang rape, builds bonds of loyalty and esteem, pointing to the Sierra Leone Civil War as an example (Carter 2010, 364-6).

Nevertheless, these norms' constructivist nature means they can be reconstructed. By instilling awareness that sexual violence is reprehensible and will not go unpunished, Quénivet argues that it is possible to avoid such crimes being committed (Quénivet 2005, 3). It is also vital that the punishment of perpetrators is followed through on. Perpetrators of sexual violence in war must be held accountable for their actions, by prosecuting them under international and national laws, and imposing stiff penalties for their crimes. Just as evidence for alleged war

crimes in Ukraine is being submitted to the International Court of Justice in The Hague (Møse et al 2022), any evidence of sexual violence in interstate conflict must be thoroughly investigated by international courts with power of enforcement power, and its perpetrators brought to justice.

As much as the prosecution of perpetrators can bring those responsible for sexual violence in war to justice, it is the socially constructed permittance of sexual violence in war that must be changed. Sexual violence in war is often rooted in gender inequality. Promoting gender equality and women's rights can help to reduce the incidence of sexual violence in conflict zones. Fitzpatrick maintains that sexist male constructs painting femininity as vulnerable and weak can be rebuilt, and that the empowerment of women to be dominant and assertive can be encouraged (Fitzpatrick 2017, 256-7). Women being given agency in all stages of war, from involvement in war strategy to the peace process, can help to address sexual violence. The role of women in war must be reconstructed to give agency to women as independent agents, rather than simply seeing them as powerless victims (Hagay-Frey and Raker 2011, 21).

"The role of women in war must be reconstructed to give agency to women as independent agents."

Although sexual violence in war can occur simply because wars allow a disregard for laws and norms, sexual violence is primarily used as a means to an end – a weapon of war. This is because of inherently sexist patriarchal structures which paint masculinity as dominant and powerful, which are traits desirable in war, and femininity as vulnerable and powerless. As a result, constructivist norms discouraging sexual violence can be instilled in military situations. Feminism then provides the necessary diagnosis of the problem but is assisted by other theoretical approaches, in this case constructivism, in providing a prognosis to address the issue. Women must be given agency so that society as a whole can break away from instilled gendered structures affecting the operation of war and to prevent sexual violence. Only by instilling concrete norms that sexual violence is under no circumstances acceptable, and likewise norms against the gendered structures of war, can the issue of sexual violence in war be addressed.

"Sexual violence is primarily used as a means to an end – a weapon of war."

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Patriarchy, Power and Mushrooms: The Sexual Politics of Ecology

Illustration by Alexander Dalton

Sophia Georgescu

Sophia Georgescu looks at how the use and study of mushrooms present a challenge to patriarchal dominance.

Throughout history women have been keepers and distributors of knowledge about ecological life beneath the ground (Garibay-Orijel et al 2012). These 'hidden ecologies' encompass mushrooms' underground mycorrhizal (fungal) networks, which are fundamental to the survival of all ecosystems (Kaishian and Djoulakian 2020). They allow trees to communicate with one another, and play the primary role in decomposition and recycling organic matter in soil. Ultimately, without fungi networks, all food systems would collapse (Kaishian and Djoulakian 2020). Despite their crucial role, fungi and mushrooms have historically been kept invisible by Western scientific modes of thought and conceptualizations of human culture and nature being separate entities (Tsing 2021). This echoes women's historical exclusion from public life and labour under global capitalism (Shiva 1989). Engaging with mushrooms as a valuable source of life and culture poses a challenge to patriarchal thought and power. Fungi force us to think away from binaries through their myriad sexual expressions and diversity (Tsing 2012). They connect all life together in intersectional, 'unruly edges' that provide needed hope and community in a time of ecological crisis.

The interconnectedness of ecological life with human life, facilitated by fungi, is key to understanding their importance (Kaishian and Djoulakian 2020). Mycology has historically been a hidden or feared science, but as the climate crisis looms and people look for alternatives under capitalism, the potential of mushrooms to provide sustainable food sources is garnering greater attention (Okuda 2022). They can clean up oil spills and create sustainable meat alternatives. However, this knowledge of mycology's importance is not new. It has existed in women's community roles since the Medieval Ages, as well as being interwoven with many different Indigenous ways of life (Maroske and May 2018). Their stories of hidden labour, silenced knowledge, and non-binary expression have great potential for the coming together of communities through mushroom picking and foraging, if articulated through a lens of power and redistribution. Mushroom identification and picking itself also requires us to move slowly and learn through practice with others (Tsing 2012). The proliferation of amateur foraging groups in recent years, on the 'recreational fringe' due to the perceived threat of mushrooms and lack of formal scientific study of them also demonstrates their potential for bringing people together outside convention (Lemelin and Fine 2013). Fungi foraging has historically relied on the passing of knowledge within communities and allows ecological systems to flourish without measured agricultural intervention. This contrasts the conditions of scientific and technological development of land which typically reinforces patriarchal dominance by reducing the status of women's labour (Shiva 1989). (Shiva 1989).

"Engaging with mushrooms as a valuable source of life and culture poses a challenge to patriarchal thought and power."

The historical dismissal of women for their perceived lack of rational, "objective" capacities means that the history of ecology has been disproportionately shaped by a small subset of people and their knowledge. Additionally, ecology itself has excluded the study of fungi and the ways they connect all life (Kaishian and Djoulakian 2020, 6). Women in the Mediaeval period who engaged with mycology for healing and traditional uses were marked as 'unnatural' and were linked to witchcraft (Federici 2013). This fear of mycology and the bodies who engaged with it through history is also linked to capitalist, modernist ideas of progress and procreation. Mushrooms cannot be contained within demarcated land boundaries and easily valued agricultural production as they grow at random in a myriad of forms (Tsing 2012). They are also, through mycorrhizal networks, interconnected with themselves and plant roots, thereby supporting nutrient exchange across entire ecosystems (Kaishan and Djoulakian 2020). They show up in a variety of types, genders, and locations that cannot be defined into separate categories, predictable timelines, or sections of land (Tsing 2012). This directly challenges the historical line of thought in Western scientific method that measures ecology along objective outcomes, and the nature of how mushrooms grow and are foraged has previously been too difficult to evaluate and easily commodify (Haraway 1998; Tsing 2012). It also challenges patriarchal assertion of gender binaries and anti-queer expressions in order to dominate and control (Kaishian and Djoulakian 2020).

Fungi themselves are incredibly diverse. Their myriad expressions, types and genders challenge a binary lens of understanding of sexuality and gender. The plural mycelium is a web of fungal cells that provide a foundation for other species' kingdoms to exist. They reproduce sporadically, unpredictably and without individual gender classifications (Kaishian and Djoulakian 2020, 9). As heterotrophs, or 'other feeders' that cannot make their own food, fungi rely on partnership and symbiosis to survive and give life (Kimmerer 2012, 270). Some fungi, such as lichen, are not named as one being taxonomically. They defy binary categorisations and are named as an interspecies family: rock tripe, Umbilicaria americana for example possessing a name that refers to the family and not an indi-

"Fungi themselves are incredibly diverse. Their myriad expressions, types and genders challenge a binary lens of understanding of sexuality and gender."

"Fungi connects nature and culture outside of Western scientific frameworks, encouraging the passing of knowledge through experience and storytelling."

vidual lichen (Kimmerer 2012, 271). Feminist Sara Ahmed writes of "moments of disorientation" in the formation of queer identity in relation to others and ourselves (Ahmed 2006, 179). Queer gatherings in heteronormative space are disorienting in the ways that they re-orient surroundings towards the queer mycology's hiddenness within ecology study through time, and the fear with which mushrooms are often met, can similarly disorient and re-orient towards scientific study away from binaries and modernist, technological progress. The drive for progress and profit from extraction, conceptualising human culture as separate from nature, is one of the key reasons for anthropogenic climate change today (Haraway 2015).

The history of relationships between people, culture and mushrooms is a long one, dating back to over 13,000 years to the Pleistocene in North America, and possibly earlier (Turner and Cuerrier 2022). They therefore hold great cultural importance in Indigenous communities who have co-existed with and used fungi for food and medicine. For example, the name for cinder conk fungus in the Cree Nation language refers to its place in Cree storytelling as a transformer of the Cree. This refers to its values as a fire starter, reminding people of its vital role in sustaining community life (Turner and Cuerrier, 2022). Greater awareness has emerged in recent years of the threat to Indigenous land, and cultures closely linked to native lands in light of the climate crisis. Knowledge of mushrooms is often passed down to younger members of communities through these stories. These 'forest community connections' are very important considering loss of Indigenous land and cultural knowledge (Serra et al 2016). Fungi connects nature and culture outside of Western scientific frameworks, encouraging the passing of knowledge through experience and storytelling.

However, similar to the proliferation of 'queer-baiting' and 'rainbow capitalism' whereby corporations and institutions have recently begun to commodify easily palatable forms of queerness for their own financial gain, fungi too have experienced growing commodification (Leszkowicz and Kitlinski 2013). As Ahmed writes of the disorientating action of queerness in space, a "superficial, extractive experience" of mushrooms is easier and of more capital value than engaging with the queer, anti-capitalist history of the study of mycology and fungi itself. From 1969-2009, world mushroom production increased ten-fold, and an estimated 25 million people are now employed in the mushroom growing and processing industry as it expands away from small-scale home growing and foraging practices (Adusumalli et al 2022). The value of mushrooms as a luxury item seems at odds with their ability to nurture trees and help forests grow after they have been deforested or extracted (Tsing 2021). Both queerness and fungi are simultaneously excluded and commodified under capitalism. This commodification is held up by productive labour of precarious, minority communities for consumption by wealthy, often white clientele in the US (Tsing 2021). The power to erase the labour and cultural meaning of mushrooms is held by them. Contradictions and meanings outside of dualisms of nature and culture, human and nonhuman, and commodity and labour are revealed in the mushroom industry (Plumwood 1993, Tsing 2021). Fungi are even often unnamed, as are many queer identities, with only 120,000 of what is thought to be 3.8 million fungi in existence being formally named (Hawksworth and Lücking 2017). Mushrooms and the ways in which communities interact with them provide a space to name and explore these contradictions and lack of separation between the human and nonhuman on multiple scales. In Vilarinho, Portugal, community forestry is emerging as a form of collective property arrangements (Serra et al 2016). In the process of regaining the forest back from state and private ownership, a community education initiative on mushroom identifying and picking was integrated. It was seen as a way of developing close knowledge between human and nonhuman nature, connecting people together across backgrounds and generations in the act of picking (Serra et al 2016). In Canada, Indigenous and other local communities are joining together in post-wildfire destroyed forests to harvest the mushrooms that grow in the wake of fire event deforestation (Stanton 2021).

As the world faces an increasing climate crisis, 'sustainable' solutions are being sought by both public and private corporate actors. This includes interest in harnessing the power of fungal systems to break down waste and grow in extracted areas. However, while mushrooms clearly have much to offer in their disruptive queerness, searching for technological solutions within a capitalist, patriarchal system will only entrench hierarchies and power. In the Canadian mushroom picking example, white settlers laid claim to the adventure and commerce of picking through business ventures around mushrooms on Indigenous lands (Stanton 2021). Engagement with mycology must, as Anna Tsing writes, 'resist common models' (2012, 143). The act of mushroom picking and foraging itself can be a way of engaging with the interconnections of land, ecology, and nature outside of categorised spaces and species. It can be used for community building outside of large-scale food systems under capitalism. Identification and picking requires slowness, observation, and knowledge learned from many different people and

sources. In this way, it is different to fast paced purchasing of food from disconnected sources. A space is opened for people to connect outside of conventional, heteronormative and capitalist situations, and collectives that form around fungi tend to articulate themselves as anti-capitalist and queer (Serra et al 2016).

"Human culture has been created and sustained through the same patterns of mutualistic relationships between landscapes, plants, and animals in ecosystems that fungi form."

With the destruction of the biodiverse nature spaces and ecologies that contribute to human well-being and culture, awareness is also growing around climate anxiety connected to this loss (Chawla 2020). One of the key reasons people continue to delay climate action is their disconnect from nature (Zelenski et al 2023). Many cultural identities, especially Indigenous community knowledge, are rooted in nature stories and experiences (Lemelin and Fine 2013). Human culture has been created and sustained through the same patterns of mutualistic relationships between landscapes, plants, and animals in ecosystems that fungi form. This ecology is disappearing with the rising climate crisis and the impact of extracting and neglecting land (IPCC 2022). The issues of climate crisis, biodiversity loss and rising climate anxiety are interlinked. Disconnection from nature reinforces a lack of responsibility to take climate action, and threats to nature spaces from climate crisis reduces the positive mental wellbeing people can experience within them. Recognising these deep and mutualistic connections between nature, humans and culture, as fungi inform us, might go a long way to truly grasping the gravity of what is at stake in ecological loss.

