



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Contested alliances: a contrapuntal reading of European (global) gender agendas

Fisher-Onar, N.; Gazsi, D.; Wolff, S.C.A.

Citation

Fisher-Onar, N., Gazsi, D., & Wolff, S. C. A. (2025). Contested alliances: a contrapuntal reading of European (global) gender agendas. *Journal Of Common Market Studies*. doi:10.1111/jcms.13773

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licensed under Article 25fa Copyright Act/Law \(Amendment Taverne\)](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4255274>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Contested Alliances: A Contrapuntal Reading of European (Global) Gender Agendas

NORA FISHER-ONAR,¹  DAVID GAZSI²  and SARAH WOLFF³ 

¹University of San Francisco, San Francisco ²University of Vienna, Wien ³Leiden University, Leiden

Abstract

In and beyond Europe, pro-gender and anti-gender causes are gaining momentum. This article asks the following: *How do (anti-)gender agendas emerge within the European Union (EU), and how are they projected beyond the Union's borders?* These questions are addressed via a contrapuntal approach, which, we argue, can help to foster multi-directional learning in (gender) policy debates. Analytically, the method entails listening to plural voices in – and across – macro, meso and micro levels of analysis. Normatively, the method supports engagement of lesser heard voices. Applying the approach at the EU scale and vis-à-vis two case studies (Hungary and the Netherlands), we identify several, counter-intuitive patterns with implications for gender-based mobilisation: namely, that emphasis on inclusion in EU gender equality promotion, paradoxically, can lead to exclusion of a wider range of gender perspectives and that anti-gender mobilisation entails forms of co-option as well as exclusion.

Keywords: EU; feminist foreign policy; gender; Hungary; populism; the Netherlands

Introduction

In recent decades, women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and other activists (LGBTQIA+) have made substantial gains in pursuit of gender empowerment (see, in this collection, Bouris, Kenny, and Mühlenhoff, 2025). Milestones range from the launching of international legal frameworks on the protection of women and children and the legalisation of same-sex marriage in many national contexts to growing acceptance of trans and queer challenges to cisgender heteronormativity in social life. Such developments have been accompanied by intense debates around what principles and strategies best serve pro-gender agendas. On balance, the European Union (EU) and its member states have foregrounded gender equality – an approach associated with political liberalism and canvassed in the growing literature on gender mainstreaming in national and foreign policy (der Van, 2016; Pollack and Hafner-Burton, 2000; Woodward, 2003). Parallel to this approach, but arguably less studied in the EU context, intersectional and postcolonial feminists have drawn attention to the historical and persistent interplay of gender with race, class, coloniality and other structural challenges, emphasising the reparative need for gender justice (Escudero-Alías, 2021; Verloo, 2006).

Momentum in pursuit of both equality and justice, in turn, has generated considerable backlash or what we call ‘anti-gender’ mobilisation. Since 2015, only one out of three countries has made progress on gender equality.¹ And whilst resistance has always existed, today, it is arguably more vocal, global and better organised than previously.

¹One-in-three countries not making progress on women's rights, Population Matters, 18 March 2022, Available at: <https://populationmatters.org/news/2022/03/one-in-three-countries-not-making-progress-on-womens-rights/>

We see this trend in rising right-wing movements in and beyond Europe. Such platforms often invoke neo-traditional ‘family values’, discursively demonising feminists and gender/sexual minorities, whilst pursuing policies that roll back reproductive, amongst other, rights. This trend has especially egregious impacts on women and LGBTQIA+ people of colour, amongst other intersecting identities (Crenshaw, 1991; Solanke, 2009).

The growing salience of (anti-)gender agendas invites exploration of the ‘crucial’ question posed by Guerrina et al. (2023, p. 503) in their assessment of EU attempts to position itself as a ‘feminist power’, namely: ‘Who gets to shape ideas about gender, equality, inclusion and foreign policy?’. We seek to help answer this question by attending not only to actors involved but also to the processes via which anti-gender mobilisation unfolds, asking the following: *How do (anti-)gender agendas emerge within the EU, and how are they projected beyond the Union’s borders?* We further address the question by expanding on Wolff et al.’s (2022) framework for contrapuntal listening – a method via which to engage a plurality of voices on a given topic simultaneously. An analytical and also normative endeavour, our goal is to both make better sense of the complexity animating (anti-)gender mobilisation, whilst probing pathways to gender empowerment that balance inclusivity with pluralism. Our project is thus commensurate with this special issue’s examination of prospects for allyship – both across critical perspectives on the EU’s global agency and between mainstream and critical approaches.

We start with a theoretical section that develops the contrapuntal method with reference to the EU, member state and other actors active in the gender arena. Contrapuntal analysis examines (the interactions between) micro, meso and macro levels. By ‘micro’ level of analysis, we mean local and community dynamics. Meanwhile, the mesoscale is often focused on institutional ecosystems at the municipal, regional or transnational levels, including epistemic communities and groups of actors that are involved in issue areas such as gender policies. The macro level here involves the national and international/intergovernmental levels (Wolff et al., 2022). In EU studies, as such, the usage of a contrapuntal approach entails reading the Union as a multi-level governance structure and recognising that foreign policy-making happens at multiple levels, for example, at the local–transnational, member state and shared EU levels. We pair this analytical attention to multiplicity with a commitment to map how power shapes inter-scalar dynamics. This approach is inspired by postcolonial scholar Said’s (2012) original invocation of contrapuntal listening to recover the voices of those erased by empire. A method for listening in plural, contrapuntal listening effectively emanates from an ethics of care that privileges lesser heard voices. Contrapuntal analytics, as such, can help to identify how a multiplicity of actors, agendas, processes and mechanisms – and the tensions and synergies via which they are animated – work in a given policy arena. Contrapuntal ethics, meanwhile, helps to foster epistemic humility and relational learning across complex fields of contestation, furnishing insights with practical relevance. By helping to capture these complex patterns, a contrapuntal approach, we argue, can support multi-directional learning with regard to complex challenges like (anti-)gender mobilisation.

Next, empirically, we apply contrapuntal listening to (anti-)gender policy-making across scales. We begin with gender equality promotion at the EU level, showing that it tends to privilege inclusivity through co-optive mechanisms, which, paradoxically, can lead to the silencing of diverse voices on gender. By way of contrast, the government of Hungary has pursued an exclusionary agenda, promoting anti-gender policies at the

nexus of domestic and foreign policy. Yet, the approach, likewise paradoxically, entails elements of co-option. Thus, whilst EU policies aim to be inclusionary and the government of Hungary promotes exclusionary policies, both may silence a more diverse range of perspectives on gender. Finally, we turn to feminist foreign policies (FFPs) in the EU context, examining the government of the Netherlands' FFP consultation process. At the early stage of policy development probed in this article, we found attempts to balance inclusivity with pluralism. If sustained, we suggest, this balancing act could serve allyship across liberal and critical feminisms, helping to counter the anti-gender alliances that actors like Hungary are building at the interstices of domestic, EU and global policy.

