

# Beyond Western Feminist Narratives: Making Sense of the Threats of Anti-Gender Politics Worldwide

Friday 7<sup>th</sup> June 2024, 12-3pm British Summer Time

University of Warwick (Institute of Advanced Study, Zeeman Building) / hybrid

There has been growing concern over the impact of transnational anti-gender politics in the past years. Yet the knowledge production ensuing from it still tends to overlook many problematic contradictions within both anti-gender and feminist mobilisations. Critiques of transnational conservative alliances often fall into orientalist tropes: highly complex and strategic political coalitions thus become portrayed as culturally backward, underdeveloped, and prone to religious obscurantism. Meanwhile, the targeting of historically oppressed minorities (trans, queer, racialised groups), which also exists within some feminist movements whether they mobilise or contest the anti-gender rhetoric, remains concerningly under-addressed.

This roundtable challenges the 'West knows best' premise underpinning international feminist discussions on anti-gender politics. We will discuss the inner complexities within feminist and conservative movements, drawing on research and advocacy work from diverse regions in Latin America and Europe, and centring the perspectives of historically silenced voices.

With the participation of current and former EUTOPIA-SIF fellows **Maryna Shevtsova**, **Carla Tomazini**, and **Sarah Werner Boada** (speakers), **Liz Ablett** (discussant), and chaired by **Maria do Mar Pereira** on behalf of the Centre for the Study of Women and Gender.

Hot vegetarian and vegan food as well as coffee and tea will be served for in-person participants from 12pm before the roundtable.

The roundtable discussion will take place from 1 to 3pm British Summer Time. Attendance is free of charge and the event is hybrid with an option for online participation via MS Teams.

[Please register at this link](#) by Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> June to attend the event in person or online. Children are welcome at the event if they are accompanied by an adult and we strive to make our space neuroaffirming and accessible. Let us know when registering if you require accommodations including BSL interpretation. We kindly ask you to refrain from using perfume out of consideration for attendees with sensory processing sensitivity.

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## Programme

**12-1pm** Lunch, IAS common room, Zeeman building

**1-3pm** Roundtable, IAS seminar room, Zeeman building

### **1. Anti-gender politics and securitization of LGBTQ+ rights in Eastern Europe: the case of Ukraine – Maryna Shevtsova**

Over the past decade, LGBTQ+ politics have emerged as a site for the (re)production and contestation of global geopolitical hierarchies. Some actors, such as the EU, have increasingly adopted LGBTQ+ rights as a signifier of modernity, or ‘Europeanness,’ while others have attempted to resist these developments and the international diffusion of LGBTQ+ norms, by proposing an alternative value system based on so-called “traditional values.” In these discourses, LGBTQ+ people are framed as a threat to traditional values and to the nation more broadly, which justifies the introduction of exceptional measures.

Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine has reaffirmed the centrality of gender and sexuality in security matters. Kratochvil and O’ Sullivan (2023) suggest that Russia’s war on Ukraine presents an essential novelty: it is a war “explicitly fought for the so-called traditional values” and against an imagination of Europe as a ‘liberal place’. For instance, in a sermon pronounced in March 2022, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow justified Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine with the need to defend the Donbas from Western-sponsored Pride marches. In this context, the construction of sexual ‘deviance’ as an existential threat to the nation serves to justify not only domestic authoritarianism, but also state aggression.

This conversation article contributes to emerging dialogue between literature on anti-gender movements and political homophobia with securitisation theory scholarship. In particular, it will examine how the shifting regional security landscape following Russia’s full-scale invasion is reconfiguring anti-gender politics, focusing on discursive struggles around LGBTQ rights in Ukraine.