As the economic value of fungi grows globally it is crucial that communities drawing on the lessons of mycology are underpinned by an intersectional, justice approach. Mycological activities pursued within a settler colonial context on Indigenous lands, for example, will entrench power dynamics by favouring economic benefit for non-Indigenous users. In this context, an intersectional approach would mean land given back to Indigenous communities for cultural and ecological preservation outside of settler colonial governments. Learning from mycology must emphasise its queerness and encouragement of connection through dismantling systems of oppression. It can also show us how to build a mutualistic world where nature, culture and humans thrive away from patriarchal dominance through binary categories and the enclosure of nature for commodification. Connection to nature and ecology is key to rebuilding what we have lost previously, to grow a better world together.

"Connection to nature and ecology is key to rebuilding what we have lost previously"

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Abortion Bans in America:

The Cycles They Perpetuate and How They Sustain a Racist and Sexist Society

Milly Holt

Milly Holt looks at the consequences of abortion bans in the US to consider how and why they perpetuate a racist and sexist society.

The History of Abortion in America

Since the twentieth century, abortion has been one of the biggest topics in political debates in America, so much so that it has become a tool exploited by politicians in their campaigns while simultaneously polarising political parties. The major question in this debate is, who should decide if a person should have one? The people themselves or the government?

The opinion that the government should control abortion rights can be traced back to eighteenth-century America. At that time, abortions were not as controversial or as regulated as they are now; abortions were legal until around the fourth month of pregnancy, which is when foetal movement typically begins (Reagan 2022, 8). That being said, once a woman passed this point, she was expected to go through with the pregnancy as a matter of morality (Reagan 2022, 9).

Then, in 1857, the American Medical Association launched a campaign to completely criminalise abortions. Their campaign was rooted in the desire to put people that performed abortions out of business, but the public was driven by their own racist objectives (Reagan 2022, 10–11). White Protestants were worried that non-Protestants and people of colour were going to out-populate them and take their 'political power', so they sought to increase the White Protestant population (Reagan 2022, 11). Through this campaign, many women were reduced to beings that were solely meant to produce children to increase their population and were considered not to be a 'true wife' if they failed to fulfil such a role (Reagan 2022, 11).

The campaign managed to get several anti-abortion laws passed between 1860 and 1880, and by 1930, it became fully criminalised in every state (Reagan 2022, 13–14). This, of course, did not stop abortions from happening. Illegal abortions were occurring all over the country, however, they were becoming increasingly unsafe, and this is when vital developments in the movement for access to safe abortions began. More and more doctors risked getting arrested to provide safe abortions, the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion was formed to help people access safe abortion care, and an underground abortion service network was created by the Women's Liberation Union in Chicago (Baker et al. 2022). Public awareness of the need for access to safe abortions started to grow. At this time, the women's liberation movement was rapidly expanding with abortion rights at the forefront of its fight. The movement improved abortion laws in eighteen states (Baker et al. 2022), which would eventually culminate in the legalisation of abortion in 1973.

On January 22, 1973, the United States Supreme Court legalised first and second trimester abortions with the Roe v. Wade (1973) ruling. It declared that, in the first trimester, abortions are a private matter between the pregnant person and the person's doctor, not a pregnant person and the government (Baker et. al 2022). The Court also decided that states could implement certain regulations, except full criminalisation, on abortions in the second trimester and that it was up to the states to decide the legality of abortion in the third trimester (Baker et al. 2022). However, any restrictions made by states regarding the second and third trimester were overruled if they were a risk to a person's health (Baker et al. 2022). Nevertheless, there was now federal protection for abortion, albeit only to a certain extent, that had not existed before.

The Roe ruling was a mark of great progress in the fight for abortion access, however it also escalated the legal war over abortions. In 1976, the Hyde Amendment was passed to ban federal funding for abortions, with some exceptions (Planned Parenthood n.d.a.). Currently, only fifteen states provide funding for abortions (Nathman 2023). The government then permitted states, through Bellotti v. Baird (1979), to require parental consent when a person of a certain age is seeking an abortion (Baker et al. 2022). Then, in 1992, the Supreme Court abandoned the trimester system established in Roe and introduced the 'viability' framework and the concept of the 'undue burden' with the Planned Parenthood v. Casey (1992) ruling. The Court defined 'viability' as the point where the foetus can survive outside the uterus (with medical assistance), which occurs around twenty-four to twenty-eight weeks into the pregnancy (Baker et al. 2022). Any abortions that occurred before this point were federally protected, but could still be subject to state regulations, and any abortions that occurred after could be banned or subject to state regulations, while in-keeping with preserving the person's health (Baker et al. 2022). Furthermore, these state regulations implemented on abortions before the point of viability had to comply with the Court's concept of the 'undue burden.' States could implement restrictions on abortion as long as they were not in place specifically for the purpose of hindering a person's access to abortion, which would then qualify them as being an 'undue burden' (Baker et al. 2022). Therefore, even though Casey ultimately upheld Roe, it also opened the door for a multitude of abortion restrictions. These restrictions would later be increased after the Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization (2022) ruling.

On June 24, 2022, the Supreme Court decided in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization to strip federal protection over abortions and grant control over its legality to the states (Center for Reproductive Rights n.d.), making Roe obsolete. As a result, twelve states have completely banned abortions and thirty-two have banned abortion after a certain point in pregnancy, with both

"In America, those with female assigned reproductive systems have lost the fundamental right to an abortion."

groups barring exceptions such as whether the person's or foetus's health is at risk or if the pregnancy was the result of rape or incest (Abortion Finder n.d.).

In America, those with female assigned reproductive systems have lost the fundamental right to an abortion. The reason that such a right was able to be taken away is the sexist culture that continues to exist in America. The abortion bans and restrictions that result from this culture cause their own additional economic and psychological harm, which only strengthen pre-existing disparities. Thus, abortion bans and a sexist culture support one other, creating a vicious cycle. Furthermore, racial, sexual, and gender minorities, as well as low-income individuals, are subject to additional economic and psychological disparities that result from racist and discriminatory systems in America. Thus, this cycle perpetuates even more discriminatory structures in America.

Pre-existing Economic Disparities Experienced by Women and Minorities in America

One of the most notable manifestations of sexism in America is the economic disparity between men and women. According to the National Women's Law Center, in 2019, women were 35 percent more likely to live in poverty than men, with one in twenty women living in extreme poverty (Sun 2003). Furthermore, racial and gender minorities, among other groups, are subject to even greater economic disparities. As of 2019, eighteen percent of Black women, eighteen percent of Native American women, and fifteen percent of Latina women lived in poverty, while only eight percent of white women lived in poverty (Sun 2023). For gender minorities, it was reported that in 2019, the US transgender poverty average (twenty-nine percent) was double the national average (twelve percent) (inequality n.d.).

Economic Consequences of Attempting to Receive or Being Denied an Abortion

There are two types of abortions a person can get. A person can terminate a pregnancy by taking a pill or by getting the pregnancy surgically removed, which is known as an in-clinic abortion (Planned Parenthood n.d.b.). Without government funding, or insurance, abortion pills can cost up to $800. At Planned Parenthood, a major abortion provider in the United States, abortion pills average around $580 (Planned Parenthood 2022). The cost of an in-clinic abortion depends on how far along the pregnancy is. First-trimester abortions can cost up to $800, but average at $600 at Planned Parenthood. Early second-trimester abortions can cost $715, and late second-trimester abortions can cost from $1,500 to $2,000 (Planned Parenthood 2022).

In states where abortion is banned or where restrictions make it very difficult to receive one, pregnant individuals may face additional costs. If abortion is banned in a state, then those who are seeking one will have to travel out of state, which means additional transportation and accommodation costs. There may even be considerable transportation and accommodation costs when a person has to travel to a clinic within their state. Furthermore, people might have to pay for childcare and lose money from taking time off work (Nathman 2023). And, as said before, the farther along in a pregnancy a person gets, the more expensive the abortion becomes. So, the longer it takes to get to a clinic and the longer it takes to receive the abortion, the more the abortion will cost (Nathman 2023).

Moreover, there are also considerable economic consequences when people are denied abortions. The Turnaway Study, which observed women seeking abortions across thirty clinics in twenty-one states and the immediate effects and effects over a five year period on the women that were denied and those that received an abortion (Miller, Wherry, & Foster 2020, 2), found that, either immediately after abortion denial or in the years following it, those who were denied an abortion were more likely to have worse credit scores, live in poverty, go bankrupt, or get evicted compared to those who received an abortion (ibid, 4, 11, and 22). Another study that expanded upon and reviewed these findings found that the people who were denied an abortion and those who did receive an abortion in the Turnaway Study were on similar economic trajectories prior to their experience with abortion. So, it was concluded that being denied an abortion was the cause for the economic harm those who had to carry on with the pregnancy faced (ibid, 31). Those who were denied an abortion were not financially ready to have and raise a child. Because they had to face the costs of childbirth and of raising a child, some had to borrow money or go into debt, which likely worsened their credit scores (ibid, 2 and 4). In addition, because they were now paying for the costs of caring for a child, some could not afford to pay rent, so they were evicted (ibid, 2 and 4). Thus, it was concluded that 'the more wanted or optimally timed births may impose a smaller financial penalty' (ibid, 37).

With the current state of abortion bans and regulations in America, there are potential economic consequences at every point of the abortion-seeking process. Because of the Hyde Amendment, if a person does not live in one of the fifteen states that offer funding for abortions or if they do not have health insurance, they are going to pay a significant amount for abortion care, which only increases if they live in a restriction-heavy state. If they

"Abortion bans and a sexist culture support one other, creating a vicious cycle."

end up getting denied, they are going to face even greater economic struggles over time. This will only add to the financial hardship that people who seek abortions already face. Additionally, according to the American Psychological Association, those 'who already struggle to pay for and access abortions — those living in poverty, people of color…sexual and gender minorities — are likely to be hit hardest by abortion bans' (Abrams 2022). Because these groups are subject to discriminatory financial hardships, as mentioned before, and because they may not have as much access to health insurance (Williams and Rucker 2000), they become financially stunted and must remain in a position that makes them more 'likely to be hit hardest by abortion bans' (Abrams 2022).

Pre-existing Psychological Disparities Experienced by Women and Minorities in America

Another significant manifestation of sexism in American society is the psychological disparity between men and women. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, women are more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety in America (n.d.). Such a disparity can be attributed to sexism. A study done in the UK found that women who experience sexism are five times more likely to suffer from clinical depression (Young Women's Trust 2019), and a study conducted by the World Health Organization also found that sexual discrimination is closely linked with women's mental health (Vigod and Rochon 2020). People of colour, among other minority groups, are also subject to severe mental health disparities. Black adults, for example, are 20 percent more likely to experience mental health conditions than white adults (American Psychological Association 2016). This can be partly attributed to the racial discrimination, prejudice, and violence they face. People of colour are constantly subjected to racial trauma, which can develop into severe mental health conditions (Mental Health America n.d.). A study also found that with African Americans, exposure to racism increased cardiovascular activity (Harrell 2013). While another study found that changes in heart rate and blood pressure are closely linked to systemic racism (Harrell 2013). Physical changes such as these are common symptoms of stress and anxiety. Furthermore, due to higher rates of unemployment and limited access to health insurance, racial minorities do not have as much access to mental health care as white people do in America (Williams and Rucker 2000). Consequently, any underlying or existing mental health conditions are likely to go untreated and worsen over time.

Psychological Consequences of Attempting to Receive or Being Denied an Abortion

The day before the Dobbs decision was released, the American Psychological Association issued a statement on the harmful effects of being denied an abortion on a person's mental health (Abrams 2022). They cited the aforementioned Turnaway Study, which found that among the people they observed, those who were denied an abortion felt, in addition to 'lower self-esteem and life satisfaction', higher levels of stress and anxiety than those who received an abortion (Abrams 2022).

Moreover, studies have found that having to push through the countless barriers to get an abortion can also harm mental health. One study that observed the attempts of 778 people in California, Illinois, and New Mexico to get an abortion found that harm to mental health was strongly associated with having to face difficulties like travelling to other states, delays in getting abortions, and procedure costs (Biggs, Kaller, & Ralph 2020, 355). With the Dobbs ruling, the psychological effects will only worsen, as people will have to travel farther, deal with more delays, and inevitably face more denials, ultimately resulting in paying higher costs.

The psychological damage from this process strengthens the existing psychological disparity between men and women in American society. Furthermore, according to Carrie Baker, a professor of women and gender studies at Smith College in the United States, 'half of the people who need abortions live in poverty, 75 percent are low income…and are disproportionately people of color' (Nathman 2023). So, the disparities that these groups are subjected to are aggravated by the abortion bans. Because these psychological disparities were the by-products of racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination, the psychological effects of the abortion bans only reaffirm these structures.