I. A Contrapuntal Method to Study (EU) Gender Agendas

Contrapuntality was introduced to social theory by Said (1993) and imported into International Relations (IR) theory by Chowdhry (2007) and Bilgin (2016). Wolff et al. (2022) built on these approaches, envisaging contrapuntal listening as a method with which to analyse (EU) foreign policy. In a nutshell, the analyst engages – and triangulates between – the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, ‘no matter how small or seemingly insignificant’ (Collins, 1998, p. 249). Like dissonant counterpoints in music, which subvert the rules of traditional techniques, a contrapuntal ear is receptive to a ‘polyphony’ of sounds. This may result in dissonance, which can be jarring; yet acknowledging dissonance also can open ‘the mind’s ear’, as it were, to novel chords. The result may be a transformative process of relational learning, producing compelling counterpoints and future harmonies. Via this bottom–up, inside–out and open-ended mode of listening, the ‘reconstruction [...] of external [EU] praxis on the basis of mutuality and local empowerment’ may be possible (Wolff et al., 2022, p. 1612).

In other words, by envisaging IR as a ‘multilogue’ (Fisher-Onar and Nicolaïdis, 2013, 2021) or conversation at – and between – the micro-scale, mesoscale and macro-scale, we seek both analytically and normatively to help ‘render visible the invisible’ (Wolff et al., 2022, p. 1617). This contrapuntal, inter-scalar approach adopts and develops Wolff et al.’s (2022) levels of analysis with specific reference to actors and institutions relevant to (anti-)gender mobilisation within the EU. Our scales bear some resemblance to ‘levels of analysis’ in mainstream IR and foreign policy analysis, whilst also drawing on the wider public policy literature and its understanding of the various scales of government and related interactions.² However, a contrapuntal approach folds in two further features. First, in keeping with Said’s (2012) aforementioned usage of the method to recover the erasure of colonised voices in European cultural production about the ‘Orient’, the framework seeks to render visible the workings of power structures like race, gender and class in shaping (inter-)scalar dynamics. This critical lens is paired with a feminist ethics of care that strives to engage voices, experiences and perspectives that, too often, are unheard (Porter, 2018), taking ‘seriously insights from disenfranchised groups’ and striving to ‘rescript’ from the ‘borderlands’ (David et al., 2023, p. 4). To be sure, not every feminist endorses this view of ethics, arguing, for instance, that they reinforce neo-traditional views from evangelical Christianity to neo-Confucianism, which read women as intrinsically caring – hence suited to private/domestic and not public roles

²This inspiration from the public policy literature in this piece is more significant than in Wolff et al. (2022).

(Held, 2006). Our approach, nonetheless, follows a flourishing body of work that recognises that an ethics of care in public life including IR (Robinson, 2011) involves self-reflexive and other-regarding engagement of putative Others in ways that may help to challenge exclusionary structures (see, in this collection, Bouris, Fisher-Onar, and Huber, 2025).

Analytically, the *micro* level is read with reference to local- and regional-level community actors. Normatively, this can involve engagement of ad hoc individual or small group experiences, even as sustained listening may reveal deeper patterns. For instance, Musina (2023) insightfully deployed contrapuntal listening to study the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda by the EU through a military training programme in Tunisia. Subverting EU-centric expectations that the Union's contributions would advance gender equality, she engaged the micro-level experiences of training participants. Her finding is that transnational co-operation reproduced a 'muscular neoliberal security apparatus that objectifies and instrumentalises (wo)men's roles'; the result is to routinise practices in sync with the 'structural patriarchal culture existing both in the metropole and the post-colony' (Musina, 2023, p. 476).³ Similarly, in this piece, by conducting interviews with individual activists in the contexts of the Hungarian and Dutch cases, we highlight how macro-level, EU and member state actors could learn from more meaningful engagement of micro-situated actors such as local activists. The key, we contend, is to read each level as co-constitutive.

Turning to the *mesoscale*, the focus on contrapuntal analysis in this article is on actors situated at a distance from central government whilst participating in the implementation of policies such as sector-specific regulatory bodies and the 'epistemic communities' they form, as well as regional and local governments. According to Haas (1992, p. 3), an epistemic community consists 'of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain'. Built on shared criteria for the validity of knowledge, epistemic communities share a set of principles and beliefs that rationalise common practices and social action. Policy-making and implementation in the Union are increasingly influenced through the establishment of EU-wide epistemic communities at this meso level (Cross, 2013). Meso-level analysis also can examine how the 'governancing' of issue areas like gender entails devolution of powers and functions from central governments to other public authorities. Examples include non-majoritarian institutions like (semi-)independent regulators, central banks, courts, electoral management bodies or ombudspersons, which function at arm's length from central authorities (Levi-Faur, 2011). In cases where regional and local governments are run by the political opposition, moreover, a feature that currently describes our case of Hungary, the contrapuntal analyst can listen in terms of actors' (inter)dependence from the central government. As such, this scale may encompass relationships between meso-level institutions and micro-level civil society actors who work in the issue area of interest (with the latter sometimes taking over governance functions). Meso-level relations may be carried out in domestic, bilateral/multilateral and transnational settings (Wolff et al., 2022).

Finally, when it comes to the (anti-)gender actors centred in this piece, the macro level refers to the central government at the national level or in an international/intergovernmental context. This level, which also encompasses 'the political', may 'allow for

³See also Luciani's (2024) contrapuntal reading of EU interventions regarding domestic violence in the 'liminal' Caucasus.

contestation, new opportunities and new circuits of power to emerge and re-align in co-existence ...', enabling the 'debating and legitimizing [of] contesting social orders' (Korosteleva, 2017, p. 322). Plural listening at this scale offers a timely resource to scholars and practitioners of IR in an increasingly 'multiplex' (Acharya, 2017) world where we encounter diversification of voices and agendas amongst global players. This focus goes beyond mainstream – especially realist – scholarship on multipolarity, which tends to reify agency at the macro-scale, reading the international in statist and/or systemic terms, with a strong, great power-centric flavour. The added value of a contrapuntal approach, as such, is that it helps to access the role of the plural people and interactions, including vulnerable actors who, in our lived realities, constitute national and global politics as much as large powers.

