

## Introduction: Input by all

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Big feminist sigh. When we started thinking about this special issue, we knew it was important – as the warning signs of a global rightward turn were pretty obvious. But truth be told, it's worse than we thought. Everywhere you turn – even in locales thought safely social democratic if not socialist – some version of neo-populist, xenophobic, demagogic conservatism seems on the rise if not fully in place. And if you have any doubt about the way this right-ward turn is anchored in and in many places even motivated by anti-feminist misogyny and toxic masculinity, just glance around and see the women mowed down in Toronto by a man bent on revenge against women he imagined didn't give him the time or the sex or the love he believed was his to have.

In this special issue of *SIGNS*, the contributors address the complex and powerful relationship between gender and the rise of the 'Global Right'. Resistance to gender equality is not – as some left wing commentators seem to believe – just one of the many aspects of right wing value systems, a 'cultural' aspect of a phenomenon whose roots lay in economic developments. Rather, as articles in this issue make evident, antagonism towards feminism is both a sentiment at the heart of the right's value system and a political strategy, a platform for organizing and for recruiting massive support. The new populist right is a reaction to neoliberalism, yes. But it is also a new stage in the culture wars. Gender conservatism, at times verging on obsession, has in recent years become the lingua franca of an otherwise diverse global trend. It is what brings together right-wing activists from otherwise distant walks of life: believers and non-believers, nationalists and universalists, populists who demonize global capital and traditional (paleo) conservatives with a neo-con love for the market. So, while the new global right is by no means a unified political movement, there does exist a global anti-feminism – a countermovement to transnational feminism, an

internally diverse global coalition to roll back gender equality. People who live thousands of miles apart and otherwise have little in common are now reading and sharing the same videos on social media, signing the same online petitions, and “liking” coverage of similar protests in various countries: against gay marriage, against abortion rights, against ‘gender ideology’, against ‘political correctness’. Meanwhile, the leaders of this transnational anti-feminist (counter)culture are connected in organizations such as World Congress of Families or the more recent group Agenda Europe. The new cohesiveness on the right has been brewing for some time. Arguably, an important turning point was the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, when Catholics, evangelical protestants and Muslims put together a coalition against the use of ‘gender’ as category in human rights treaties. Since then right wing forces linked to have been collaborating in what Clifford Bob has called the Baptist-burka network (Bob 2012, 36; see also Buss and Herman 2001; Butler 2004)

As evidenced by the contributions, this centrality of gender to right wing movements and discourses is a complex transnational phenomenon that manifests in countries as diverse as Argentina, Brazil, Germany, India, Ireland, Philippines, Russia, Turkey, and the United States. And while the term ‘global right’ may be contested, it is intended to capture the anti-feminist, anti-minority positions that appear to be in ascendance in different geographical locations, including in liberal democracies. The ‘global right’ is political, ideological and also informs – though is by no means synonymous with – recent populist movements. Its politics is deployed in a variety of ways in diverse historical, economic, cultural and religious contexts. For example, it emerges as a misogynist, racist, anti-feminist attack in online social networks, such as the ‘Red Pill’ in the US (see Dignam and Rohlinger); is articulated in the anti-gender ideologies of the Vatican (see Case and Corredor); or voiced in the conservative political opposition to, and take down of, Brazil’s first female president (see Sosa).

While not all of those on the right are religious, it is certainly true that the religious right has gone global with impressive impetus, maturing in terms of strategies, goals as well as funding. In 2013, twenty US-based and European campaigners met and began pulling together an agenda of ‘achievable goals’ (Datta 2018). ‘Agenda Europe’, as this group calls itself, has since grown to include over one hundred organizations from thirty European countries. The network’s ideas, aims and ambitions are those of religious extremists but explicitly religious language is strategically displaced by talk of ‘rights’ and seemingly neutral Natural Law discourse (Datta 10). Natural Law, the anonymous authors of the groups manifesto claim, has been challenged by the ‘Cultural Revolution’ (equated by them with ‘sexual revolution’), which is destroying humanity. Agenda Europe’s urgent rescue plan includes not only overturning existing laws related to sexuality (LGBT rights) and reproduction (contraception, abortion, all assisted reproduction technologies), but also the right to divorce, use of embryonic stem cells, euthanasia and organ transplantation. Their strategy – strongly resembling those of the US anti-choice movement as described by Mason in this volume – is to re-frame the conflict, using strategies of their opponents. This involves positioning themselves as victims, “defenders of faith struggling against intolerant, cultural revolutionaries, the concept of discrimination and intolerance against Christians, or “Christianophobia” (Datta 15). Among its strategic recommendations, Agenda Europe’s manifesto explicitly mentions ‘colonization of human rights’, that is reframing of ultra-conservative religious positions on sex and reproduction to sound like human rights language. Also recommended is infiltration of key institutions and becoming “a respected interlocutor at the international level”; the aim is to get recognized as a UN player and be included in Treaty Monitoring Bodies, as Special Rapporteurs and judges on the ECJ and ECHR as well as in the EU institutions (Datta 18).