It is consequences like these that strengthen the systems which allowed for them to happen in the first place. The perpetuation of cycles like these are ultimately how America has managed to maintain its discriminatory structures and institutionalise its sexist and racist beliefs since the eighteenth century. Because the consequences of abortion bans enforce inherently sexist, racist, and discriminatory disparities, abortion regulations are ultimately ensuring the continuation of a sexist, racist, and discriminatory society.

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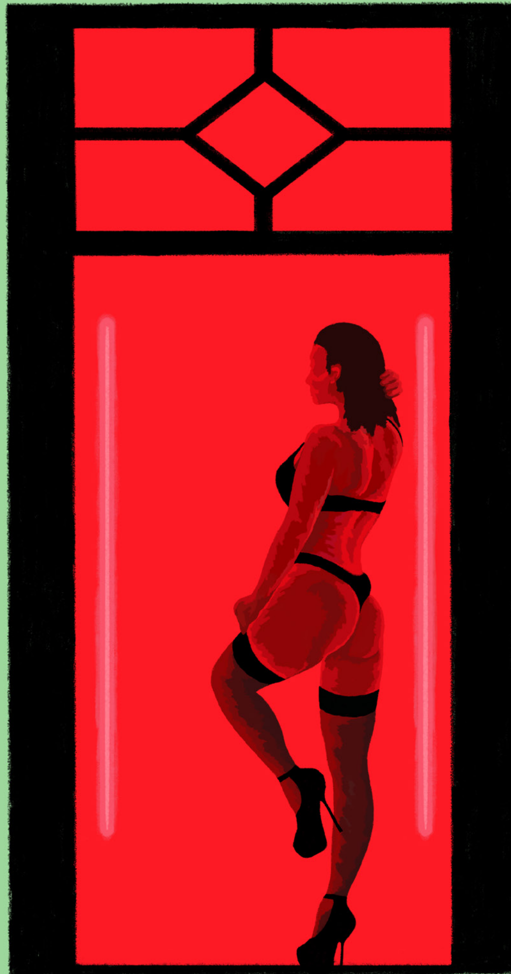

Artwork by Alexander Dalton

The Sexual Politics of Sex Work and Voices within the Feminist Debate

Karoliine Pärlin

Karoliine Pärlin examines liberal, radical, and intersectional strands of feminist thought, discussing how they elevate or silence different voices in the broader sex work debate.

Different voices and arguments characterise feminist debates. Historically, white women have been the dominant voices in feminism. For example, a popular approach to feminist history sees feminism in 'waves' through the remarkable achievements in Western women's rights, such as the attainment of equal voting rights (Olufemi 2020). However, various experiences of women do not fit the 'waves' narrative. When white women gained rights, it often did not apply to black, indigenous, or women of the Global South, nor were they fought for by the proponents of the dominant form of feminism (Olufemi 2020). This is also the case when it comes to the debate about sex work: voices in these debates are tied to the arguments and the movements that they represent, some defending the liberal world order and some seeking radical change. This article will review the various arguments that feminists in the sex work debate claim and the voices that they represent.

Liberal Views on Sex Work

The debate over sex work and sex workers' rights is characterised by the policies of criminalisation and different understandings of the role of sex work under the patriarchy (Beran 2012). It is an inherently feminist issue due to the overrepresentation of women as sex workers and men as consumers, creating a power dynamic that can often result in assault and the degradation of women (Overall 1992). Liberal feminism upholds that the decision to engage in sex work is a woman's choice and is as legitimate of a job as others that require physical labour, such as being a cashier (Satz 2010). Because it is a service that people are willing to sell and buy, it is considered a normal part of the market where regulation should be put in place for the protection of women. Sex work should thus be regulated like other professions through the introduction of minimum wage, set hours, maternity leave, and the regulation of safety and health (Satz 2010). Hence, decriminalisation of sex work as opposed to criminalisation is proposed because it allows for the legal improvement of working conditions and increases the reporting of violence to the authorities, whereas criminalisation leads to lack of protection (Comte 2014).

However, liberal feminism is often criticised for its freedom of choice argument. Martha Nussbaum (1998) posits that most women become sex workers due to a lack of better options in the labour market. While acknowledging that it is mostly poor women who engage in sex work, she proposes improving the overall market inequalities through reforms of education, training new skills, and creating jobs for women, instead of eliminating the option of sex work. In this case, the effectiveness of reformism is questionable. According to hooks (2015), reformism focuses merely on achieving equal workforce positions to men and therefore ignores the radical foundations of contemporary feminism that aim to restructure the gender order in a fundamentally anti-sexist way. Additionally, it takes for granted men's 'need' for sex work and how this type of market exists due to the current gender relations without challenging the power imbalance. The industry has long relied on the naturalised narrative of male desire without questioning its origins and women as its satisfiers (Overall 1992). As the demand and supply is heavily gendered, women's free will is influenced by the patriarchal order. Therefore, the potential of liberal feminism to emancipate women is questioned by radical thinkers.

Radical Opposition to the Prostitution Market and the Intersectional Critique

According to a more radical school of thought, women have no choice at all in the decision to become a sex worker as it is the patriarchy, coupled with systems of classism and racism, that coerce women into the industry (O'Connell Davidson 1998). MacKinnon (2011) reports that sex workers are often disproportionately young, poor, and persons of colour, making them vulnerable to abuse by their clients and not being in conditions where one can make a choice with free will. MacKinnon (2011) describes countless risks and harassment specific to the job, such as influence from pimps, acts of police raids, and sexual health issues. MacKinnon claims that state control or unionising will not be enough to eliminate the plethora of issues. Radical feminists present a more pessimistic account of harm and violence in the industry. Their analysis focuses on the coerced victims of prostitution, and some even argue that sex workers who claim to have entered the industry at free will have still been coerced through patriarchal structures (Comte 2014). In addition to class structures, therefore, the underlying reasons why women end up in sex work disproportionately are unequal societal gender relations and subordination of women which is being reinforced in the sex work industry. Even if sex work has the potential to economically liberate a woman, radical feminists see it as enhancing the inherently objectifying power imbalances between genders, thereby extending harm to all women.

Intersectional feminism emphasises the importance of extending the analysis of women's experiences to other interlocking powers like race, class, ability, and sexuality (Carbado et al. 2013). It adds nuance by showing how the patriarchy is not the only source of power that operates in women's lives, but can for example interact with white supremacy or heterosexism. Clients of sex workers tend to be mostly white males and thereby often reinforce racial stereotypes of submissive and fetishised women of colour as the greater proportion of the sex workforce (Overall 1992). Therefore, intersectional feminists believe the debate should not only focus on policy decisions of legalisation or decriminalisation but also address broader inequalities and power structures that play out in the sex work industry (O'Connell Davidson 1998). Some radical

feminists opt for the criminalisation of the consumer and the decriminalisation of the sex worker in order to radically reorganise the contemporary patriarchal order. In Sweden, where this is implemented, the sex workers have reported that they were left with more violent and unpleasant clients because they are the ones who are willing to continue the service illegally (Beran 2012). While the radical and intersectional views offer an analysis of how women's choices are shaped by the societal structures they are placed in, the possibility of emancipation is constrained by the possibilities of the current political systems.

Different Voices in the Sex Work Debate

Both radical and liberal feminists elevate different voices of sex workers to validate their arguments. Feminists who advocate for women's choice in entering the sex work industry cite the works by sex workers who take pride in their job and claim the opportunity to define their own experience. Jacqueline Comte (2014) offers an empirical account of the experiences of sex workers in response to the claims of radical feminists about the nature of sex work always being violent. She cites multiple works that highlight the empowerment of sex workers that shape her research, challenging the negative view on sex work and portraying the job as enjoyable. It is also, however, noted by Comte that the samples of those studies are not representative: it is difficult to access the most marginalised populations in the sex work industry, alongside ethical problems in research. There is also more risk to marginalised sex workers to disclose information about their work, which is why white working-class women's accounts dominate the discourse of the liberal feminism. This is especially true when less violent contexts of sex work are talked about from a sex positive lens, like online sex work. The sex positivity movement shows this kind of sex work in a positive light and illustrates a potential for empowerment in sex work as a source of flourishment in society and as a site for de-stigmatising women's sexuality (Comte 2014). Therefore, it becomes easier to showcase it as a legitimate choice opposed to the narrative of oppression and coercion. To challenge the homogenous victimisation of marginalised women in the discourse, Comte (2014) also offers evidence from India where sex work can be a path to autonomy from the domination of women's husbands and fathers. Positive accounts of sex workers offer a valuable insight into the experiences of women in today's world where this ideal has not yet been achieved and advocate for the safety of the women who live in today's reality. Changing the narrative of stigmatisation can have a positive impact on the women who are currently forced to do sex work.

Radical feminists uphold their arguments with the accounts of women who have engaged in prostitution in the past. These workers speak out about the violent conditions of sex work and advocate for abolishment of the sex work industry. Beran (2012) cites the research from the organisation WHISPER (Women Hurt in Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt), which shows how most former sex workers were sexually abused as children, making them more vulnerable to exploitation in prostitution. This illustrates that the accounts of liberal feminists do not reflect a big part of sex workers' experiences. An attempt to bring the radical and liberal wings together is made by Beran (2012). She acknowledges the position of the prostitutes and their social background instead of defending the whole practice in an unequal system. Therefore, while it is important to validate the experiences and agency of sex workers, neither absolute positive or negative narratives are helpful for the protection of sex workers - the former does not reflect everyone's experiences and the latter runs the risk of further stigmatising current sex workers.

The debates of sex work highlight specific schools of thought within feminism. Liberal feminists aim to improve women's conditions through state institutions by decriminalising sex work and making it safer through regulating the market. In contrast, radical feminists do not believe that state institutions are capable of eradicating the violence that women experience and instead advocate for the deconstruction of the patriarchal society. This would destroy the demand for prostitution. While the debate is polar, it also represents voices that try to bring the sides together aiming to limit the harm done to women – by recognising the patriarchal roots of the sex work industry but seeking for legal protection to those currently in sex work. Regarding the voice of feminists, the debate is enriched with the arguments of intersectional feminists who see beyond the patriarchy and how different systems of power affect women in particular contexts. Thus, it remains important to seek accounts from diverse experiences in sex work to not exclude voices that lay at the intersections of multiple oppressions.

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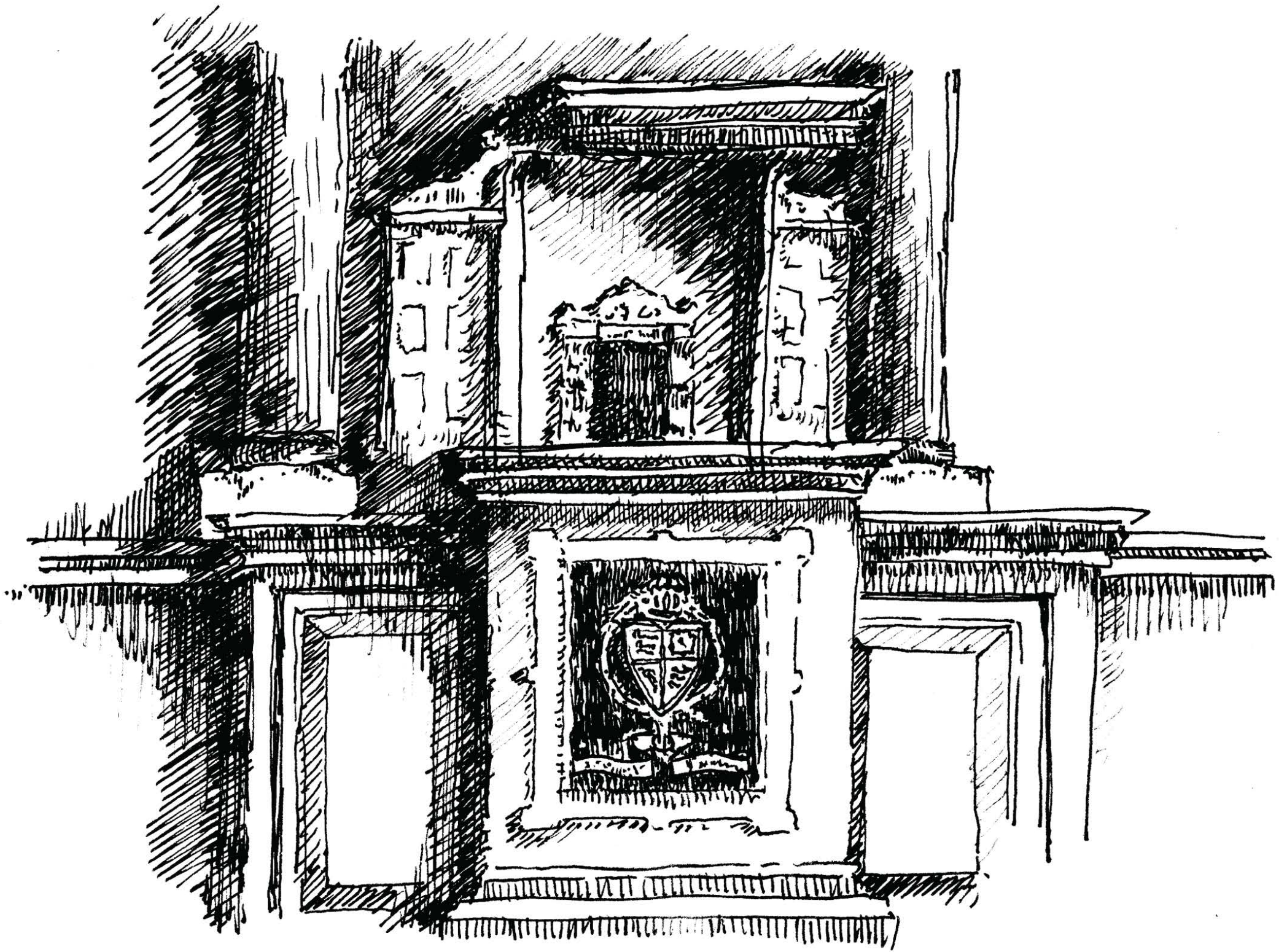

Artwork by Henry Wolff

gender bias in custodial cases

Esme Patton

Esme Patton reviews gender bias in divorce courts by looking at the different expectations, preferences, and understandings that shape outcomes in custodial cases.