This inter-scalar framework, in short, can help to identify how a multiplicity of actors, agendas, processes and mechanisms – and the tensions and synergies via which they are animated – work in a given policy arena. Contrapuntal ethics, meanwhile, helps to foster epistemic humility and relational learning across these complex fields of contestation, furnishing insights with practical relevance, even if such insights will always be partial, incomplete and cacophonous – or, as Breiding (2025) argues in this collection, 'agonistic'. It follows that contrapuntal analysis of the micro embedded in the meso and the macro offers both a more pluralistic and inclusive prism onto agency in foreign policy, including the EU's. By way of contrast, if the analyst focuses only on patterns at, say, the meso level without factoring in micro level dynamics, they risk ignoring the vital role of local agencies in shaping governing spaces. Similarly, ignoring macro-level pressures – like the weakening of the liberal world order since the late 2000s – risks ignoring the ways that geopolitical, geoeconomic and geocultural forces impact meso-level or micro-level behaviour. The contrapuntal focus on interlinked dynamics, in short, enables analysts to complexify – and challenge – the EU's 'unidirectional,' 'one-size-fits-all', 'Europeanisation' agenda (Bicchi, 2006; Schimmelfennig, 2015).

Contrapuntal attention to the co-constitution of actors and processes across scales, moreover, may help to tackle a persistent problem in the study and practice of world politics: the silencing of marginalised individuals and groups in an international system characterised by 'hierarchical multilinguality' (Bertrand, 2018, p. 286). By striving to hear not only what is said but also what is not being said – and what is silenced – the hope is to help translate underrepresented worldviews and experiences into how policy problems are defined and solutions are pursued. This approach speaks to Bertrand's (2018, p. 284) observation that while striving to 'enable more speech' and 'awaken audiences' are potential solutions to the problem of silenced subalterns, such strategies are always imperfect, not least because they raise tough questions about the role and power dynamics involved in 'translation'.

Our data collection, as such, sought to listen in multiple registers through in-depth interviews with women's rights activists⁴ and participant immersion.⁵ Further data were derived from relevant primary and secondary texts such as national legislation and reports

⁴In the Hungarian case, interviewees included affiliates of the Budapest-based NGOs, 'Women for Each Other Movement' and 'Women for Women Together against Violence Association' and an affiliate of Caritas Africa.

⁵Participant observation was conducted during the launch of the Dutch FFP on 1–2 November 2023 in The Hague. Field notes were taken during the various sessions and plenaries, and the objective was to gain contextual insights and observe networks of both governmental and non-governmental participants, activists and critics.

published by international organisations. Proceeding inductively, we processed the data by first reading each text holistically, then conceptually, and, finally, comparatively, triangulating themes and patterns to tell a multi-scalar story.

II. (Anti-)gender Agendas at the Internal/External Nexus: Patterns of Co-optation and Silencing

This article asked the following: *How do (anti-)gender agendas emerge within the EU, and how are they projected beyond the Union's borders?* In this section, we address the question(s) by examining actors and processes at the macro-scale and EU scale, showing that the Union's apparently inclusive gender agenda entails a number of exclusionary practices in the form of co-optation and silencing. We further show how explicitly anti-gender practices are also coalescing in macro-level EU spaces in conjunction with the rise of right-wing nationalism. The article then pivots to two case studies at the interstices of the macro, meso and micro levels – namely, Hungary's domestic-foreign policy nexus as a case of anti-gender activism and the Netherlands' FFP planning process as a fledgling case of pro-gender mobilisation. Rather than seek or impose symmetry across findings, the purpose is to contrapuntally capture patterns of co-optation and erasure in the emergence of (anti)gender agendas within the EU and their projection beyond the Union's borders.

The EU Gender Agenda and Its Discontents

The EU is widely recognised as seeking to 'mainstream' gender at the macro level, including the Union and national levels, as well as in external relations, albeit with mixed results (Guerrina and Murphy, 2016). This means that legally, the macro field is inclusionary. Gender equality is enshrined in several articles of the Treaty of the EU. Article 2, for instance, identifies 'values [that] are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail'. Article 3 states that 'the Union shall combat social exclusion and discrimination, and promote social justice, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations, and protection of the rights of the child'. The principle of gender equality – and gestures towards gender justice – also informs the legal framework governing key functional fields. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) specifies, for example, that 'in all its activities the EU shall aim to combat inequalities, and to promote equality between men and women' (Article 8 TFEU).

The intersection between the legal field and Union-wide practices, however, entails forms of co-optation and erasure wherein practices that are intended as inclusive can work, paradoxically, to exclude. For example, the EU has enacted legislation to combat gender-based discrimination including labour and market rules like support for the reproductive rights of pregnant workers – a co-optive strategy. Consider [Council Directive 92/85/EEC](#), which has improved the safety and health at work of pregnant workers or those who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding (Council of the European Union, 2009). Also, in its 'Roadmap for Women's Rights', the Commission mentioned reproductive health as a challenge in the EU (European Commission, 2025). In effect, such measures help the Union to address uneven gender equality performance

across member states by promoting an active female workforce across the common market. The EU also has adopted strategic documents towards this end, like the Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025, which – rather ambitiously – aims at achieving a gender-equal Europe by 2025.

Yet, ironically, through such practices, the EU's approach to gender also silences. The centring of the single market within the EU's economic vision, after all, fosters a narrow understanding of gender equality. As Elomäki (2023, p. 413) shows via a review of the European Parliament's policies on the European Semester (a key instrument of EU economic governance), there has been 'a strategic silence about gender, [with] constructions of gender equality as a productive factor contributing to existing economic priorities, and narrow understandings of the economy that ignore and undervalue the reproductive economy'. According to this critique, 'feminism has become the "handmaiden" of neoliberal capitalism' in which 'co-optation' becomes 'a process of collective capitulation and, indeed, active collusion' (Eschle and Maiguashca, 2018), as suggested by the fact that 'only 0.6% of approximately 1900 amendments tabled by MEPs on five reports [related to gender], made any mention of gender' (Elomäki, 2023, p. 409). This finding suggests that the EU's economic policies, which 'are often presented as gender-neutral', may in fact be 'underpinned by social understandings expressive of established gendered power relations' (Elomäki, 2023, p. 405). Meanwhile, despite the declarative goal of imminent gender equality, women still earn less than men in Europe (in terms of both income and pensions) and are more exposed to poverty and violence (Buzmaniuk, 2023), even as illiberal trends gain ground within Europe as gender regimes increasingly diversify (Walby, 2004, 2020).

In parallel to these dynamics of inclusion and exclusion when it comes to gender mainstreaming, the EU faces anti-gender backlash at the nexus of internal and external policy. Pushback, we argue, operates through attempted erasure (e.g., discursive demonisation and policy suppression of pro-gender agendas) and also more subtle forms of co-optation. In other words, if the EU approach to gender entails elements of co-optation and erasure, right-wing governments and movements privilege suppression as a strategy whilst also using co-optation.

