

Research Project

Rethinking transnational feminism and power relations in times of backlash

Project funded by own resources

Project title Rethinking transnational feminism and power relations in times of backlash

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Project start 01.05.2021

Probable end 31.12.2024

Status Active

The rise of authoritarianism in post-communist Europe goes hand in hand with an anti-gender backlash. Authoritarian regimes in the region use the backlash to conduct what I call "Othering back". Anti-gender backlash is used to brand the West / the EU as a perverted Other who tries to impose supposedly alien values and norms. As a result, the West / the EU not only no longer figure as legitimate reference points to assess one's own development. More importantly still, this acts as a shortcut to refute democratisation and liberal rights altogether and thus to justify the own mode of governance and an aggressive foreign policy, which only serves to defend this "normative attack".

Against this background, it is primordial that the scholarship on transnational feminism rethinks which power relations is considers salient. Since inception it has been primarily preoccupied with unearthing how asymmetrical relationships between the West and the rest function, both in feminist thought and practice, to silence "other" women. With the rise of authoritarianism, I argue we ought to shift focus on internal power dynamics within authoritarian regimes. For this is the power axis feminists on the ground are most concerned with at this historical junction. Sticking with the traditional focus on Western hegemony not only no longer reflects their main concern, it crucially plays into the hand of the authoritarian regimes they actually try to oppose.

This research project therefore looks at how Othering back is conducted in official discourse and through policies, the impact is has on feminists in two case studies (Russia and Serbia) and how they reject the traditional notion of West-Rest power relations and advocate for a reformulation of transnational feminism that goes beyond this harmful geographical dichotomy.

Keywords Transnational feminism, backlash, Othering, authoritarianism, post-communist Europe, discourse analysis, Russia, Serbia

Financed by

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