50 percent of marriages end in divorce and it is predicted by Cherlin (1992) that 40 percent of this generation's children will live in a divorced single-parent household before they are sixteen (Sharfman 2022). These statistics are at the forefront of divorce as any media representation of custodial battles expresses compassion for the negative impact that the decision has upon children. The media reaches only the surface level of the legal workings of divorce as, understandably, when regarding custodial cases, the focal point is the child, which by proxy masks the possible gender bias that exists within the courtroom.

"gender bias is prominent in family courts for both women and men in different ways."

Gender bias is prominent in family courts for both women and men in different ways. It is a common conception that a man should forfeit his right to custody over his own children in order for them to stay with their maternal figure (Kushner 2006). For women, the gender bias in familial court is prominent through the boundless expectation that single mothers are expected to maintain or otherwise be deemed negligent.

Firstly, it is critical to note that over the last twenty years, custodial options for all parents have evolved as it is now common for courts to show preference towards joint custody rather than sole custody in order to offer the child equal access with their parental figures (Wookey 2013). In the US, several states follow the court ruling of joint custody unless proficient evidence is provided that expresses the inadequacy of one parent (Wilcox et al. 1998). However, the tense atmosphere that surrounds family court is fed by the complexity of perceived gender preference in the courtroom.

background

Up until 2000, the assumption of divorce law was that, whatever the custodial outcome, spousal maintenance would be paid, whilst the main custodial conclusion was reliant on the role of the homemaker in comparison to the breadwinner (Barton 2017). It was viewed that the homemaker, in comparison to the breadwinner, did not need to maintain a comparative weight of contributions towards the household. Although unspoken, this court perspective followed the gender-based stereotypes of males as the breadwinners and females focused on childcare/house maintenance (Amato & Booth 1995). This perception was changed through the House of Lords ruling in White v. White (2000), which initiated equal financial sharing following divorce; this attempted to act as the catalyst for the complete elimination of gender bias within the courtroom. The goal was to remove the ingrained gender stereotypes that have played a decisive role both in the legal system and in society (White V. White 2001). In terms of child custody, it is viable to argue that old-fashioned stereotypes of the homemaker and the breadwinner are still prevalent; however, they are adapting so these stereotypes are not necessarily gender based.

primary caregiver and parental responsibility

The complexity of custodial rulings is often overlooked. Although gender bias is prevalent, all judges focus on the best interest of the child or children. Courts aim to give the main proportion of custody to the parent that is the primary caregiver (Weinman & Associates 2020). Although the term itself is genderless, when dissected we can see the patriarchal role that commonly pushes women into adopting the title. Notably, the judicial system and social expectations were created by men at a time when the common belief was that a woman's singular purpose was to be a homemaker and caregiver. Thus, it is difficult to dispose of the ingrained biases that conceptualise women as the primary caregiver.

In 2017, it was estimated that 79.9 percent of primary caregivers were mothers, whereas only 20.1 percent of fathers were given the title of primary caregiver in custodial cases (Census.gov 2021). From these statistics alone, one can draw the conclusion that there is a gender bias in the courtroom, and it is targeted against men.

When broken down, the possible bias that judges hold which often grants women the role of primary caregiver stems not just from the patriarchal system, but also from the biological factors that are associated with caregiving. From a biological perspective, the female anatomy is tailored to provide nutrition for a newborn baby in a way that the male anatomy cannot. The body, following childbirth, produces a hormone called oxytocin and the child begins to associate the feelings of safety and comfort with the action of breastfeeding, strengthening the bond between mother and child (Else-Quest et al. 2003). Arguably, this biological 'advantage' that females receive as caregivers should not play into legally defining the primary caregiver, as commonly breastfeeding only takes place for an average of six months and many new-borns are not breastfed at all. Providing the argument that this short lived bio-

logical nurture should be defining in deciding a primary caregiver is irrational and completely unreliable (Kaneshiro 2021). Adopting a modern-day perspective, biological factors should not play a valuable role in the decision of assigning caregiver, as a child's life is not solely reliant on these features. The role of caregiver involves the physical and mental well-being of a child, thus consisting of general health care, preparation of meals, dressing, and bathing as well as a fair engagement with school and extracurricular activities (Prebeck 2022). When listing these criteria, a singular gender should not come to mind. However, these criteria match outdated gender stereotypes which should not be referenced in a courtroom. There is an underlying gender bias in the majority of courtrooms that attempts to prevent a child from being brought up in a single-parent household as it is argued that a child needs both parents in equal measure to properly develop. In this context, society has adopted damaging phrases such as 'controlling father' or 'malicious mother syndrome' that aim to create a divide via the portrayal of parents that file for divorce and wish to keep their children away from their other parent purely out of spite whilst neglecting the child's relationship with their other parent. Statistically, this portrayal is proven false as the majority of custody settlements are reached on mutual terms outside of the courtroom.

This old-fashioned thought process brings into play the gender bias towards women as custodial cases strike issues within feminist development. For a woman to be granted custody, the criteria consist of stereotypes that modern-day women are attempting to escape. In order to achieve maternal custody, it is more important for the court that the woman expresses the homemaker over the breadwinner role, as it is an unsaid belief that their ex-spouse would be able to provide financial support (Amato & Booth 1995). This unspoken law is illustrated through the 87.34 percent of all paying parents of child support being men, compared to 10.03 percent of women (Arnold n.d.). The ingrained nature of these harmful gender stereotypes makes gender equality nearly impossible to reach in family court. In order for a woman to achieve primary custody they must once again adopt the homemaker role that society has limited women to, which in turn acts as a harmful step backwards in the feminist fight for equality (Groove 2023).

custodial preference vs. custodial outcome

From a father's perspective, sole custody seems unlikely, although this may not necessarily be the case. Many men feel they have a better chance at attempting to receive joint custody than sole custody due to the court favouring women. Numerous researchers revealed that there is a divide regarding gender satisfaction with the custodial mandate. It was found that fathers are commonly satisfied with joint custody whereas women are normally happier with sole custody (Wilcox et al. 1998). This highlights inequity within court rulings as many males feel as though the likelihood of receiving sole custody is less than their female counterpart; however, this may be reliant on the proposed custodial preferences from either parent. Custody preferences are decided very early on in the divorce process and are a critical part of the overall mandate. The preference provides the court with insight into each parent's ideal custody situation thus highlighting a more intimate look into the family dynamic.

Many fathers limit themselves to joint custody due to their desire to stay in their child's life and maintain their identity as a father; this is an important coping mechanism post-divorce and should be necessarily addressed by the courtroom (Wilcox et al. 1998). Following the rise of divorce requests from women since the right was granted in 1937, many men felt neglected and attempted to counter the feminist movements by adopting male liberation protests. Sociologist Terry Anderell explains that 'by disrupting the power hierarchy and authority relations endemic to the institutions of marriage and married fatherhood divorce can be seen as disruptive to men's sense of masculinity' (Arendell 1995). This negative outlook of divorce draws connotations of ownership as men attempt to use fatherhood as a synonym for masculinity.

As previously mentioned, numerous courts strive to grant joint custody whenever they can as it encourages collaborative parenting post-divorce and is, in most cases, thought to be best for the child's wellbeing. Feminist legal scholar Martha Fineman says granting joint custody has 'been detrimental to women, for whom sole custody still provides the greatest level of flexibility and autonomy' (Fineman 2005, 18). Understandably, sole custody for either parent provides greater flexibility as you are not working around a companion's schedule but instead able to parent alone, however, this often neglects the child's needs. The custodial decisions are the most significant mandates made during divorce court as the relationship between spouses is not at the forefront instead the well-being of the child is the focal point and it is difficult to dissect the best outcome for the child during their parent's divorce.

forfeiting roles

Seemingly, society has forgotten to deconstruct the patriarchal structure that plagues the judicial familial court. A person's gender does not make them a better parent and it is negligent for the court to attempt to portray it that way. The idea of gender within custody cases needs to be

eliminated as it not only infringes on feminism, prolonging gender-based stereotypes of women, but it also disrespects all familial bonds (Throssell 2022). Claiming women are naturally better caregivers undermines single dads and same-sex male couples by arguing that biological autonomy enables better parenting.

Gender bias in custodial court is seen on both sides of the spectrum as women are expected to readopt the homemaker stereotype whilst men are limited to maintain the role of the breadwinner. The historic role of gendered stereotypes is so deeply embedded into family court and acts as a preventative barrier in achieving the optimal results for children's wellbeing (Warshak 2005). The antiquated gender stereotypes still need to be addressed in the courtroom as they limit the complete abolition of gender bias, however, it is uncommon for a judge to express bias regarding custodial cases.

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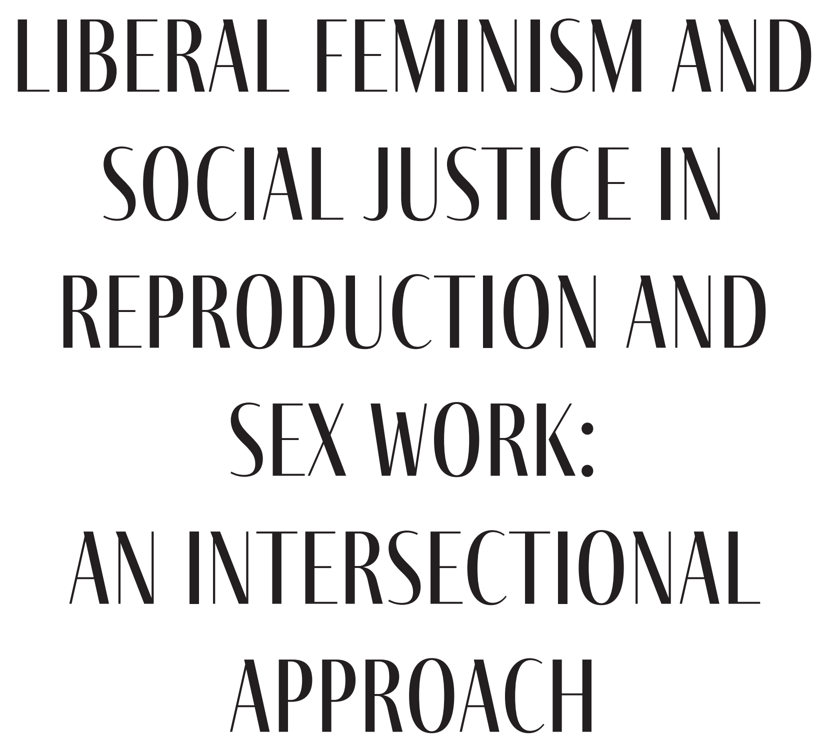

LIBERAL FEMINISM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN REPRODUCTION AND SEX WORK: AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

JADE TAYLOR

In both reproduction and sex work debates, mainstream activism has been governed by semantic discourses concerning choice, a concept that is consistent with liberal articulations of personal freedom. Using an intersectional feminist analysis, this article discusses how liberal feminism's focus on individual rights achieved through a strictly legal framework is insufficient in achieving social justice in both reproduction and sex work.

Liberalism refers to a plurality of doctrines that share the belief that the state should guarantee freedom for all individuals so that humans can be autonomo-us, rational, and self-sufficient (Fineman 2017, 135). Baehr (2021) distinguishes between two schools of thought that hold different views: egalitarian and classical. The former, more left-leaning liberalism encourages the state to take regulatory action through laws to achieve social parity. The latter's understanding of liberalism is a non-interventionist style of governance and economic philosophy. This article focuses on the views held by classical-liberal feminism and refers to this perspective when using the term liberalism.