Strategies at the interstices of the macro and meso levels illustrate this point (Futák-Campbell and Schwieter, 2020). For instance, natalist social policies in Hungary and – under right-wing nationalist rule in Poland – have sought to channel women's energies away from individual, economic and professional advancement towards organic reproduction of the nation. Validating only women's role(s) as wives and mothers, measures include childbirth incentives and limitations on birth control including de facto abortion bans (Grzebalska and Pető, 2018). Natalism thus subverts causes centred in liberal feminism like women's access to labour markets and political voice. At the same time, natalism silences diverse gender voices by exacerbating the uneven economic and political playing fields that marginalised women and sexual minorities already face.

Performatively too, right-wing populism celebrates hyper-masculinist leaders whose impassioned displays serve to suppress alternative forms of gender agency. They do so by glorifying militarism, naturalising heteronormativity and re-imagining group belonging in terms of (inaccurate) histories of racial and religious purity (Fisher-Onar, 2021). Posturing as messiahs, populists claim that they can restore the nation, state and/or 'civilisation' to righteous glory by eliminating polluting elements – not least, feminists, LGBTQIA+ activists and immigrants – within and beyond borders. Typically delivered

on domestic stages, these performances contribute to transnational, right-wing mobilisation within the EU (Demirsu, 2024⁶), and between EU states and international interlocutors from Uganda to the United States (Saltnes and Thiel, 2021).

In addition to the neo-traditionalist masculinities performed by populist leaders, a sort of 'femonationalism' (Farris, 2017) has emerged in countries like Italy under Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni wherein migrants and people of colour are portrayed as dangerous to 'native' Italian women (Colella, 2021). Meloni, like her populist counterpart in French party politics, National Front-leader Marine Le Pen, navigates this space by privileging their racial and class identities over women's solidarity. Testifying to the subtle ways in which right-wing politicians' anti-gender agendas also entail co-optation, these leaders profess support for neo-traditional gender roles even as their theatrics simultaneously subvert such norms – for white women. Gay populists like the Netherlands' late Pim Fortuyn and his political heir Geert Wilders likewise mix and match 'homonationalist' (Rahman, 2024) gender sensibilities – weaponising white European secular masculinity whilst reassuring the progressive streak in Dutch national identity via defence of gay rights as an exclusionary component of national identity.

The European Parliament is another site of gender- and sexuality-based activism – and growing backlash. Research reveals that over the course of the 8th Parliament (2014–2019), radical right populists 'opposed gender equality by reframing the democratic principle of gender equality as a dangerous and elitist "gender ideology" which challenges traditional family values based on heteronormative relations and education' (Kantola and Lombardo, 2021, p. 566). Examples of direct opposition to gender equality include challenges to 'gender quotas and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTBI) rights'; the discourse has further focused on 'homophobic, misogynistic and xenophobic arguments against migrants, LGBTQIA+ and poor people' (Kantola and Lombardo, 2021, p. 571).

Another site – where we witness mirroring dynamics between EU gender equality promotion and anti-gender resistance – is negotiations regarding gender-based violence (GBV). For example, at first glance, a legislative proposal on combating violence against women and domestic violence, which was adopted in plenary in April 2024, reinforced the inclusive, macro-level legal field of EU gender equality. The document, after all, sought to criminalise forced marriage, introduce an obligation for member states to implement rape prevention measures and pledged to raise awareness about the need for consent in sexual relationships (European Parliament and Council, 2024). Yet the GBV proposal simultaneously pitted activists for more vigorous gender policies against 14 member states who opposed the definition of rape as sexual intercourse without consent, including objections from France, Germany and the Netherlands, these states' self-images as gender progressive notwithstanding. Meanwhile, Hungary's Fidesz party-led government, along with Poland's Law and Justice party-led one, repeatedly blocked the adoption of Council conclusions, including the document's calls to respect the Charter of Fundamental Rights, social issues, LGBTQIA+ safety and the EU's Gender Action Plan (GAP) III. Hungary's rationale for blocking was the fact that these items contained the term 'gender'. This

⁶For an exemplary exercise in contrapuntal listening to the registers of anti-gender mobilisation, see Demirsu's (2024, p. 527) nuanced account of the actors, processes, mechanisms and outcomes of an 'alliance between religious right, far-right and populist right' elements in Verona and how their 'interaction with (trans)national themes' results in local institutionalisation.

pattern reflects the plurality of gender actors and agendas within the Union at the macro-scale. At the same time, it reveals that attempts to adopt more inclusive measures may invigorate anti-gender mobilisation both amongst the bloc's putatively progressive nations (Gwyn Jones, 2024) and by neoconservative actors. We now turn to how these patterns of erasure and co-option play out in the domestic and foreign policies of precisely such an anti-gender entity: Hungary under Viktor Orbán's government.

'Eastern Opening': Hungary and the Mainstreaming of Anti-gender Causes between Internal and External Policies

In power since 2010, the Fidesz-led Hungarian government has promoted nationalistic and neo-traditionalist conceptions of social order. This has led, inter alia, to the emergence of a cohesive anti-gender agenda domestically and to its projection externally. The country's socio-political transformation provides a prism onto the exclusionary impact of anti-gender populism-in-power (Pirro and Stanley, 2022). A 2023 United Nations (UN) report on Hungary sheds light on the implications for gender equality:

retrogressive movements [are] seeking to exclude reference to gender from the political, educational and social discourse in the State party, and that the State party's equality policy is based exclusively on a concept of the family and primarily conceiving a woman's role as a wife and a mother.

The report further noted 'backlash on women's rights' in legislation, political and public life, 'undermining the administration of justice and the separation of powers' [Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 2023, p. 2]. Access to numerous rights is also being inhibited including reproductive rights and protection from discrimination for women from vulnerable, minority and/or migrant groups (CEDAW, 2023). An additional form of erasure at the interstices of the meso and micro levels is apparent in social policies that channel scarce benefits to 'traditional' middle-class families (Gagyí, 2021). As an interviewee contended, 'government policies favor the middle and higher social-economic classes, while lower classes are increasingly ignored [...] the scarce social benefits available tend to be tied to "family" and "children". This leaves women, particularly those in the lower classes without sufficient protection against domestic violence and exploitation [...]; they remain silent' (Interviewee 1).

In macro-legal terms, this engineering of neo-traditional orthodoxy is reflected in dissonance with the supranational EU regime, including the lack of 'plans to adopt specific legislation in relation to women's rights and gender equality'. A notable case in point was the Hungarian Parliament's decision against ratifying the Istanbul Convention – a Council of Europe framework that addresses violence against women and children, amongst other protections.⁷ Similarly, 'the low level of implementation of existing anti-discrimination legislation' has resulted in a 'protection gap especially for women facing intersecting forms of discrimination' (CEDAW, 2023, pp. 2–3). Anti-gender erasures are evident also in the adoption of several laws and policies to counteract what Hungarian government officials call 'gender ideology' – namely, in their opinion, the promotion of a

⁷ More precisely, the 'Council of Europe Convention No. 210 (2011) on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence'.