While Agenda is focused on Europe and many of its leaders have direct links to the

Vatican, its Summits have hosted American luminaries from groups such as National Organization for Marriage or Family Watch International. These special guests were to share experience gained in many decades of activism in the US, which the global right seems to view as far ahead of Europe. Another important guest speaker was Alexey Komov, well known Russian ultra-conservative, representing the Russian Orthodox Church (Datta 23) and, no doubt, Russia itself, as beacon of the new ultra-conservative civilization. Donors to the program include a Mexican billionaire, members of European aristocracy, a UK climate change-denier, a far-right Russian oligarch, and a corrupt Italian politician (Datta 24).

The global dimension of this new wave of right-wing strategizing consists not only in the building of transnational networks, but also in the way these networks choose their targets: with an ear for the local legal culture but an eye for the larger goals ahead. Hence, on the one hand, focus on ‘conscientious objection’ laws, as a way to limit access to abortion in even such liberal sites as Sweden, and, on the other hand the relentless vilification of the Council of Europe’s convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the so called Istanbul Convention). The global anti-gender right imagines itself to be the rival of the progressive forces in the UN and the EU; thus, much of its strategy consists in repeating the steps by which feminism went international (and institutional) in the seventies and eighties and beyond. Corredor in this issue aptly discusses these dynamics through the lens of countermovement theory.

Of course, it is not religious fundamentalists who elected Duterte in the Philippines, Orban in Hungary, or Trump in the US. The recent triumphs of the populist right are linked to the rise of fundamentalism, but are not primarily a religious phenomenon. Rather, they are an effect of remarkable confluence of various strands of the right. Gender has been key to this process. In the US this plays out in terms of a common conviction on the part of resentful

“angry white men” of the alt-right, (Kimmel 2014), many of them atheist, that feminism is destroying humanity. The alt-right has found common cause with Christian fundamentalists in different parts of the global, and also mobilized fears and anxieties produced by neoliberal reforms (for an extended version of this argument see Korolczuk and Graff 2018).

**Antifeminism is where Milo can meet Pope Francis?? (needs elaboration)**. Arguably, at one level resistance to gender equality is one source of the right’s popularity and credibility among the grass roots. Maligning “corrupt elites” and opposing them to virtuous masses is the essence of populism. By claiming that the “corrupt elites” are imposing a “gender agenda” or the “people” in various locations, the populist right has been able to join forces with religious fundamentalists. No wonder “pussy grabbing” failed to disqualify Trump as presidential candidate – it was read as a sign of his ordinariness, of being ‘just like us’ and unlike the ‘liberal elites’. In fact, as one of the articles in this volume demonstrates (Dignam), Trump’s misogyny mobilized men active on Red Pill to view themselves as a political movement and not just cultural one. Populism and misogyny have fed on each other, that is why both are doing so well today.

At the same time, the pursuit of law reform and rights, in particular the right to gender equality, remains integral to advancing the agendas of the right wing as a means for pursuing their vision of the world. In a number of countries, they have sought to occupy and configure the parameters of the right to gender equality in ways that perpetuate racist and exclusionary agendas. As illustrated by Mason, the discourse of rights is used to advance deeply conservative agendas as in the context of the transnational pro-life movement promoted by Christian religious organisations. In her discussion of Ireland, she traces how the pro-life lobby skilfully deploys various rights, including the right to life or to maternal health, to demonstrate their pro-women credentials, which in turn has helped the Catholic Church expand health care facilities to impoverished groups. And these rights claims and right wing