Coined by Crenshaw in 1989, the concept of intersectionality builds on the activism of black feminists to confront the universalist assumptions of womanhood purported by white, liberal feminism (Ross 2017). As a fundamentally anti-essentialist conceptual space, intersectionality scholars posit that human beings are a product of multiple social locations, such as their race, class, and gender, which transpire in an infrastructure of formal power systems, for instance laws or governments. These cultural interactions produce processes of privilege and oppression, influenced by hegemonic discourses such as colonialism, racism, and patriarchy (Hankivsky 2014, 2). According to this perspective, inequity is never the result of, nor can it be addressed by, singular, discrete factors. Intersectionality seeks to understand the relationships between epistemologies of power and knowledge production to recognise how patriarchy and heterosexism co-produce a system of interwoven oppressions which has been termed 'a matrix of domination' (Collins 2000, 18).

Reproductive debates in this article are defined as those related to the reproductive health of women, including but not reserved to contraception, fertility, and conception. Whilst acknowledging that the ability to reproduce is not confined to a specific gender, primarily this article discusses the experiences of ciswomen, as the laws and policies designed to control reproduction traditionally focus on ciswomen as a social unit (Browne and Calkin 2020, 4). Sex work is understood as the transactional exchange of sex for monetary or material gain or services (Orchard 2020). Whilst there is terminology contention within the debate, this article uses the term sex work rather than prostitution due to the negative pathology associated with the latter (Mullins 2021).

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK – INTERSECTIONAL SOCIAL JUSTICE

Critical to intersectional feminism, social justice theories call for either the redistribution of resources (Rawls 1971) or a radical change of social processes (McGuire 2009); however, what unites both is a commitment to achieving equity in addition to equality.

Intersectional feminists have drawn attention to the inadequacies in liberal conceptions of justice which show a correlation between legal theory and formal equality. According to Kalsem and Williams (2010, 135), liberal individualistic ontology of personhood is exacted predominantly by men whose private autonomy is most unimpaired and thus often taken for granted. This situates white, heterosexual males as the norm and makes assumptions about womanhood. There are similarities here with Collins' concept of the 'Eurocentric Masculinist Validation Process', wherein those in power assume that they are the single mediators of experiential legitimacy, neglecting the subjective knowledge of those who fall outside the dominant group (2009, 151). As the primary creators of institutions and social frameworks, these assumptions rooted in patriarchal hegemony make individuals the primary agents of social understanding. The law is therefore an instrument for protecting the individual, to ensure that everyone has formal entitlement to equal rights and personal liberty (Phillips 1987).

Intersectionality calls for a rearticulation of justice that recognises the limitations of legislation as means to achieving a more equitable society and redressing systemic oppressions. Intersectional feminists insist that social justice goes beyond liberal insistence on personal autonomy but should create the conditions 'necessary for their thriving' by ensuring they have sufficient access to basic conditions and deconstructing discriminatory systems (Kalsem & Williams 2010, 157). Intersectional social justice is therefore concerned with the transformative potential of equitable power redistribution. This, they argue, can only be achieved by ensuring marginalised voices are allowed and encouraged to participate in social deliberation,

"INTERSECTIONALITY SEEKS TO UNDERSTAND THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN EPISTEMOLOGIES OF POWER AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION TO RECOGNISE HOW PATRIARCHY AND HETEROSEXISM CO-PRODUCE A SYSTEM OF INTERWOVEN OPPRESSIONS WHICH HAS BEEN TERMED 'A MATRIX OF DOMINATION' (COLLINS 2000, 18)."

so that political power is more justly distributed.

Coined by SisterSong in 1994, reproductive justice advocates for 'human, sexual and reproductive rights' for all women (Amery 2015, 511). Reproductive justice signals a departure from the language and discourse that has coloured mainstream rights activism. Activists affirm that the term encapsulates 'the right to have children, not have children, and to parent children in safe and healthy environments' in a Human Rights framework (SisterSong 2022). This helps the mainstream movement recognise the limits of the choice rhetoric rooted in legal equality (Luna 2009).

An intersectional social justice framework does not endorse universal legal approaches to sex work, as they neglect the context specific factors which can encourage or coerce individuals into such labour. In consequence, there is no essential meaning to sex work as understandings are mediated through intersectional identities. It is therefore imperative that government and social policies differentially recognise the unique experiences of sex workers to provide them with 'appropriate and specific' provisions (Mullins 2021, 6). This nuanced approach to sex work, intersectionality argues, is the most just way of confronting the systemic oppressions which disproportionately impact marginalised individuals and the inequitable harm that dichotomic legal strategies create, whilst also acknowledging the enfranchising potential of sex work (Gore 2014).

DECRIMINALISING LAWS: CHOICE AND BODILY AUTONOMY

Liberal feminism fails to capture the injustices that are rooted in legal approaches and rights narratives, which can be discernible in two categories of law. The first type, termed decriminalising, or legalising laws are intended to protect the individual by removing legal barriers, or through creating specific legal provisions e.g., abortion rights. The other, termed criminalising laws, protect the interests of the state by outlawing certain behaviours and practices, e.g., illegalising prostitution. The two types of laws relate to different agendas and raise distinct debates, thus will be analysed separately.

Liberalism understands reproductive autonomy as 'the power to decide whether and when to have offspring' (Knight & Miller 2021, 3) thus endorses the 'self-rule' of the individual (Lee 2022, 523). A clear example of this is the 'pro-choice' movement which advocates for the legal right to access abortion services as a critical tenet of reproductive autonomy.

When challenging liberal assumptions that everyone has equal entitlement to have children, intersectional feminists draw attention to differing contextual factors which limit black women's ability to fulfil their rights to have a child. For instance, expensive fertility treatment programmes are typically most accessible to 'white, middle class, able-bodied, heterosexual women' (Peterson 2005,281) as black women and other economically marginalised groups are discouraged from pursuing their services, given the substantial costs (Peterson 2005, 281). In what Roberts (2009, 783) terms 'a new reproductive dystopia', she suggests that such limitations to reprogenetic technologies are a form of methodical population control designed to discourage women of colour from having children.

With reference to the choice not to have children, intersectionality feminism draws attention to the historical and enduring pressures to reproduce that black women experience. Moreover, Ross (ibid, 290) details how misogyny within black patriarchy reduces black women to objects of sexual and reproductive subordination. This derives from the belief that 'cradle competition' (Sanger 2003, 173), wherein black women attempt to outbreed white women, can help to defeat white supremacy. Black women thus face a 'double jeopardy' (Gould 1984), as they experience oppressive and essentializing attitudes from both white and black patriarchy which impinges upon their choice to not have children.

"LIBERAL FEMINISM FAILS TO CAPTURE THE INJUSTICES THAT ARE ROOTED IN LEGAL APPROACHES AND RIGHTS NARRATIVES."

Finally, intersectional feminists draw attention to how reproductive choices are often influenced by the social and economic oppressions that women disproportionately experience which create environments that are incongruous with the safe rearing of children. Liberal emphasis on individualism, paired with a neo-liberal focus on capitalist economic rationality, resists state intervention in the economy or social infrastructures. Such theories situate individuals, who are rational actors entitled to equal rights and benefits, as the singular agent responsible for their own socio-economic condition (Peterson 2005). Intersectionality challenges this by demonstrating that privilege is the result of inequitable and oppressive power relations which favours white supremacy at the expense of marginalised identities, such as black women, who experience 'double or multiple jeopardies of subjugation' (Corus et al. 2016, 212). Findings from The Turnaway Study indicate that 69 percent of US women who seek abortion lack financial security, and of that figure two thirds lived below the federal poverty line (RHTP 2015,1). Accordingly, the study found that the most common reason US women pursue abortion services is because they feel that they lack the necessary economic resources, such as adequate insurance plans, welfare assistance, or sufficient income to support a child (ibid). Therefore, liberal understandings of the free individual are insufficient in achieving reproductive justice, as interlocking systems of oppression that marginalised people are subjected to

prevent them from accessing the resources and cultural capital needed to exercise their reproductive liberties.

An intersectional approach shows how decriminalisation laws which grant equal reproductive rights to the individual cannot achieve reproductive justice as they neglect the wider, systemic barriers to access that marginalised groups disproportionately face. This impacts their reproductive options and decisions.

CHOICE AND JUSTICE IN SEX WORK

Liberal feminists call for the decriminalisation of sex work which they argue can serve as a liberatory site for economic furtherment, bodily autonomy, and sexual expression (Burkhard 2020). Miriam (2005), as discussed in Burkhard (2020), distinguishes between two categories of liberal sex work activism: the expressivist and economic. The expressivist model seeks decriminalisation as means to restore the dignity in sexual labour by removing its devaluation as work. The economic model seeks to demonstrate the financial merit and security that can be achieved through decriminalisation by allowing the 'liberal economic agent' (Miriam 2005, 131) access to labour laws, protections, and an income.

> "INTERSECTIONALITY FEMINISM DEMONSTRATES HOW THE ABSENCE OF LEGITIMATE CHOICES FORCES MARGINALISED AND OPPRESSED WOMEN INTO SEX WORK AS A NECESSARY TOOL FOR SURVIVAL."

Intersectionality feminism is not necessarily opposed to the emancipatory potentials of decriminalisation. Rather, it criticises the universalistic assumptions made by liberalism that assume all individuals have access to equal rights and agency (Kalsem & Williams 2010; Collins 2009). Therefore, sex work should be understood with reference to specific contexts and formal responses should reflect these complexities to acknowledge that there is both merit and disadvantage to sexual labour.

However, intersectionality feminism also challenges whether choices can be detached from their cultural climate and the extent to which this impinges upon the true agency of individual decisions. Due to the intersecting social oppressions black women face, they are more vulnerable to economic marginalisation and sexual stereotypes (Butler 2015, 63) which may drive them into sex work through either direct coercion or lack of lawful options. Puschila's (2022) research into the link between poverty and prostitution in the U.S. indicates that of the 98 percent of female sex workers, 33 per cent were recruited as children or teenagers, of which 55 percent are or were homeless. As MacKinnon (2011, 278) effectively discerns, 'no one chooses to be born into poverty' or the social conditions that determine who undertakes sexual labour. Intersectionality feminism demonstrates how the absence of legitimate choices forces marginalised and oppressed women into sex work as a necessary tool for survival. Therefore, decriminalisation of sex work without broader measures could generate further harm to marginalised individuals.

CRIMINALISING LAWS

Liberal feminism is fundamentally opposed to laws that encroach upon the bodily autonomy of individuals, seeing this as a curtailment of personal liberty (Gore 2014). Intersectionality extends the liberal argument by explaining who is specifically disadvantaged by criminalisation and why it is imperative to move away from universalistic assumptions.

Ogbu-Nwobodo et al. (2022) affirms the US Supreme Court's decision to repeal Roe v. Wade will increase health inequity through constrictive medical care, exacerbating the injustice forged against those most vulnerable . Exposure to institutional poverty increases the likelihood that women will require reproductive healthcare, such as abortions or contraceptives (McKinnon 2011). Therefore, illegalising safe access to these resources is likely to exacerbate social marginalisation through incarceration, unsafe abortions, or worsening financial hardship through childcare expenses. However, vulnerability goes beyond pecuniary factors. For instance, Biggs et al. (2020) reveals how restricting access to comprehensive reproductive health care intensifies the likelihood of psychiatric conditions for people suffering from mental illness, such as postnatal depression, bipolar disorder, and substance abuse. Ogbu-Nwobodo et al. (2020) develops this, stating that laws which confer foetal rights directly discriminate against individuals with suicidal tendencies by misdefining their personal distress as vindictive child endangerment.

> "SEX WORK SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD WITH REFERENCE TO SPECIFIC CONTEXTS AND FORMAL RESPONSES SHOULD REFLECT THESE COMPLEXITIES TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THERE IS BOTH MERIT AND DISADVANTAGE TO SEXUAL LABOUR."

Furthermore, the reproductive justice movement uses the term 'population control' to capture the powerful forces that shape reproductive choices and debates (Roberts,

1997). Doty's (2022) prognosis of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) maltreatment of pregnant migrant women demonstrates that laws which curtail abortion rights concern less the protection of the foetus and more the control of women's procreation. The reproductive violence prevalent in U.S. detention centres saw coerced sterilisation programmes and frequent miscarriages amongst apprehended pregnant immigrants due to the absence of antenatal care or maternal health provisions (ibid). Thus, the paradox between the over-policing of American national bodies and the absence of sufficient formal attention paid to the reproduction of migrant women arguably speaks more to eugenical ideology than to the significance of foetal life.