### **2. Attacking Gender Education in Latin America: Ambiguities in Coalition Building – Carla Tomazini**

The Latin American region is known for its strong progressive movements, as well as its significant opposition to gender equality (Zaremborg, Tabbush, and Friedman 2021). While gender-related issues have always played a central role in political conflicts in Latin America, it is worth noting that it was only in the 2000s that these issues began to define the public identities of political parties, politicians, and candidates (Biroli and Caminotti 2020). Anti-gender movements are highly active when it comes to educational policies. These movements bring together a diverse range of actors, including religious figures from various Evangelical, Catholic, and Jewish sectors, as well as political actors from right-wing and far-right conservative parties (such as Fujimoristas and Bolsonaristas). Moreover, it is worth considering the involvement of economic actors, such as liberal think tanks, activists, and private entities. It is also crucial to recognise that actors who do not take a specific stand against gender policies in education can reinforce backlash policies through other means. To what extent do these actors collaborate and form alliances to defend the anti-gender cause, even if it means embracing an “ambiguous consensus” (Palier, 2005)? What kind of ambiguities (axiological, partisan, electoral) enable anti-gender actors to reach agreements?

How does politics contribute to a consensus building in policy-making? This presentation draws on recent data collected in Brazil, Costa Rica, and Peru.

### **3. Leave All the Race Behind? A Critique of White Feminist Narratives on the Istanbul Convention – Sarah Werner Boada**

This year marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the entry into force of the Istanbul Convention. Rarely have reactions to an international instrument been more polarised than with this one. While femocrats have dubbed it the “gold standard” for state response to gender violence on the international arena, it has also attracted the wrath of a variety of conservative actors reportedly for being “misandric” and bearing a dangerous “ideological agenda”. Resistance to the Istanbul Convention tends to be portrayed along a West vs. East divide essentialising the Central and East European region as culturally heteropatriarchal and ultranationalist. Not only is this orientalist binary factually flawed – as the principal troublemaker during treaty negotiations was the United Kingdom’s delegation – but it also turns a blind eye to potential white supremacist undertones in the treaty’s translation into national law. Ratification across Europe has been largely taken on board as an increase in criminalisation, despite the tangible danger which coercive and carceral policies represent to racialised minorities. Drawing on the experiences of the Romani minority, I argue that feminist supporters of the Istanbul Convention, in their mobilisation against anti-gender politics in Europe, have failed to address state violence against historically oppressed groups. To do so, I use a broad range of data I collected under multiple hats both in Spain, which was the precursor for the Istanbul Convention’s model of intervention, and at the Council of Europe, where I worked as a visiting researcher in the aftermath of the treaty’s adoption.

**Liz Ablett** (she/her) is a Leverhulme Early Career Research Fellow in Sociology, University of Newcastle, UK. She researches violence and misconduct in politics and transnational anti-gender mobilisations. She has a co-authored chapter in the forthcoming book, *Transnational Anti-gender Politics: Feminist Solidarity in Times of Global Attacks*.

**Maryna Shevtsova** (she/her) is a Senior post-doctoral FWO Fellow at KU Leuven and former Marie Skłodowska-Curie EUTOPIA-SIF fellow at the University of Ljubljana. She co-founded the Dnipro-based Ukrainian NGO Equal Opportunities Platform and, in 2022, she received the Emma Goldman Award for her work as a feminist scholar and human rights activist. She recently published *LGBTI Politics and Value Change in Ukraine and Turkey: Exporting Europe?* and *Feminist Perspectives on Russia's War in Ukraine: Hear our Voices*.

**Carla Tomazini** (she/her) is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie EUTOPIA-SIF fellow at the University of Warwick's Institute of Advanced Study and Department of Politics and International Studies. She is currently investigating the correlation between anti-gender mobilisations and educational reforms in Latin America. She previously held academic positions at the Université Paris-Saclay-CNRS, Sciences Po, and the University of Versailles, and has co-edited three books on Brazilian and Latin American policies.

**Sarah Werner Boada** (she/her) is an Assistant Professor of Sociology and former Marie Skłodowska-Curie EUTOPIA-SIF fellow at the University of Warwick (UK). She researches anti-Romani racism in gender violence and child protection policy frameworks, rooting them in centuries of punitive modern/colonial ideology. Prior to joining academia, she worked in international policy advocacy in the fields of gender violence and children’s rights.