'harmful' and 'unnatural' view of gender and sexuality. In this context, the Hungarian Parliament adopted a new constitution in 2012 declaring the protection of marriage as a 'union of a man and a woman' and 'the family as the basis of survival of the nation.'⁸ It further passed a legislative amendment in 2018, banning gender studies programmes at universities, instead introducing programmes on 'family policies'.⁹ A 2020 legislation restricted the rights of transgender and intersex individuals, including a ban on legal gender recognition for transgender people. The list continues with a legislative amendment in 2021 banning the portrayal of homosexuality and transgender issues to minors in educational materials and TV programmes.¹⁰

Anti-gender legal initiatives have been bolstered by government efforts at the interstices of the macro and meso levels. These include attempts to 'colonise' the media (Bajomi-Lázár, 2013) so as to dominate public discourse. The result is to silence feminist framing – liberal and intersectional/anti-colonial alike – of socio-political debates. Likewise, at the interstices of the macro and meso levels, since 2010, Hungary has witnessed significant centralisation of authority away from local government (e.g., municipalities) to the central government. This funnelling of power to the top has been achieved through restructuring local administration, curtailing the mandates and fiscal independence of local governments, and extending central government control over public services (Hegedüs and Péteri, 2015; Horváth, 2016). The process has been coupled with the 'squeezing of the civic space' (Buyse, 2018) – that is, of micro-level actors – to ensure that the government increasingly dominates the public realm. Legislation designed to defund civil society organisations and subject them to legal harassment has limited their scope of action considerably. The 'demonisation' and 'securitisation' of civil society agendas located 'within the liberal democratic human rights paradigm' have been accompanied by the creation of a 'parallel civil society sector' composed of pro-government non-governmental organisations (NGOs) supported via the redistribution of EU and state funding (Bernhard, 2020).

At the same time, consultations between the government and the remaining independent NGOs – to the extent that these interactions still take place – leave no room for the latter to exert meaningful impact on legislation or effectively represent the voices of disadvantaged groups (Grzebalska and Pető, 2018, pp. 169–170). However, as an interviewee highlighted, 'while things are only getting worse [at the macro level], [opposition] successes at the local elections made it possible for these parties to gain more control [at the meso level] where some positive trends are visible now' (Interviewee 2). These sentiments were echoed by another interviewee, who noted that whilst 'earlier, feminist approaches were never part of the narrative in local decision making, an increasing number of municipalities controlled by the opposition now engage with civil society organizations, taking on board feminist approaches and providing resources for the implementation of related activities such as in the areas of exploitation and domestic violence' (Interviewee 3).

This suppression of alternative gender voices is also pursued by the Hungarian government internationally via mobilisation at the interstices of macro, meso and micro spaces.

⁸<https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/countries/hungary>.

⁹<https://qubit.hu/2018/10/16/a-magyar-kormany-eltorolte-a-gender-szakot-a-hazai-egyetemeken>.

¹⁰https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_2689.

Here, at the macro level, we witness the country increasingly contesting and decoupling from common EU institutional positions. This dynamic is evident in consistent attempts to block EU-level, common foreign policy planning aimed at mainstreaming gender equality in EU external engagement (Von Der Burchard, 2020). Budapest has sought, moreover, to remove references to gender and gender equality from EU documents agreed upon by other member states (Zalan, 2020). Such moves have been made in conjunction with the gradual politicisation of Hungarian foreign policy such that today, agency in external affairs is almost completely concentrated in the leadership of the governing party. Similarly, the foreign policy bureaucracy has been (re-)socialised into an organisational culture that is hostile to gender diversity (Müller and Gazsi, 2023), whilst independent, civil society actors, some of which have transnational connections at the micro-scale, have been excluded from gender-relevant decision-making (see Grzebalska and Pető, 2018).

Along with challenging macro-level pro-gender foreign policy at the EU scale and disabling meso and micro inputs into foreign policy-making, the government has proactively built its own illiberal international alliances (Sierakowski, 2019). For example, it introduced the ‘Eastern opening’ agenda as early as 2011 (Government of Hungary, 2015). The purpose was diversification of trade relations away from the Euro-Atlantic region – an effort rationalised as adaptation to power shift in the ‘changing world order’ (Tarrósy et al., 2024). In 2019, the approach was complemented by the adoption of a novel ‘Africa Strategy’ aimed at putting the country’s trade relations ‘on a new footing’ and enhancing its security co-operation across the continent to prevent immigration into Europe (Government of Hungary, 2019). This agenda is riddled with gendered implications, especially when read through the critical lens of intersectional, postcolonial feminism, which captures the disproportionate impacts of neoliberal economic, security and migration policies on women of colour in the EU and the Global South alike (Achilleos-Sarll et al., 2023; Fisher-Onar, 2023).

Such initiatives are rationalised via a value-based agenda to form, support and join ‘anti-gender advocacy transnational networks’ (McEwen, 2022). Seeking a key role in co-ordinating anti-gender advocacy globally, senior Hungarian state officials, such as Katalin Novák, Minister for Family Affairs and later President of Hungary, and Orbán as Prime Minister, have organised extensive events and funded groups that promote ‘traditional family values’. Novák, for instance, hosted the biannual Budapest Demographic Summit, championing ‘traditional family values’ with the participation of high-level, radical right decision-makers such as Meloni, Aleksandar Vučić, President of Serbia,¹¹ former US Vice President Mike Pence and French presidential candidate Eric Zemmour.¹² Another example was Orbán’s trip to the United States in March 2024 to meet with then-former President Donald Trump without meeting any representative of the incumbent Biden administration. On this occasion, Orbán first attended a discussion organised by the Heritage Foundation – an influential Washington-based conservative think-tank opposed to the promotion of ‘gender ideology’ (Trueman, 2023). The forum centered gender in the future of Hungary–US relations based on a ‘fight for justice, tradition, families, and ordinary people’ (Interviewee 1).

¹¹See <https://budapestdemograficaucs2023.hu/en#speakers>.

¹²See Reuters (2021).

These macro-level attempts to shape global gender agendas are supplemented by engagement of meso-level actors internationally. For example, between 2020 and 2022, Novák was the president of the Political Network for Values (PNV),¹³ a global platform for political representatives promoting ‘the values of family’ and addressing ‘gender ideology’ on the basis of ‘Christian democratic values’.¹⁴ Receiving financial support from the Hungarian government, the PNV has brought together representatives of conservative organisations such as Moms for Liberty, the Center for Family and Human Rights (C-FAM), the Family Watch International (FWI), the Alliance Defending Freedom (Newton, 2023) and conservative parliamentarians from across the globe including Africa, Latin America and Europe.¹⁵ Such initiatives also seek to capitalise on frustration with the EU in third countries where local experts complain of lack of consultation in funded programmes.