Narratives of sex trafficking have dominated criminalisation debates on sexual labour in Western contexts. They equate trafficking with broader conceptions of sex work. Intersectionality theory shows how this essentialises hierarchies of victimhood which determines who is deemed worthy of rescue (Boukli & Renz 2018). Sex trafficking rhetoric creates 'the ideal victim' (Uy 2011, 208) within sex work, pertaining to a white, young ciswoman that has been stolen by foreign aggressors; thus, those who do not conform to this stereotype are largely excluded from policy responses. As Fehrenbacher et al. (2020) argue, trans-people and people of colour have been ignored in discriminatory law practices designed to regulate sexual labour and are consequently 'hyper-criminalised' due to prejudicial profiling. The study found that whilst cis women sex workers were rehabilitated instead of being persecuted when arrested in contexts where the labour was criminalised, those who fall outside the 'idealised victim' description are over-sexualised and tried as both moral and legal offenders.

Vulnerability as a theoretical concept holds progressive potential within criminalisation debates on sex work. It can challenge the assumptions liberalism makes about the free individual which neglect the intersectional factors that may encourage participation in sexual labour. One could apply Fineman's (2017) prognosis of the vulnerable subject here, which attempts to forego stereotypical identification of vulnerability by affirming that it is innate to the human condition. Fineman argues that vulnerability is both a persistent feature of human existence and a product of social relationships. Thus, in order to transcend damaging frameworks which situate privileged identities, such as white masculinity, as the invulnerable norm, laws need to assume that vulnerability is universally inherent. Accordingly, those who benefit from invulnerability do so as a result of occupying an advantageous social location. In the context of sexual labour, this reframing can be beneficial to transgressing liberal conceptions of the free subject, which ascribes responsibility to the sex worker for their social condition. Instead, it acknowledges that the vulnerable subject is 'embodied' and 'contextualised [...] by her sociality', which therefore necessitates a rearticulation of equality through 'the strategic distribution of assets' (Hewer 2019, 230). It thus recognises how infrastructures of power can increase an individual's vulnerability to sex work, which obliges the state or governing body to acknowledge their duty to correct institutional inequities.

Moreover, the criminalization of sex work fails to achieve social justice as it undermines access to sexual health rights. Kismödi et al. (2015) argue that fear of prosecution prevents sex workers from pursuing sexual health concerns, accessing contraceptives, or seeking information. Intersectionality feminism recognises that transgender sex workers are overly represented in U.S. data pertaining to sexually transmitted disease (Shapiro & Duff 2021,25); however, this is seldom formally acknowledged. Similarly, male sex workers are rarely given proportionate consideration in sexual health campaigns and policy drafting despite bearing a high burden of anorectal STIs and anal cancers (ibid). Logie's (2019) intersectional study into LGBT sex workers and sexual health disparities demonstrates how socially marginalised identities are further constrained when their livelihood is criminalised. They are morally vilified for their non-heteronormative sexual expression and formally prosecuted for their labour. Consequently, workers are discouraged from pursuing sexual health concerns, particularly in contexts where both homosexuality and sex work are illegal, confounding their social marginalisation. Moreover, criminalisation exposes sex workers to exploitation and abuse from law enforcement (Human Rights Watch 2019). Liberal messaging of the rational individual is so intimately enmeshed in U.S. policy that many sex workers feel that police brutality serves as a moral punishment that they have indirectly chosen (Gore 2014). In contexts where discrimination is rife, such as racism, homophobia, or areas where religious fundamentalism is prevalent, sex workers are particularly unlikely to pursue assistance from the police or healthcare professionals due to the increased risk of prosecution (ibid).

Decriminalisation laws which grant equal reproductive rights to the individual cannot achieve reproductive justice. They neglect the wider, systemic barriers to access that marginalised groups disproportionately face which impact upon their reproductive options and decisions. Liberal feminism's focus on decriminalising sex work is insufficient in achieving social justice within the industry by failing to address broader systems of oppression. Furthermore, liberalism makes universalist assumptions about the choices to undertake such labour without interrogating who benefits from the quid pro quo framing of sex work and who suffers. Finally, liberalism fails to account for the unequal impact that criminalising laws have on individuals facing intersectional marginalisation, and how this inequity inhibits social justice in the context of reproduction and sex work. Due to the intersecting social locations that influence individual oppression, policy and laws should centre marginalised voices to better understand and respond to the diversity of experiences within both reproduction and sex work.

" LIBERAL FEMINISM'S FOCUS ON DECRIMINALISING SEX WORK IS INSUFFICIENT IN ACHIEVING SOCIAL JUSTICE WITHIN THE INDUSTRY BY FAILING TO ADDRESS BROADER SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION."

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Distorted Masculinities and the Rise of Anti-Feminist Discourse: A Comparative Analysis Between South Korea and Hungary

Rosie Inwald

'While the majority of our ministers are men, for now, women will take over in the near future'. Taken from an interview with The Washington Post, newly elected South Korean President Yoon Suk-Yeol employed the increasingly popular fear-begetting rhetoric reminiscent of anti-gender equality (Kim 2022). Here, the manipulation of 'gender' as an instrument to instil fear, decries feminisms as threatening, mnemonic of social destruction rather than a movement towards equality (Hark 2022, 63). Critically, with the removal of gender equality as a collective aim that is integral to national policy, anti-feminism rhetoric intends to de-legitimise and disrupt. Utilising the case study of Hungary, this piece will explore how this is extended to the legislative process by which 'gender' is restricted to heteropatriarchal normative conceptions. In tandem, 'feminism' here refers to the socio-political approach to equality and equity based on gender and gender expression, evident in political activism and social movements. In weaponizing gender, political polarisation ensues, shown by the victory of Yoon Suk-Yeol, built on a platform of anti-feminist discourse (Nilsson-Wright 2022). Aided by public apprehension towards migrants and fears around national identity, the context in which populist agendas have arisen have provided circumstances through which anti-feminist discourse can be legitimately adapted into the wider one. Accordingly, this essay will explore the distortion of masculinities to disrupt and intervene with the process of gender equality. Nagel's scholarship on the intimate connections between masculinity and nationalism are central to this discussion (1998). Primarily, this essay engages with a discussion of the discourse, before moving to an exploration of the spatial productions of this discourse on the government, digital and grassroot level. Finally, by highlighting the repercussions of anti-feminist ideology, this article concludes that since anti-feminism constructs gender equality as optional and a mere political tool, this not only polarises electorates but also seeps into a wider nihilism towards politics. As noted by Nathan Park, this is already apparent in relation to declining concern with environmental protection in South Korea (Park 2022, 158).

Using South Korea and Hungary as case studies, this essay employs a comparative analysis of anti-feminist discourses. Employing Mill's Most Different Systems Design I will discuss how South Korea and Hungary are institutionally distinct yet show similar ideological developments in a move away from gender equality (Anckar 2020, 33). Since 1979, South Korea's political trajectory has seen the gradual institutionalisation of a constitutional republic with a presidential system. Marked by its history of mass mobilisation, activists have played a significant role in structuring the state (Nilsson-Wright 2022, 2). Comparatively, following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, Hungary was restructured as a parliamentary democracy, wherein Victor Orbán rose to power in 1998 and again in 2010. Differences between these two case studies outside of the electorate, party systems, and population density, is shown with 2020 Gross Domestic Product in Hungary standing at 155.8 billion USD against the 1.638 trillion USD in South Korea (World Bank 2020). Here, we can use the example of Hungary to theorise the similarities of outcome in Korea. Yet, in utilising a comparative approach, this essay intends to retain the national and local distinctiveness. From Mohanty's argument on uniqueness, when discussing feminist discourse in both Hungary and South Korea, it is necessary to differentiate what the term implies (Mohanty 1984, 333). As we can ascertain from Mia Roces's scholarship, South Korean 'feminisms' are specific to local, national, and transnational contexts, in the same way as Hungary (Roces 2010, 7).

Firstly, to consider the venues through which anti-feminist discourse emerges and its subsequent repercussions, it is essential to begin with an outline of the rhetoric itself. Indeed, within the context of both Hungary and South Korea, normative ideals of patriarchy played an integral role around which a men's rights discourse is developed (Butler 2021). Accordingly, these discourses foment the narrative of anxieties for the loss of the nuclear family. In both South Korea and Hungary, biopolitical fears over population size have resulted in blame: directed at perceptions of 'feminism' as discouraging women to reproduce (Fodor 2022, 56). Here, biopolitics refers to political rationality which foregrounds populations and life at its centre. From the example of Victor Orbán's Hungary, we can see this form of anxiety on the government level. In passing the 2011 Family Protection Bill, welfare and inheritance are restricted to families adhering to heteronormative structures: a cis-man and cis-woman cohabiting (Borbála 2012, 5). The process of the government prioritising family mainstreaming over policies for gender mainstreaming is legally legitimated in this bill (Peto 2017, 121). Later, in June 2021, the Hungarian parliament extended these normative rulings to the educational realm, eliminating the possibility of any public schools teaching about homosexuality and gender fluidity (Butler 2012). By associating queer identities with paedophilia, the government not only intended to politicise 'gender' as to de-legitimise it as a concept, but once again engaged in a transnational anti-feminist discourse centred around heteronormativity.

"In both South Korea and Hungary, biopolitical fears over population size have resulted in blame: directed at perceptions of 'feminism' as discouraging women to reproduce (Fodor 2022, 56)."

Comparatively, Yoon Suk-yeol's attempt to abolish the gender equality ministry was informed by a similar fear. In October 2022, the South Korean president told the

Yonhap news agency that his intention was to protect families and children (Bloomberg 2022). In the public opinion arena this discourse continues into the context of the 'Man of Korea' organisation, originally established as 'Anti-Feminist Male Liberation Union,' a small online group in 1996 (Yun 2018, 693). Taking from their website, feminists are blamed for 'shaking the foundation of the family', blaming Korea's 'gynocentric' social reality for high divorce rates (Yun 2018, 693). From this hostile worldview, gender equality only exists in opposition to the role of mother, inaccurately diminishing the possibility of negotiating gendered roles. Returning to Nagel's exploration of nationalism as a masculine enterprise, one can infer that the anxieties surrounding national population loss, and declining economic power are entangled with conceptions of male power (Nagel 1998, 244).

Certainly, with the anti-feminist form of hegemonic masculinity struggling to assert itself in a contemporary context, these anxieties culminate into an anti-gender discourse, existing on a global scale (Butler 2021). Further, by demonising the term 'gender,' the dirty word of feminism has been misconstrued to aid the ideological development of anti-feminisms and more widely, anti-genderism (Yun 2018, 690). In both Hungary and South Korea, 'feminist ideology' is associated with the 'West', leading both women's groups and anti-feminist organisations to reject the term, thus presenting themselves as rejecting external influence (Fabian 2002, 280). However, as stated by Andrea Peto and Eszter Kovazts, the emergence of 'gender ideology' and the subsequent 'anti-gender' response in Hungary can be traced to 2008 with Gabriele Kuby's book Die Gender Revolution (Peto and Kovazts 2017, 118). In this context, anti-genderism functions in three ways; an approach that represents itself as a saviour for the ordinary person, a unifying platform for neoreactionary influences, and a mask through which liberal democratic values are undermined (Hark 2022, 60). In addition to viewing gender equality as the antithesis of the ideal nuclear family, Kuby's anti-gender work began a process by which 'gender' was reconfigured to represent all societal ills (Fodor 2022, 17). In employing an apocalyptic discourse around gender theory, attempts are made to demonise equality, misinterpreting gender as situational and episodic, existing only in tandem with political agendas (Hark 2022, 56). Indeed, a core theme of this European anti-gender discourse relates to religion, seeing Christian family values as vulnerable in the face of gender equality (Peto and Kovazts 2017, 125). Outside of the Kuby influence in Europe, South Korean anti-feminist discourse employs a similar rhetoric. Here, the 'Man of Korea' organisation views feminism as a ploy by which reality is masked from public view, a reality inaccurately depicting women as holding power, as opposed to men being vulnerable and oppressed (Yun 2018, 694).