agendas are displaced onto a first/third world, us/them, Christian/Muslim binary, where the civilized, women-friendly West must emerge victorious over the uncivilized Others, who bring the threat of imminent loss and death. Similarly, the Hindu Right in India for example has argued that women in minority religious communities need to be treated the same as all other women (read Hindu women). There is of course no similar argument that *all women* must be treated the same as all men. By the same token, the Vatican has supported campaigns to end violence against women and encouraged the inclusion of women into positions of authority, while at the same time asserting that women and men are different and promoting the notion of harmony within the family (Buss, Robes Relics and Rights, 1998). In this pursuit, right wing advocacy has been able to utilise or build upon some forms of feminist advocacy in human rights that have been based on gender essentialism, especially in the area of violence against women and also in the context of CEDAW to justify the difference in treatment of women (Dianne Otto, Queering Gender [Identity] in International Law” 33:4 Nordic Journal of Human Rights (2015) 299)

While right-wing politics manifests differently in different spaces, in each instance the repudiation by critical feminist, queer and postcolonial scholarship and advocacy of deterministic understandings of gender and sexuality as well as calcified understandings of race, culture, and religion in which these understandings are frequently bound, invites a fierce ideological resistance. This resistance reflects deep felt anxieties or fears over the toppling of dominant groups – fears perpetuated by the myth of demographic explosions of, for example, rural lesbian farmers in the rural US, or myths of prolific conversions of Hindu women by Muslim men in India (see Gokariskel, Neubert and Smith); or the end of white civilization together with its cultural and political dominance through claims of over-breeding by outsiders, in particular Muslims, in Russia (see Mason). These are aggravated by the challenge to fixed notions concerning the roles men and women as the result of increasing

recognition of same-sex marriage or trans rights (see Case). Once again, some feminist and even queer interventions have been implicated in producing racial and cultural exclusions, reinforcing stereotypes, and in turn enabling right wing, populist or nationalist positions on gender (Sara Faris: *In the Name of Women's Rights – The Rise of Femonationalism*. 2017; Ratna Kapur, *Gender, Alterity and Human Rights : Freedom in a Fishbowl*, 2018; Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Duke UP, 2007). This complex and nuanced politics on gender is evident in several submissions in this volume. Sen's analysis on how right wing groups such as the Shiv Sena (Footsoldiers of Shiva) in Mumbai, a large urban financial city in Maharashtra a western state in India, through Aghadi, their militant women's wing of the Shiv Sena, are "empowering" women through self-defence initiatives that include "arming" poor, underprivileged women workers in urban settings with kitchen knives as a strategy for combating "India's rape crisis" and violence against women. This complexity also forms the basis of Diaz's argument on the new nationalist sovereignty that underlines the authoritarian, masculinist and decolonial ideology of Duterte's policies. It is an ideology that sanctions gender violence at home while also foregrounding and opposing violence against Filipino women elsewhere to aggressively advance his vision of national sovereignty and postcolonial autonomy, (Diaz 6). Diaz further demonstrates the complexity of gender politics tracing its antecedents in the Marcos era. The Marcos regime built on UN resolutions in the 1970s that called on member states to ensure women's full integration into the development effort. The regime deftly and through political manoeuvring advanced this agenda through the discourse of gender equality and the adoption of a national programme for women's integration into market oriented political economy (Diaz 12 and 13). Gender has since become a central device in international governance advanced through neo-liberal governmentality and the market. At the same time, the emergence of the "New Filipina" within this neo-liberal framing of gender has not only become the mechanism for extending

feminised labour into the service of the global market, it has also been used to reaffirm women's roles in the service of "the welfare of the human being" and as constituting the "heart and soul" of the Filipino family (Diaz 14). Finally, Abji, Kortweg and Williams address the way social workers in Canada have responded to the right-wing framing of domestic violence in South Asian immigrant communities. As evidenced in Canada's Barbaric Cultural Practices Acts (2015) targeting forced marriage, polygamy and honor-based violence, the right presents violence against women as evidence of the "backwardness" or "barbarism" entire ethnic or religious groups. It is a "culture talk" that instrumentalizes women's rights, while its real target is to stigmatize immigrants and undermine multiculturalism. The article tracks social service providers' resistance to this framing: they navigate the gendered and racialized "culture and violence" nexus in ways that both resonate with feminist theorizations of the issue and the specific predicaments of their clients. Fully aware of the dangers of totalizing culture talk, they strive to think in terms of *culture-as-meaning-making*: a frame that is both context specific and sensitive to structural forces that shape the experience of violence.