Interestingly, such mobilisation includes attempts to co-opt marginalised voices by appropriating postcolonial critique. For example, attempts to support ‘equal recognition and the rights of LGBTIQ+ people’ are lambasted as ‘practices of cultural imperialism and colonization’ (McEwen, 2022, p. 107). This co-optive move, to be sure, silences the critical thrust of postcolonial feminism whilst enabling Hungarian agents to ‘defend “tradition” and pursue “geopolitical boundary-making” in order to combat the influence of the “liberal west” in African [as well as Central and Eastern European] nations’ (McEwen, 2022, p. 105). Such frames, nevertheless, support engagement with anti-gender allies amongst some neoconservative African leaders. Indeed, ‘although the main donors [of anti-gender advocacy] across the continent remain US-based Christian-conservative organizations, Hungary plays an increasingly important role in this process [with] its official aid agency working primarily with Christian organizations and mainly supporting members of Christian communities’ (Interviewee 4). However, because such work is often attached to conservative, Christian conditionalities regarding aid – such as refusal to fund NGOs that support birth control – the practice is also perceived by many in target countries as imperialist and neocolonialist. Viewed through this neo-conservative rather than progressive postcolonial perspective, ‘the Bible which is not African’, and attempts to co-opt faith-based, meso-level actors are perceived to be ‘export[ing] of US-style culture wars’ to the continent (Namubiru and Soita Wepukhulu, 2020). The upshot, as such, of Hungary’s multi-scalar attempts (via both suppression and co-optation) to become a leader of conservative internationalism is a Western/Christian-centric but globalised, anti-gender echo chamber.

European and Dutch FFPs: Towards Listening in Plural?

In contrast to Hungarian ambitions, various European countries have been seeking to project feminist principles internationally, whilst organising to amplify pro-gender agendas at home. Amplifying the EU’s gender equality promotion agenda, several such states have reframed their foreign policies as ‘feminist’. In this section, we offer a brief overview of

¹³ See <https://politicalnetworkforvalues.org/en/2022/03/katalin-novak-until-now-leader-of-the-political-network-for-values-is-elected-as-the-new-president-of-hungary/>.

¹⁴ See <https://politicsnetworkforvalues.com/en/2021/03/the-transatlantic-dialogues-will-address-the-theme-responding-gender-ideology-in-the-political-arena/> (accessed 29 April 2024).

¹⁵ See https://politicalnetworkforvalues.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/PROGRAM-Budapest-Summit-May26-27_WEB-2.pdf.

these policies and their reception by diverse, pro-gender observers. We then provide a contrapuntal account of how the Netherlands – under the third and fourth Rutte governments (2017–2022 and 2022–2024) – prepared and launched its own FFP between 2020 and 2024.¹⁶ One of our findings is that the Netherlands' fledgling policy had the potential – if pursued with sustained humility and receptivity to multi-directional learning – to listen contrapuntally towards a promising balance between inclusion and pluralism.

European Pro-gender Agendas

Our contrapuntal analysis starts at the macro level where we review how the Netherlands' choices have evolved in parallel to the EU's gender equality promotion agenda, as well as in response to anti-gender mobilisation amongst member states and their global allies. Several member states have begun branding their global agendas as explicitly 'FFPs'.¹⁷ Initiated by the Swedish government in 2015, the frame created waves (even though it was dropped by Sweden after only 7 years at the behest of a right-wing partner in a coalition government). Taken up by France, Canada and Mexico, FFPs – especially as practised by EU member states – have tended to centre liberal feminist concerns and methods like equality promotion. By making feminist diplomacy a practice adopted by male as well as female-identified officials, FFPs 'mainstream' rather than silo the pursuit of gender empowerment across a wide range of practices. In the process, FFPs may help to dismantle the 'high' versus 'low' politics distinction wherein women's experiences are not considered to be bona fide 'security' concerns (e.g., GBV) (Guerrina and Sloodmaeckers, 2023; Hoijtink et al., 2023). Representationally, as well, FFPs arguably help to secure women greater visibility in foreign policy fora where they make up only 15% of ambassadorial appointments globally (with Nordic countries and the Philippines leading at 35% and 41% female ambassadorial representation, respectively) (Townes and Niklasson, 2018).

Despite the 'emancipatory potential' of EU FFPs, they have received a mixed reception amongst pro-gender commentators (Haastrup and Hagen, 2020, p. 133). Critics tend to preface interventions with acknowledgement of FFPs' attempt to foreground 'other-regarding cosmopolitan cares for vulnerable women and girls' within and across 'borders' (David et al., 2023). Concern is nevertheless expressed at 'blind spots' (Väyrynen et al., 2021) characterised by co-optation and erasure. Intersectional and postcolonial feminists, for their part, call for deeper engagement with feminism's critical and emancipatory thrust by recognising that traditional foreign policy concerns are embedded in patriarchal, (neo) liberal and (neo)colonial structures of power (Bergman Rosamond, 2025; Guerrina and Sloodmaeckers, 2023). As a result, the quantitative inclusion of more women at the table does not necessarily challenge the root causes of gendered violence, especially when women diplomats contribute to North-favouring negotiations in sectors like trade, arms sales or immigration. These macro-level developments however favour the emergence of dissonances that appear at the meso and micro levels.

First, when it comes to patriarchy, FFPs – like the EU's gender regime more broadly – tend to privilege women as the subjects and objects of FFPs. As such, gender and sexual

¹⁶See Footnote 5.

¹⁷By 'European', we refer to both the pro-gender agendas of EU institutions and the ones developed by European member states. FFP has mostly been developed by EU member states along an EU pro-gender agenda.

diversity beyond women – such as LGBTQIA+ perspectives – may be ignored. The reification of women within FFPs also can lead to a view of women's role in world politics as intrinsically peaceful – an approach that overlooks the various ways in which women contribute to (in)security. Furthermore, in practice, diplomats may shy away from using the very term 'feminist' out of concern that the language and content of 'feminism' may be provocative. A rather bizarre case in point was Swedish diplomats' decision to package the country's FFP as 'entertainment', that is, as a form of public diplomacy, screening a documentary regarding the country's generous parental leave as part and parcel of the country's FFP (Karlsson, 2022).

Second, when it comes to capitalism, liberal FFPs – like the EU's aforementioned labour market interventions – are said to co-opt and silence via their emphasis on 'results-oriented strategies over thoroughgoing gender analysis of structural injustices such as gendered violence' (Bergman Rosamond, 2025). A recurring critique here is that 'the EU produces a binary and stereotypical understanding of gender', which is mostly driven by a view of women 'as neoliberal subjects responsible for their own well-being' (Muehlenhoff, 2017, p. 153). According to this view, the EU and member states pursue gender equality 'solely [as] an instrument to achieve more security and development' (Muehlenhoff, 2017). In the process, moreover, the role of intersectional challenges in shaping women's economic, amongst other agencies, has been relatively absent from EU external programming (Wolff, 2022).