Concerning the exit polls of the 2022 South Korean Presidential election, the election was marked by a gendered division amongst young people (Kim and Lee 2022, 286). As stated by scholar Nathan Park, 58.7 percent of men in their twenties voted for Yoon, whilst 58 percent of women in their twenties voted for the opposition's candidate, Lee Jae-myung (Park 2022, 157). Here, the role of young men as a demographic perpetuating anti-feminist discourse is exemplified by the gendered history of military conscription and the subsequent argument of preferential employment towards women (Kim and Lee 2022, 286). To contextualise this argument, from 1949 the Military Service Act began a process by which compulsory military service for men was normalised. After being started by Park Chung-hee's government in 1961, this military culture continues into the current day (Choo 2020, 486). After the late 1990s with South Korea entering its International Monetary Fund regime, economic change placed women as level competitors with men, inviting conflict over the extra points system that aided male veterans in the job market (Hwang 2019, 54). In removing the reward system, the current generation of employed young men have little incentive for military service, more recently culminating in an increasing dissatisfaction with the conscription system. Thus, during the current epoch of changing gender relations, alternative masculinity struggles to arise, resulting in an emphasised, more toxic male anxiety due to displacement (Choo 2020, 494). Thus, to describe younger generations, a rhetoric of 'fairness' is utilised by mass media (Choo 2020, 488). However, the nature of 'anti-genderism' as an incoherent ideology with a non-unified movement is shown by the conflict in arguments around conscription. Scholar Jihyun Choo refers to a 2019 survey of men aged 19-34, in which 61.4 percent disagreed with expanding military forces for women's participation (Choo 2020, 488). Thus, certain forms of anti-feminist opposition are grounded in the assumption that women should not participate in a supposedly male-dominated task.

Whilst it is essential to explore the content of anti-feminist discourse, the spatial production of this rhetoric must be discussed. Notably, the venues accommodating such discussions exist in a plethora of ways: virtual, organised activisms by grassroots, and state mandated. Through the dissemination of Kuby's work, anti-feminist rhetoric crosses borders to regional and even global planes (Peto 2017, 117). Namely, with the emergence of the virtual space as a non-legislated and global phenomenon, social media platforms act as a medium through which the emanation of both online gendered violence and anti-equality language, practices, and policies can thrive (Barker 2019, 95). As argued by Andrea Peto, the preconditions through which anti-feminism is co-opted by public opinion include media outlets, online forums, and popular blogs (Peto 2017, 126). In the Hungarian context, blogs and forms such as mandiner and kuruc.info, with newspapers such as Magyar Hírlap, Magyar Idők, helped Gabriele Kuby's initial conversation find a virtual space in which to grow. Similarly, in South Korea, the internet hosts a variety of alternative-right websites (Kim and Lee 2022, 293). This includes Digital Camera Inside (DC Inside) which was established in 1999 and was notorious for its galler-

ies and message boards containing misogynistic jokes which were posted anonymously (Park 2022, 155). Acting as a venue of anti-feminisms, DC Inside constructed a virtual space through which the later forum, Depository of the Daily Bests (Ilbe), could emerge in 2010. Due to anonymity and absence of any socio-legal parameters, the discourse online is more threatening. From a 2014 analysis by SisaIN magazine, popular offensive posts on Ilbe were targeted at women, progressives and Jeolla-do provinces, an area active in the push for democratic consolidation (Park 2022, 154). Here, it is convincing to characterise anti-gender discourse as a conduit through which extensive neoreactionary discussions can develop. Scholar Jung-mee Hwang extends this to the language and insulting content of the posts, noting that in 2005 a collection of satires used terms such as daenjangnyeo, mugaenyeomnyeo, and kimchinyeo (Hwang 2019, 54). Respectively, these terms translate to 'high maintenance woman,' 'kimchi woman,' and 'a stupid woman'. Through such rhetoric, the anti-feminist discussion perpetuates a unique hatred of women in the virtual world. Manifesting itself within a supposedly amusing culture, the social and bonding process by which women are othered and degraded culminates into what Ueno Chizuko coined as a 'homosocial society' (Hwang 2019, 54). Thus, constructing a culture of entertainment around anti-feminist discourse acts as a part of a wider normalisation and accessible process.

The online world's dissemination of ideologies is just as dangerous as if it were happening in 'reality' (Barker 2019, 103). With the offline venues of anti-feminist activist activity often informed by online discourse, organised activism aims to disrupt existing protest, as seen with the actions of 'Man on Solidarity'. In this context, the group frequently disrupt anti-sexual violence campaigns, chanting 'ugly feminist pigs' and that 'feminism is a mental illness' (Sang-Hun, 2022). The offline mobilisation which has been connected to the YouTube channel 'New Manpower,' of 450,000 subscribers, exemplifies the move of anti-feminist discourse into the main-stream and therefore into organised direct action from the grassroots (Sang-Hun 2022). Historically in Hungary, mass mobilisation has played a lesser role in political warfare and this aspect has been used to organise grassroots action under a different model (Vasali and Peto 2014). Since 2010, the Hungarian government has developed a (pseudo-)Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) structure intended to influence public opinion for state benefit. By preferentially channelling NGO funds into specific organisations, the state has removed financial power from movements promoting gender equality (Vasali and Peto 2014). Thus, in contrast to the mass mobilisation that buttresses the anti-feminist campaign in South Korea, this is less explicit in the Hungarian context. Writing in 2017, Kovazts and Peto note that on a more regional level, Europe saw organised activism as a space reproducing anti-genderism (Peto and Kovazts 2017). Yet, as a result of the absent gender mainstreaming policies from Orbań's government, there is little that anti-feminist movements can protest the state for (Peto and Kovazts 2017, 123). Consequently, with anti-gender ideology as a guiding worldview for the government itself, South Korean anti-feminisms appear to be on a differing chronology.

"The online world's dissemination of ideologies is just as dangerous as if it were happening in 'reality' (Barker 2019, 103)."

In Hungary, state-driven initiates are a means of institutionally mandating heteropatriarchal norms, achieving anti-genderism through legislative means (Fodor 2022, 17). As noted by Joanna Nagel, the coalescence of manhood and nationhood is both a contemporary and historical trend (Nagel 1998, 242). When deployed by the state-level, the anti-liberal gender regime exists within the mainstream political spectrum. In Hungary, the state initiative ties social citizenship to pronatalism with anti-feminist discourse constructed around anxieties regarding the 'traditional' nuclear family (Fodor 2022, 29). From 2010 onwards, the Hungarian government introduced policies with the explicit aim of encouraging childbearing, cited by scholars as the 'carefare regime' (Fodor 2022, 56). Outside of childbearing, the state went further to ensure that women's claims to social citizenship were most likely to succeed when based in care work (Fodor 2022, 56). In doing so, the government utilises gender policy as a means to reorganise societal stratification into the 'deserving' groups of those contributing to social citizenship and loyalty to the state. In this sense, anti-feminist discourse is employed as a top-level political tool to shape public opinion of the gender regime (Fodor 2022, 10). Comparatively, South Korean anti-feminism has, until recently, existed predominantly in the spheres of offline and online activism. Indeed, whilst not a legal norm as of yet, the 2013 Park Geun-hye government capitalised on the Ilbe support base, with their National Intelligence Service Psychological Warfare Division (PSYOP) using the site as a tool of disinformation, disseminating government-loyal posts (Park 2022, 155). Later, in May 2017, Moon Jae-in was elected as president and was noted for his use of moralising language, establishing government sanctioned 'task forces' as a means to eliminate societal 'evils' (Nilsson-Wright 2022, 17). Here, the emergence of anti-feminist discourse in top-level political rhetoric, though more recent, is nonetheless a venue enabling the normalisation of public polarisation and anti-feminist opinion.

With the dependency on normative behaviour, anti-feminism is easily incorporated into political ideologies of the nation-state, whether right-wing, nationalist, or in the case of twentieth century Hungary, state-socialist (Nagel 1998). Notably, as discussed in the context of Gabriele Kuby, the incoherency of anti-feminism as a non-unified ideology

allows it to shift in line with popular rhetoric on a national and transnational level. Hark delves into this, noting that with the ascent of the new 'International' Right as a nationalist and illiberal force, the form of polarising populism accommodates neo-reactionary approaches (Hark 2022, 55). Through this, 'zero-sum' politics is employed, intended to demonise political opponents and erode democratic norms (Nilsson-Wright 2022, 4). In speaking to the populist narrative, the popularisation of 'zero-sum' politics has led to a mainstreaming of anti-feminism to the extent that there are no alternatives for the electorate (Nilsson-Wright 2022). Kovazts develops this point in the context of Hungarian politics, arguing that women's support for Orbán's Fidesz Party was a result of split identity between class and labour, in opposition gendered inequality (Kovazts 2018). From this, it is evident that with state formation acting in tandem with hegemonic masculinities, anti-feminisms are easily integrated into the political structures.

Resistance to feminism through 'anti-genderism' is emphasised by national and global socio-political and economic contexts. Regarding the internal discourse of the anti-feminist demographic, it is evident that anxiety around heteropatriarchal normativity guides action within state, grassroot, and virtual spaces. As noted by Choo, not only does this harm cis women, especially in the case of conscription in South Korea, but leads to the over-simplification of complex concepts (Choo 2020, 493). When comparing the case studies of Hungary and South Korea, the level at which this political discourse operates differs. These situations seem to be a direct response to the existing and historical political institutions. In both Hungary and South Korea, these anxieties distort and disrupt efforts to institutionalise gender equality, instead perpetuating inflammatory and threatening anti-feminist discourse.

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An Exploration of Gender in Global Politics: Why Women Have Better Success Outcomes

Julia Bahadrian

Introduction

In recent politics, there have been numerous instances of successful and transformative female leadership outperforming traditional metrics with improved outcomes. However, there is still a lack of analysis explaining the qualities and causative factors behind these female leaders' successes, and how gender factors into their leadership success and style. Within this article, I will assess the existing body of research that delineates gender as a factor and determiner of good national outcomes.

In order to explore this, we will be analysing the extent to which specific gendered presentations by women influence female leaders' optics, and how these gendered power dynamics impact policy and legislative stances on the domestic and international scale. Furthermore, we will look into how female leaders have better handled the Covid-19 pandemic and examine the exogenous environmental, endogenous impersonal and socio-economic factors that contribute to female success in governance globally.

The Sexing of Power Dynamics

Historical precedent in gendered understandings of politics placed masculinity and maleness as the focal factor in defining the success of a global leader. Emblematic of the Trump and Bolsonaro 'machismo populism' presidential terms, this hegemonic approach towards masculinity in politics has manifested in the modern adoption of explicitly anti-feminist, traditionally patriarchal, and aggressively capitalist stances (Finchelstein and Piccato 2017). The corroboration between these explicit masculine approaches to leadership and more security-dependent, nationalistic, and isolationist foreign policies is indicative of a specific association between a leader's masculinity and militarisation, national agency, and individualism of a nation or people on the international stage. This precedent, however, has increasingly been undermined by the growing prevalence of women in executive positions of power, either as a Head of State or Government, with a record 31 countries currently being led by women (UN Women 2023). Furthermore, the proportion of women represented in parliamentary and local government politics has been steadily growing, presenting women as a part of the political landscape.

With this increased representation on the international stage, the way in which the adoption of gendered power dynamics influences female leaders' optics and perceptions becomes more evident. Styles of oration, dress, problem-solving and policy and welfare implementation can all be used to build a more thorough understanding of gendered stances and the sexing of power. Existing stereotypes of women in positions of power assume their

"Existing stereotypes of women in positions of power assume their preoccupation with a high degree of emotion, a lack of political initiative and crisis management."

preoccupation with a high degree of emotion, a lack of political initiative and crisis management. This has been challenged by a plethora of women who either adopt androgynous or explicitly masculine stances in politics.

Angela Merkel is a prime example of female leaders adopting genderless traits in leadership; as Federal Chancellor of Germany, she has been dubbed 'the most powerful woman in the world', yet her public image is intrinsically identified with her donning short hair and pantsuits (Whiteside 2021). She has a public political perception congruent with masculine stereotypes, theorised as an attempt to divorce herself from stereotypic expectancies around female leadership and motivation, creating the oxymoronic nickname, 'The Iron Mum' (Becker et al. 2012). In the wake of successfully navigating Germany out of the 2008 financial crisis, her image as a chancellor who embodied genderless, or de-sexed properties was at their lowest, while after her pro-refugee stance in 2015, associated with an increase in femininity and empathy, the public assigned her more female orientated descriptors (Becker et al. 2012). This phenomenon is evidence of a 'masculinisation' of female leaders when they adopt masculine visuals and take strong economic and security stances, and 'feminisation' when the same leaders focus on welfare or humanistic issues. This double blind- effect often limits women, as partaking in leadership, an intrinsically perceived 'masculine' activity, which often reduces their public capacity to be perceived just as female leader, therefore centring the relevance of their gender in debates that should be taking a meritocratic and democratic approach to selecting and judging global leaders and their successes (Windsor et al 2021). In lieu of this, we will be looking into whether gender is a valid aspect that factors into the specifics of how leadership is carried out, and whether it is a relevant factor for consideration in regards to national success outcomes and leadership.

Women as Transformational Leaders

Female leaders have a noted tendency to be 'transformational leaders', in opposition to more status-quo-entrenching transactional leadership stances, more often associated with male leaders (Eagly et al. 2003). Women tend to stand on platforms pushing for wider societal-

ly stimulating reformations, such as Scotland's Nicola Sturgeon's advocacy for Scottish independence past a tumultuous period of Brexit, a radical break with previous Unionist stances in government. Female leaders have also been evaluated as more challenging leaders that cater towards more democratic and collaborative governmental approaches (Eagly 2003).