There are similarities across the globe in terms of how the right-wing addresses gender and sexuality, masculinities, and deploys fear, violence, and threats to dominant groups by the 'Other', to serve its anti-gender ideology. Its efforts are invariably directed at purging women of sexual agency, degrading sexual diversity, banishing overt expressions of sexuality, and asserting particularly muscular and virile forms of masculinity. These efforts are directed in part at setting up the model of the ideal woman. In contexts, such as Brazil, Sosa discusses the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, the first female president, through tropes of the terrorist, mother and killjoy that are invoked at different moments of her political career by her conservative detractors. Where race and religion are involved, the right wing is



intent on projecting the majority race as under threat by minority groups, and also producing a narrow, rigid and immutable interpretations of scripture and mythology, in order to oppose feminism, gender diversity or the recognition of non-normative sexualities. Presumably this strategy is also designed to erase more pluralist understandings of faith that accommodate sexual, gender and religious diversity. Gokraniksel, Neubert and Smith bring a nuanced discussion of the interrelations between gender and difference through their use of the concept of demographic fever dreams, that predicts an apocalyptic event where alterity, either in the form of a lesbian farmer in the rural US, or the Muslim 'Romeos' luring unsuspecting Hindu women in India into marriage for the purposes of converting them, are presented as threats, to be feared as it is claimed that they seek to destroy the social and cultural cohesion of the dominant group through a demographic explosion.

The rise of politico-religious right wing politicians and groups globally is, however, not an unequivocally negative space for women. In fact, some of the key figures of the global anti-gender movement – Gabriele Kuby, Marguerite Peeters for instance – are women. Gender-conservatism is, above all, an anti-modern discourse, feeding on a sense of loss and nostalgia for a more peaceful harmonious time. At times, the notion of return to tradition opens spaces for women who are rendered invalid or illegitimate by secular, urban, elites that have set up gender in opposition to religion or faith. As discussed by Gokraniksel, Neubert and Smith, in Erdogan's Islamist Turkey, the veil is no longer an obstacle for access to education, the public space, or employment. At the same time the authors focus on the larger narrative of the imposition of a more austere, homogenous, Sunni Islamic code on the citizenry and the reduction of women to victims in need of protection from the state or male guardian. Political agency on the part of women, on display when they poured into the streets responding to Erdogan's call to the people to stop the 2016 coup attempt, has gone largely unrecognized. Similarly, Luehrmann discusses how women in Russia are seeking abortion

advice from counsellors aligned with or belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church. Using an anthropological feminist lens, she traces the negotiations within these interactions and demonstrates how women arrive at decisions that at one level may strengthen the Church's position on the abortion while also in the process strengthening alternative familial arrangements that are based on intergenerational ties between women. To say that the right 'empowers' women may sound absurd, but empowerment is precisely what the women involved in right wing movements claim to feel: a sense of strength, dignity and mission drawn from participation in a collective action. The concept of women's empowerment has been successfully hijacked by right-wing movements and ideologies and has draw many women to the right. Sen's piece similarly draws attention to how right wing groups cultivate an urban paranoia that tags the 'Other', namely migrants, Muslims or asylum seekers, as rapists, to fashion a populist politics around Hindu and poor women's empowerment. The harnessing of self-defence techniques such as carrying a kitchen knife in the public arena by poor (Hindu) urban women transects with feminist concerns with women's labour and mobility in the modern, urban public space (Sen x). Through such techniques, the right is able to position itself as a popular guardian of Hindu women, and the Aghadi, its women's wing, project itself as the defender of under-privileged, lower class women. At the same time these women are attributed with autonomy, agency and a collective sense of empowerment, engaged in fighting violence against women, a central component of feminist politics.

The global right both crafts and appeals to a virulent, hyper-masculinity that plays out differently in different historical and political contexts as well as forums. As demonstrated by Dignam and Rohlinger in the context of the online Alt-Right 'Red-Pill' virtual space in the US, through this forum an 'alpha masculinity' is mobilized into political action to defend its supremacy, that includes racial superiority, from the perceived threat posed by feminists.