Third, when it comes to neocoloniality, European FFPs may overlook the fact that gender was centred in several Global South platforms long before Sweden claimed – and subsequently abandoned – the brand. For example, the African Union (AU) and South Africa have long incorporated gender into their diplomatic engagements, alongside the EU and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (Haastrup, 2023; Väyrynen et al., 2021). As such, European external equality promotion and FFPs, like the UN's WPS agenda and humanitarianism more broadly, have been accused of perpetuating 'global racial hierarchies' that 'limit localisation' by positioning European/Western countries as exporters of (gender) empowerment and Global South states as importers (Haastrup and Hagen, 2020; İşleyen, 2024). The result, critics argue, can be a sort of gendered, civilising mission bent on 'liberating women' based on the '... racialized coding of Arab', amongst other allegedly non-Western women, which assumes a lack of prior agency (Kunz and Maisenbacher, 2017, p. 12).

Launching Dutch FFP

The launch of the Dutch FFP reveals contrapuntal dynamics at the interstices of macro, meso and micro levels. The prospect of learning from Global South counterparts was not initially considered when the Netherlands announced plans to launch an FFP. In fact, some Dutch civil servants questioned the necessity of the policy, given that the Netherlands traditionally has been perceived as a champion of feminism. The Netherlands, after all, was an early supporter of women's and LGBTQIA+ rights promotion internationally and already included gender concerns in its diplomacy through its work on the Commission on the Status of Women. It also was amongst the first countries to create separate funds for advancing gender equality and women's rights. For instance, in response to the Millennium Development Goals, in 2008, the Netherlands established a

\$77 million fund to support groups working for gender equality (Bigio and Vogelstein, 2020). These resources were instrumental in the launch of the SheDecides movement together with Belgium, Denmark and Sweden – a platform that supports women's health and reproductive rights in response to a US rule prohibiting international NGOs from receiving funding if they advocate for abortion. Thus, at the nexus of macro- and meso-level engagement, the Netherlands was already engaged in foreign policy within and beyond the EU, which, *de facto*, had an FFP flavour. Similarly, through initiatives like SheDecides, it was positioned to challenge the anti-gender alliance that Hungary pursues with its transnational, conservative allies (Archer and Provost, 2020).

Despite this tradition of gender equality promotion, Dutch policies have been subjected to critical scrutiny. When it comes, for instance, to the Netherlands' implementation of its National Action Plan for the UN's WPS agenda, Muehlenhoff (2022) argues that competition for funding and influence between different civil society groups has rewarded large development and peace organisations. The result has been to privilege white, Global North knowledge production, marginalising women's rights and diaspora organisations and excluding local actors (Muehlenhoff, 2022, p. 744).

Meanwhile, on the domestic side of the internal/external nexus, the picture of the Netherlands as championing gender rights also requires nuancing as there has been co-optation of feminist discourses by extreme-right political parties. A case in point is the politicisation of Muslim women's head and body coverings and the challenge of 'honour'-related violence wherein 'the voices and frames of minority women's organizations are strategically and/or selectively used by politicians, in particular right-wing and populist politicians, without adopting the larger agenda of these groups' (Roggeband and Lettinga, 2016, p. 240). This pattern casts a shadow of disingenuous co-optation of 'feminist demands' and advocacy for marginalised women (Roggeband and Lettinga, 2016, p. 240).

It is within this fraught context, with its dynamics of feminist empowerment, co-optation *and* silencing, that we situate the launch of the Netherlands' FFP on 1–2 November 2023, following a conference in Germany the previous year. The initiative unfolded within a macro-global context wherein the UN also has been very active, at the headquarters level, when it comes to advancing FFP internationally, such that there is now a global FFP network. The launch also was marked by an explicit commitment – at least discursively – to an intersectional approach.¹⁸

In conjunction with these macro-level dynamics, the Dutch impulse to launch an FFP emanated from the meso level at the request of the Dutch liberal party D66 in the Senate to investigate lessons learned from FFP in Sweden, France, Canada and Mexico. In response, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched a consultation with the WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform in 2021, which is the largest gender civil society platform in Europe. The gathering brought together some 50 organisations and 125 professionals linked to the organisation. Participants included specialists on development and peacebuilding, women's and gender rights activists, diaspora organisations, trade unions, police, journalists, think-tanks, academics, military personnel, entrepreneurs, students and

¹⁸See <https://www.government.nl/documents/parliamentary-documents/2022/12/07/letter-to-the-parliament-on-feminist-foreign-policy>.

opinion-makers. Many such entities, like Mama Cash, were based and accredited to the Dutch authorities but with a transnational membership.

The gathering took place in a major conference centre in The Hague. Conference ambassadors included micro-level, civil society activists Maria Al Abdeh (Women Now for Development, Syria), Laxman Belbase (Co-Director of MenEngage Alliance), Anisha Chugh (current Executive Director of Women's Fund Asia), Mike (a radio presenter and activist from the University of Zambia), Natalia Karbowska (Ukrainian Women's Fund), Raul Martin Hular (a Filipino queer activist) and Sofia Marcia (Urgent Action Fund for Latin America). Bringing a diversity of perspectives, their contributions addressed the gendered thrust of war and conflict, the queer community and the need for meaningful (not convenient) allyship with men. In response, the Dutch government has worked with MenEngage at various sites (e.g., at the Dutch Permanent Representation in Geneva in February 2023).¹⁹ Yet the question of who was invited and represented at the conference was subject to dissonant interpretations amongst the participants.

The initial consultation document reflected a non-reflexive view of Dutch feminist agency, questioning to some extent the added value of an FFP. Some civil society participants nevertheless argued that the branding dimension alone of an FFP can act as 'an instrument to push for change' and is needed 'to successfully counter the continuous shrinking of civic space' for pro-gender activism (WO=MEN, 2021). A further key point stressed by civil society was the need for FFP to 'have an intersectional approach' and to demonstrate this commitment 'explicitly and consistently'. In this regard, the EU GAP III was invoked as a case where intersectionality was ignored during the implementation process. This feedback reveals that during the consultative process, there was insistence from diverse, pro-gender activists on inclusion without being subsumed to a liberal feminist agenda.

Lessons learned from Sweden's abruptly truncated FFP were discussed by a civil society group (Kvinna till Kvinna)²⁰ that had been closely involved in the implementation of the country's FFP amongst other women and feminist organisations at the conference, for whom the Swedish FFP had been a 'game changer. We felt so much more seen in our work by the ministry, embassies and we feminist civil society organisations were the experts to help formulate policies. We were invited to meetings we were never invited to before. We pushed the government to do more on intersectionality, as it was quite narrow at the beginning'.