The causes for these observations are varied, but a leading theory explaining these tendencies ascribes significance to a pseudo-glass ceiling phenomenon; when women overcome more resistance in leadership and presidential bids, therefore overcoming gender-based promotion issues within their career spaces to the most executive levels, they tend to be galvanised by this and adopt more wide-reaching reform, with a tendency to hold consecutive executive positions and be more engaged with issues of social inequality, sustainability (Coscieme et al. 2021). This issue of social inequality is especially relevant to economically developing nations; female led policy and leadership was also found to be linked to improved policy outcomes, especially in developing areas or nations. In rural India, issues such as neonatal mortality, healthcare, and educational access were improved under women-oriented policy initiatives, and they were found to be more effective than their male counterparts in providing public health care and access in India, as the latter focused more on agricultural infrastructure and development that centred male consumers and industries over social initiatives (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004). Furthermore, female-heavy parliaments and leaders tend to have better environmental policies, factoring environmentally friendly shifts in industry more centrally into long-term economic plans. They also perform better in anti-biodiversity, greenhouse emission, and air pollution reduction efforts (Coscieme et al. 2021).

These tendencies to focus social and environmental initiatives targeted on healthcare, education, and industry longevity also allows female leaders to create more foresighted anticipatory policies in these important sectors, therefore increasing increase social buffers, adaptive organisational capacity, and allowing for a society and infrastructure to 'flex', making the societies more resilient to external shocks such as military aggressions, pandemics or global financing stock and trade issues (Eagly et al. 2003). Societal successes under female leaders, therefore, need to be factored through a gendered leadership lens, as the statistically significant correlation between executive leaders and their gender is a marked differentiator in policy initiatives, which help define national success in times of acute economic or health crisis.

Women & the Pandemic

Female leaders have recently been awarded acclaim in regards to their better success in handling the short and long-term social and economic restructuring demands resulting from the pandemic crisis. Scholastic opinion has asserted that nations that were led by female leaders during the Covid-19 pandemic had six times fewer Covid deaths and had a more robust capacity to recover from the consequent recession than those by equivalent male leaders (Eagly et al 2003). Female success in the pandemic crisis can be ascribed to a trend of prompt, risk averse public health measures resulting in correlated lowered mortality rate (Soares and Sidun 2021). This gendered success can further be attributed to existing divergence in male and female leaders' policy approaches; women focused on creating policies that focused on preventative measures and long-term social well-being, enforced on the macro and state level, while male led administrations focused on regulating individual behaviours with the interest of retaining short term associated economic productivity (Windsor 2021).

Women-led countries tended to have 'moderate mortality' rates per capita of five to twenty, and even with results controlled amongst nations with similar populations exceeding 5 million, with a gross domestic production of over $25,000 per capita; impressively four female-led nations did not exceed eleven deaths per capita. (Bilinski and Emanuel 2020; Egaly 2003). Some of the factors contributing to this success have been surmised to be female executive leaders' tendency to publicly acknowledge the virus and communicate its severity with immediacy, in addition to being more prone to enter more prompt, earlier lockdown than men (Coscieme et al 2020). This can be evidenced by the fact that although all national leaders enacted Covid-19 policies at 32 days after the pandemic was considered to have started, all female leaders had these policies implemented by day 24, helping reduce the initial outbreak (Araya 2020). Even when not in national leadership positions, within the United States, data from 2020 indicates that female governors issued orders to stay-at-home earlier, and that their states had fewer Covid-19 deaths (Sergent 2020).

In addition to this, female leaders promptly introduced preventative public health measures. This is exemplified by Taiwanese Minister Tsai Ing's implementation of regional medical checks and Icelandic PM Jakobsdottir's test and trace technology early introduction of test and trace technology. These technologies helped to identify and minimise pandemic spread more effectively, flattening the epidemic's curve early and lowering daily death counts in stark contrast to their neighbouring countries (Coscieme et al. 2020). These reduced the need for lockdowns on a larger scale, and were successful, as delaying early lockdowns for fear of economic ramifications usually led to a longer, deadlier, and therefore stricter lockdown earlier, therefore enabled economic rebuilding on a faster scale (Egaly et al. 2003). Therefore, a combination of effective communication, early lockdowns, and immediate scientifically oriented and centred tracking and testing policies was surmised to have limited further contagion,

mitigating overall death rates and the economic effects of the pandemic (Windsor et al. 2021).

However, this data and the centre of its thesis on female causative success is significantly abated by the significance of limiting factors such as data selection bias regarding Western media's emphasis of female leaders' success. Studies have claimed an economic development bias in data that favours emphasising OECD countries successes in pandemic management, which due to their tendency to be more geographically isolated and richer, as is the case with New Zealand and Iceland, had better Covid outcomes not only due to their naturally existing Covid buffer, and smaller more disparate populations, but also due to their already robust healthcare and financial systems that could cope with the pandemic more effectively from the outset (Windsor et al 2021).

States that elect female leaders tend to have better policy landscapes, characterised by collectivist approaches, minimal societal power disparities, and pre-existing wealth and political stability. These existing factors and societal elements predispose the nation to being socially progressive enough to elect a woman, and also to mitigating Covid-19 crises more effectively due to a more developed medical infrastructure, social cohesion, and robust regional bureaucracy. Therefore, to a certain extent, it is the existence of certain national cultural values rather than the gender of the leader which facilitates pandemic management successes and other positive social outcomes.

However, despite these mitigating arguments, the significance of gender is still a relevant factor that cannot be undermined completely by pre-existing socio-economic circumstances. The focal study highlighting non statistically significant differences between male and female leadership on Covid-19 deaths for instance, failed to identify women leaders as the executive head of states but rather labelled a nation women-led if they held executive positions in the military or judicial systems, rather than Head of a State or Government. This confounding variable therefore causes errors in data drawing direct links between leadership stances, gender, and Covid outcomes, as these women, although in positions of leadership, might not have the authority to legislate and pass immediate Covid-19 policies like their counterparts who were the main leaders of their countries (Soares and Sidun 2021). In addition to this, the claim that OECD nations had better Covid and social outcomes due to their wealth and demographics doesn't hold up significantly. When matching sociodemographic and economic characteristics such as GDP per capita, demographics, urban agglomerations with equivalent neighbouring countries in a comparison of Covid-19 outcomes, women-led countries actually had lower deaths per capita (Garikipati and Kambhampati 2020). Even with the data sets reassessment excluding Germany and New Zealand, two focal female-led nations emphasised by Western media spotlight for their Covid success, the results stayed consistent.

These findings are, despite the small and relatively new existing data pool into this phenomenon, further supported by corroborative studies. Female-led nations had 1.6 times fewer deaths per-capita than male-led counterparts, with average highest daily COVID-19 deaths stagnating at 91 in contrast to 643 between female and male-led sample nations (Coscieme et al. 2020). Therefore, we must balance the evidence that indicates that wealth and politics are not the more significant variable in comparison to gender in this circumstance.

The secondary alternative argument, which posits that a nation's pre-existing cultural values had a greater effect on Covid management is more significant, as progressive cultural values, national disaster preparedness, and a high level of education within the population increases the likeliness of people adhering to Covid policies that reduce mortality rates (Soares and Sidun 2021). However, this does not necessarily undermine the significance of women in decision making and success outcome attributions. Adopting the perspective that democratically elected countries' leaders function as a reflection of societal interests and policy interests, the election of female leaders in socio-economically developed countries are manifestations of societal interests being increasingly geared towards tackling issues like social inequality, economic recovery, and welfare initiatives. Issues that the populace may identify as being better executed by women who can use their greater transformational and agentic capacity to fulfil election demands and cater to community interests.

Rather than focus on the singularity of individual female leaders and their gender in isolation being the main determiners of better crisis management and national success, it is instead social-values and gendered policymaking initiatives that create political capacity for female leaders to be more successful and transformational leaders that also enable social success (Windsor 2021). Female success is therefore not just a top-down trickling effect, but intrinsically established due to pro-women political structures and cultural values that nations hold that concurrently facilitate economic, social and political success in the long-term. It is ultimately the cultural environment that supports, or indeed has the policy making and structure, that can support the ascension of a female leader that develops national success, both political, economically, and in situations of crisis such as the pandemic.

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Conclusion

Increasing divergence in, and the explicit usage of womanhood and gender as a political tool or signifier within the modern international political sphere is indicative of women's increased relevance as executive on the international stage. Although women entering presidential and executive political positions usually transpires in progressive nations due to socially accepting pre-requisites, the women themselves bring in transformational practices that hinge on a more integrative and oppositional approach, as even the adoption of these leaders is a gendered consideration how people perceive female leadership as conducive to national function and success.

As evidenced by gender-correlated outcomes during the Covid-pandemic, female-leaders tended to have improved Covid mortality and economic outcomes. This is due to female leaders' tendency to build anticipatory preparedness systems that bolster healthcare, environment and educational fields. Additionally, their capacity for collaborative cooperation with their voting blocs allows for more effective and immediate consensus building in creating and implementing health policies that self-perpetuate and bolster female success (Soares and Sidun 2021).

To help develop the validity of this analysis, further studies into the significance of gendered politics are required to factor in the phenomenon of an increasing wave of far-right female leaders, such as Weidel and Le Pen, the significance of female leaders in non-democratic nations, and the role of non-gender conforming individuals as leaders and their effects in global leadership.

However, within the purview of this essay, the existing evidence supports the facilitation and increase of representation of women in power to help develop more meritocratic, androgynous perceptions of leadership stereotypes and attempt not only to replicate success results and create more data for us to further examine this gendered link between global leaders, success, and their gender, but also ensure the ultimate goal of ensuring societal success on a global scale (Soares and Sidun 2021).

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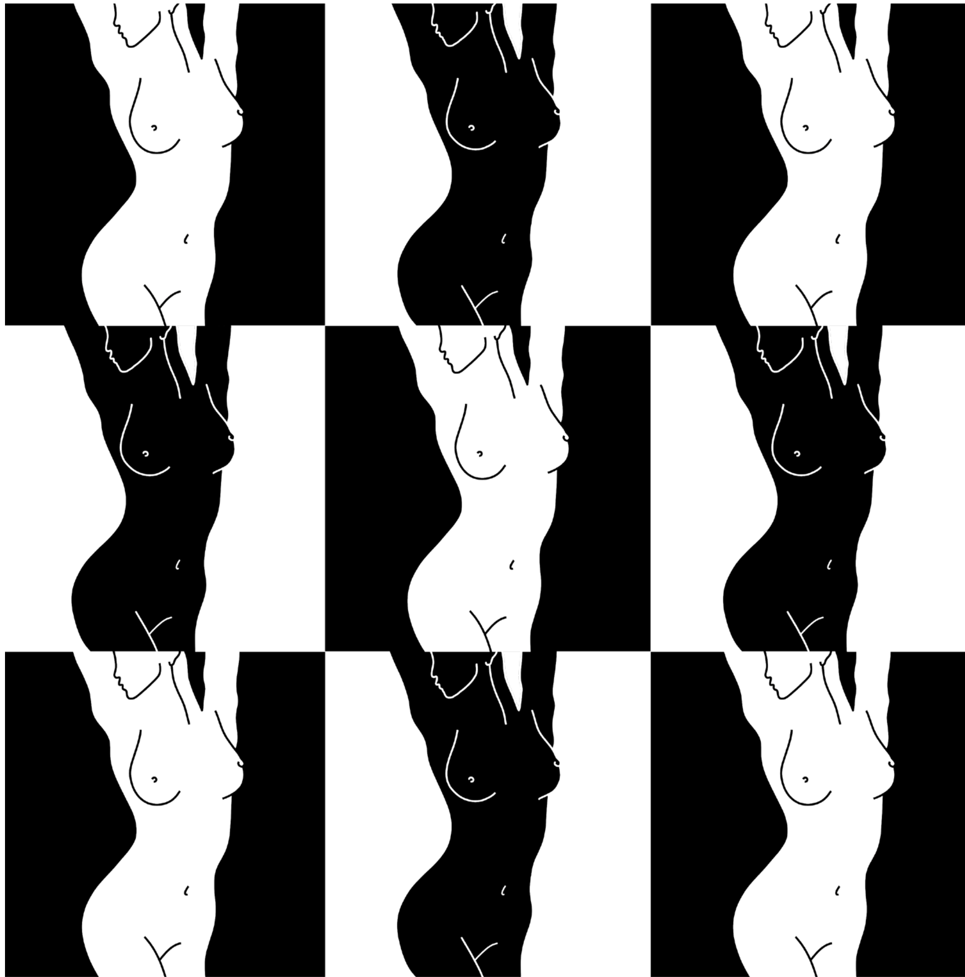

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