

Framing Global Contestations of Women's and Gender Rights

Veranstalter: Alexandra Scheele / Julia Roth / Heidemarie Winkel, Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Forschung (ZiF), Universität Bielefeld
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Women's and gender rights are currently being contested and attacked in many places worldwide. This is particularly evident in debates concerning abortion rights, marriage for all, and hostility towards feminists and gender studies, to name a few. Since October 2020, the ZiF research group „Global Contestations of Women's and Gender Rights“, led by Alexandra Scheele, Julia Roth and Heidemarie Winkel, has been bringing together different perspectives on this phenomenon in an interdisciplinary dialogue to analyze common logics, patterns, and strategies in relation to overarching power structures and hierarchies. These include economic dependencies, struggles for political hegemonies, persistent colonial legacies and religious discourses. The hybrid conference was the first assessment of this cooperation.

MANUELA BOATCĂ (Freiburg) kicked off the event with a keynote address. Using the example of transnational migration, she showed how the categories of „citizenship“ and „gender“ have historically developed into decisive factors of global inequalities against the backdrop of international interdependencies. Referring to Maria Lugones' concept of the coloniality of gender, she argued that current struggles for equality and citizenship rights must be considered in a *longue durée* of global (gender) inequalities, and thus in a perspective of fundamental political, economic, and social power imbalances.

In the first panel, the speakers questioned fundamental assumptions and concepts of law, examining what (gender) equality and solidarity can mean under different social, cultural, and historical conditions. BIRGIT SAUER (Vienna) and JULIA ROTH (Bielefeld)

highlighted the instrumentalization of principles of equality for racist argumentation in so-called anti-gender mobilizations (among others Femonationalism, Ethnosexism). They also gave examples of social counter-movements, such as #NiUnaMenos against femicide and violence against women in Latin America. Such examples demonstrate the potential that solidarity alliances and strategies of cooperation have to go beyond national, cultural, class-related or even religious borderlines.

JOSÉ MANUEL BARRETO (Bogotá) and INA KERNER (Koblenz-Landau) discussed the ambivalences of the concept of Western universalism from a post- and decolonial perspective. They proposed to recognize ideas and conceptions of norms of equality that have emerged in resistance to Western imperialism.

Following this, SUAD JOSEPH (Davis) stated in her lecture about gender rights that „the law constructs its subject.“ She argued for understanding the autonomous acting (heterosexual) subject, which underlies the Western understanding of human rights, more as a historically and contextually specific way of conceiving basic rights. Furthermore, she suggested expanding and rethinking universal legal principles towards a relational approach in the conceptualization of equality rights.

JULIA ROTH, ALEXANDRA SCHEELE and HEIDEMARIE WINKEL (Bielefeld) showed how social conflicts are brought to a head and fought out via „gender“ in a global perspective, using the three paradigmatic empirical fields of „work,“ „religion“ and „citizenship“. The conditions and possibilities for women's employment as well as the societal needs for (unpaid) care work have intensified the care crisis in recent years, particularly since the banking and financial crisis of 2008/2009. Consequently, women's and gender rights have become a contested field in a new way, while access to civic rights has intensified from an intersectional point of view. In this context, neo-patriarchal and authoritarian regimes, parties and activists instrumentalize gender-political issues for their own agendas. They often use rights-based language to speak in the supposed

name of human rights and civil liberties. Social conceptions of gender order are fed to a considerable extent by fundamentalist religious worldviews.

The second panel was opened by ANIA PLOMIEN (London), MARTINA SPROLL (Berlin) and ALEXANDRA SCHEELE (Bielefeld) who dealt with the role of the state, market and family in (global) crises and the accompanying struggles for women's and gender rights. Using selected examples from different contexts in the „Global South“ and „Global North“, they showed that the Covid-19 pandemic had intensified gender inequality structures along race and class lines. Meanwhile, state strategies in response can neither eliminate structural inequality nor close the gaps in care provision.

In her contribution on post-conflict communities, ONYINYECHIEKWU DURUEKE (Port Harcourt) used the example of the Niger Delta to illustrate how the participation rights of women in the former war region remain restricted in the post-conflict phase by the local legal culture, patriarchal power structures and militarized notions of masculinity.

The third panel focused on different modes of hegemonic knowledge production through religion in conflicts about women's and gender rights. HEIDEMARIE WINKEL (Bielefeld) and FATIMA SADIQI (Fez) used the examples of (post)colonial Morocco and Germany to examine how, in both contexts, traditionalist and fundamentalist religious actors have been continuously involved in political debates about women's and gender rights since the 19th century. Furthermore, they examined how ideas about gender have increasingly become the core of the arguments and how religious-feminist counter-arguments have confronted them.

The debates about religious family law in Mali and its change in 2009 can be understood in an analogous way. BRENDA KOMBO (Bielefeld) described the different controversies about the colonial heritage of a secular state and the democratic participation in a law reform. She examined the religious, cultural and traditional norms, which create a social field of tension in which questions of gender rights and family arrangements are negotiated.

In the third panel, (global) norms and notions of normality of gender were criticized. In their presentation on bodies and queer identities, LIGIA FABRIS (Rio de Janeiro), HOLLY PATCH (Dortmund) and KARSTEN SCHUBERT (Freiburg) used the example of a trans choir in Los Angeles to show the contradictions that arise from a demand for legal recognition of trans, inter, non-binary, and queer ways of life within a legal tradition of heteronormativity.