They push back against charges that men are responsible for perpetuating gender inequality, arguing that in fact feminism has diminished men's social, political and economic opportunities resulting in their oppression. What was once perceived as a personal philosophy is galvanized into bringing about effective political change. And this change has been viscerally demonstrated in the election of Donald Trump, a 'real' man who brags about sexual assault, into the White House. Similarly, Gokariskel, Neubert and Smith, demonstrate how the experience of vulnerability by dominant groups, through the perceived threat posed by the presence of the racial/religious/sexual 'Other', contribute to the ascendancy/assertion of strongman masculinities and reentrenchment of nationalist/racial ideologies in Turkey, India and US. In the same way, Duterte's toxic, visceral and ferociously violent masculinity is formulated against drug pushers as racialized adversaries as well as an anti-colonial, anti-Western rhetoric. The latter not only justifies the rape and murder of Jacqueline Hamill, an Australian missionary in Davao in 2016, but also Duterte's expression of regret that he did not have his turn with her first (Diaz 5). At the same time he directs that militant women who are fighting against his regime be taught a lesson by being shot in the vagina to render them useless as women without their reproductive capacities.

Global right-wing agendas also rely on a capillary of networks, including social network sites and more militant, aggressive and misogynistic populist movements, to develop and pursue its brand of gender politics. They intervene and work with dominant gender, sexual and cultural norms, to produce a nationalist anti-feminist, gender/hetero-normative, xenophobic, and anti-minority majoritarianism. There is an ideological intersection between these more militant elements of the right and those who seek to increase their presence gradually and through rationalist discourse to advance their agendas. Sen's discussion illustrates this intersection, where women's sense of anxiety and paranoia (or urbanoia as she terms it), are managed by the right through fear of sexual violence in the public urban

context, and its generation of a retributive model of justice and armed activism that has a veneer of feminist concerns related to women's work in the city. This strategy can in turn be regarded as a 'legitimate paranoia' that emerges from poor women's daily experiences of sexual vulnerability and harassment (Sen x). This intersection is also illustrated in Mason's contribution on anti-abortion activism. Anti-abortion campaigns such as Abolish Human Abortion (AHA) in the US, unapologetically deploys racial and religious references, including abortion-as-black genocide or abortion-as-holocaust to suggest that the plight of foetuses that are aborted is akin to the historical legacies of slavery and anti-Semitism. This framing justifies violence against the culprits and is also a move intended to both win over African-Americans, but also to simultaneously target women of colour who are cast as perpetrators of abortion and facilitators of anti-American values.

Globally, the right is increasingly engaging with gender rather than setting itself up in opposition to gender. As again demonstrated by Mason, the emerging pro-woman rhetoric in anti-abortion politics in Ireland, Russia and the US and its protectionist approach towards gender has moved beyond the confines of abortion. Significantly, it has been used to foster the larger transnational politics of the right. She points to how a pro-woman rhetoric is deployed to do the cultural work and secure political gains for the right, including resistance to the efforts by transgender and the LGBTQ community to complicate understandings of women and womanhood. The pushback from the right is intended to not only to reinstate the gender binary, but also produce an apocalyptic panic over the looming threat posed by "predators preying on specifically white women and girls." (Mason, p. x).

The right specialises in foregrounding women as victims and foregrounding the racial identity of the victim – the whiteness – both of which are central to its gender politics. The whiteness, not just the gender, are both in need of protection. And as Luehrman and Mason both point out, in the context of anti-abortion counselling in Russia, the Church, anti-abortion

groups and state-run health centres collaborate to pursue a pronatalist, pro-woman, nationalism that is supported and funded by Christian evangelical groups from the US. It is also influenced by a transnational alliance between far-right political groups, that support the Russian ultra-conservative, religious, anti-gay, and anti-abortion agenda. Their impact is witnessed in the speed with which a largely atheist, non-religious, pro-abortion country has been transformed partly through right wing resolve, into a religious, anti-abortion, 'white first' society.

This discussion demonstrates how in transnational terms, the right has become a significant player in gender politics. It resists the denaturalising, deconstructive analysis of gender and sex in critical feminist and queer scholarship, and directs its efforts towards reinstating dominant, essentialised gender and sexual norms. These efforts are often coupled with assertions of racial, ethnic or religious majoritarianism. There is no one formula in responding to this right-wing ideological creep, but one thing is for certain, as evidenced by the success of the Hindu Right in India and right wing groups elsewhere, is that feminist and other progressive groups need to seriously engage with this phenomenon. The compilation of articles for this special issue is one such effort.

(This will be the segue into the next section) As the editors of this collection, each of us has witnessed the rise of the global right specifically within the context of the intellectual and geographical spaces that we inhabit. As a way of contextualising and engaging the arguments set out in this collection, we discuss them in relation to our respective contexts.

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