Similarly, MISHUANA GOEMAN (Los Angeles) interpreted political indigenous feminisms as an anti-colonial strategy that resists not only the patriarchal notions of a (Western) bourgeois family model but also the „violence of inclusion“ through integration into associated bourgeois legal systems that undermine the collective rights of Native Americans.

Using the example of the Orbán government in Hungary, ANDREA PETŐ (Vienna) illustrated how, in a neoliberal economic order, extreme right-wing parties and movements occupy and instrumentalize gender-central political issues such as „reproductive rights,“ „motherhood“ and „family“.

Federal Constitutional Judge SUSANNE BAER (Karlsruhe) called for a differentiated concept of law in her keynote address. She distinguished between human rights as a concept, as an idea, as a political instrument, and as a legal text. Baer summarized that a productive critique is necessary to draw attention to the possibilities and limits of human rights dimensions. However, an (anti-democratic) danger emanates from a critique that fundamentally questions the *raison d'être* of these legal, political and normative instruments and which proclaims – as Turkey recently did when it withdrew from the Istanbul Convention – that they are no longer needed because gender justice has already been achieved.

The conference ended with a reflection on the past three days by Ligia Fabris, Stefania Maffei (Dresden), Martina Sproll and Shirin Zubair (Lahore). The productivity of a systematic, theoretically, and empirically differentiated consideration of the challenges to women's and gender rights from a global, intersectional perspective was emphasized by all commentators. The reflection on funda-

mental concepts of „the right“ and principles of equality, but also on the reinterpretations of equality rights by authoritarian, nationalist and fundamentalist groups, has shown how global relations of inequality and worldwide contextualized struggles for gender rights at the local level are interlocked and mutually reinforcing through structurally similar modes of hegemonic knowledge production and inequality. This is at the same time the context for new forms of resistance, protest and solidarity.

Conference overview:

Keynote

Chair: Heidemarie Winkel (Bielefeld), Co-Chair: Alexandra Scheele (Bielefeld)

Manuela Boatcă (Freiburg): Gendering Global Entanglements – Decolonizing Inequalities

Panel I: Reconfiguring Gender Inequalities and Global Solidarities: Decentering Foundational Concepts

Chair: Ania Plomien (London), Co-Chair: Holly Patch (Dortmund)

Julia Roth (Bielefeld) / Birgit Sauer (Vienna): Worldwide Right-Wing Contestations of Gender Equality: Thinking Global Intersectionalities

José Manuel Barreto (Bogotá) / Ina Kerner (Koblenz): Universalism and Provincialism: A Dialogue

Suad Joseph (Davis): Self, Relation and Gender Rights. (Un-)Bounding Rights and Personhood

Julia Roth / Alexandra Scheele / Heidemarie Winkel (Bielefeld): Framing the Global Contestations of Women's and Gender Rights

Panel II: Global Crises: States – Markets – Families

Chair: Birgit Sauer (Vienna), Co-Chair: Julia Roth (Bielefeld)

Ania Plomien (London) / Alexandra Scheele (Bielefeld) / Martina Sproll (Berlin): Global Social Reproduction: Crises and the Inherent Contradictions of Capitalism

Onyinyechukwu Durueke (Port Harcourt): Post-Conflict Communities and Gender In-

equalities

Panel III: Negotiating Hegemonic Knowledge Production about Gender

Chair: Ina Kerner (Koblenz), Co-Chair: Alexandra Scheele (Bielefeld)

Fatima Sadiqi (Fez) / Heidemarie Winkel (Bielefeld): Politicizations of Religion: Between Fundamentalist Contestations and Feminist Renegotiations

Brenda Kombo (Bielefeld): Contestations over Culture and Human Rights in Family Code Reform in Mali

Panel IV: Questioning Global Productions of Normativities

Chair: José Manuel Barreto (Bogotá), Co-Chair: Heidemarie Winkel (Bielefeld)

Karsten Schubert (Freiburg) / Ligia Fabris (Rio de Janeiro) / Holly Patch (Dortmund): Liberalism and the Construction of Gender (Non-)Normative Bodies and Queer Identities

Mishuana Goeman (Los Angeles): Anti-Colonial Strategies in Promoting Gender Social Justice

Andrea Pető (Vienna): Lessons Learned from Rhetoric and Agenda of Illiberal Gender Politics Regarding Reproductive Rights in Hungary

Keynote

Chair: Alexandra Scheele (Bielefeld), Co-Chair: Julia Roth (Bielefeld)

Susanne Baer (Federal Constitutional Court, Karlsruhe): Gendered Normativities: The Role and Rule of Law

Reflections on the Conference: Where Do We Go From Here?

Chair: Brenda Kombo (Bielefeld), Co-Chair: Karsten Schubert (Freiburg)

Ligia Fabris (Rio de Janeiro), Stefania Maffeis (Dresden), Martina Sproll (Berlin), Shirin Zubair (Lahore)

Convenors of the Research Group: Concluding Remarks

Tagungsbericht *Framing Global Contestations of Women's and Gender Rights*. 24.03.2021–26.03.2021, digital (Bielefeld),

in: H-Soz-Kult 04.09.2021.