The need for a postcolonial lens also was highlighted as a structural issue by the civil society representatives. In African contexts, they noted, any attempt to launch an FFP must consider the West's historical responsibility, not least because Western countries' funding has contributed to the consolidation of colonial-era laws on anti-LGBTQIA+ rights with enduring legacies on the policy and governance sectors. In this vein, Memory Kachambwa from the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) highlighted that the pattern is particularly visible in AU contexts where 'civic participation has been shrinking' and where backlash and repression of human rights are salient. A cognate phenomenon was the weaponisation – noted in the Hungarian case study above – of decolonial language by autocrats as part and parcel of an anti-gender

¹⁹ See <https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2023/05/30/highlights-of-a-year-of-feminist-foreign-policy>.

²⁰ Founded in 1993, the group's name means 'Woman to Woman'.

strategy; here, calls for greater democracy and gender equality are dismissed as Western cultural imperialism. Belying such claims, some participants highlighted that in pre-colonial African societies, gender differences across people were embraced, whereas (post)colonial experiences engendered a more narrow and exclusionary narrative about what family should look like. The need for an approach that engages not only with gender (in)equality but also with its intersection with minority status and access to education was also underscored by an Indian conference participant, Ambika Vishwanath. More generally, the lack of access amongst vulnerable women who, in principle, ought to be central beneficiaries of any FFP was highlighted as a key constraint.

Finally, there was a general consensus amongst civil society organisations in their feedback to EU representatives at the meeting: the Union tends to act in an inflexible way, pushing through a pre-set agenda whilst ignoring local needs and particularities. This tendency can render EU gender projects irrelevant for local contexts. Not understanding micro-scale realities, it was argued, often results in counter-productive decisions whereby EU funding is allocated to government-friendly and/or well-organised religious civil society organisations hostile to feminist or otherwise ‘liberal’ approaches.

In sum, it remains to be seen whether the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has established some internal mechanisms for reflexivity (via an oversight board with representatives from the ministries of Security, Justice and Education), will integrate these more critical, intersectional and postcolonial perspectives into its nascent FFP, if indeed the policy endures the vicissitudes of right-wing parties’ momentum in and beyond the Netherlands. To do so, we contend, would be an exercise of contrapuntal listening that has the potential to infuse Dutch FFP with key insights into patterns, processes and mechanisms via which to achieve the goal of FFPs in the first place: greater gender equality and justice. The ability to help bridge such agendas, in turn, stands to support allyship across diverse, feminist approaches – liberal and critical alike – confronted with the overlapping challenge of globalising anti-gender alliances.

Conclusion

In this piece, we developed the contrapuntal approach to policy analysis across the macro-scale, mesoscale and micro-scale, which we envisaged as co-constitutive. Contrapuntal analytics, we argued, can help to map how a multiplicity of actors and agendas, processes and mechanisms work in a given policy arena – in this case pro-gender and anti-gender mobilisation – and identify synergies and tensions that invite exploration. Contrapuntal ethics, moreover, can help to foster epistemic humility, critical reflexivity and relational learning across scales. The approach offers a method with which to analytically, ethically and practically decentre and pluralise our readings of outstanding concerns in global life. Inevitably imperfect, the goal is perhaps to ‘fail better’ (Barbieux and Bouris, 2024; Bouris, Fisher-Onar, and Huber, 2025) via more meaningful ‘multilogue’ (Fisher-Onar and Nicolaïdis, 2021) about our overlapping challenges at a world historic moment when increasingly strident, exclusionary voices seek to drown out all who advocate – one way or another – for a world that is safer for diversity.

Applying the method to the macro and EU levels, we showed that whilst gender equality promotion is an inclusive project, its pursuit via co-optative mechanisms can result, paradoxically, in suppression or erasure of a wider range of voices, including

intersectional and postcolonial/decolonial perspectives. We then turned to (anti-)gender mobilisation, homing in on how Hungary, for its part, challenges the EU regime whilst advancing its own neo-traditionalist policies at the interstices of macro- and meso-level mobilisation. An exclusionary project, we showed that the Hungarian government's strategy also involves co-optative strategies aimed at a leadership role in transnational (anti-)gender mobilisation. Finally, we turned to European FFPs and the recent Dutch attempt to launch an FFP as a case thereof. We showed that reflexive consultation with civil society furnished considerable, intersectional and postcolonial food for thought. Moving forward, we suggested that by maintaining this openness to plural voices as the policy is rolled out, Dutch foreign-policy makers were poised to help liberal and critical feminists ally more effectively in response to the common challenge of globalising, anti-gender alliances.

Specifically, if the EU and member states like the Netherlands are to effectively pursue a feminist agenda, they must support extant links between the meso and micro levels, taking into consideration situated realities by engaging more meaningfully with local experts as well as with marginalised or otherwise silenced groups. Contrapuntal listening, as such, is a tool for the 'localisation' of gender equality and justice promotion through 'the active construction (through discourse, framing, grafting and cultural selection) of' such 'ideals by local actors', which results in the former developing significant congruence with local beliefs and practices (Acharya, 2004, p. 245; Haastrup and Hagen, 2020). Sustained, pluralistic engagement is also necessary for the development of longer term strategies and programming that address root causes of gender inequality and injustice.

By way of contrast, in Hungary, anti-gender policies are likely to persist at the macro level, even as considerable changes have taken place at the meso level after the 2019 electoral success of the opposition in many municipalities including Budapest. As a result – and in response to state-level anti-gender policies – opposition-run municipalities increasingly engage with pro-gender civil society organisations. This is taking place both in the formulation of municipal policy and via the channelling of municipal resources to civic initiatives (Interviewee 2). In other words, coalescing allyship across meso- and micro-level actors stands to reverse some of the effects of macro-level decisions.

Contrapuntal listening, to be sure, is no panacea. It demands constant reflexivity, a basic empathy and tolerance for contradictions, generating as many new questions as answers. The practice will always be a work in progress, falling short of accessing the full range of voices (and silences/silencing) across the micro-scale, mesoscale and macro-scale. Ethically, moreover, the Saidian commitment to rendering power dynamics visible and engaging with lesser heard voices (Said, 2012) can help to practice 'allyship' through relational learning (see, in this issue, Bouris, Fisher-Onar and Huber, 2025). At the same time, contrapuntal listening must encompass informed consent, including the need to respect not only the voices of vulnerable interlocutors' but also their privacy. Nevertheless, on balance, the method has promise to enrich our understanding of and ability to engage key concerns and opportunities of our era. This undertaking could not be more timely, as anti-gender agendas gain salience, and pro-gender actors across the micro, meso and macro scales can benefit from coordinating efforts, as well as from forging broader alliances between feminists and activists in adjacent spaces (Roggeband and Krizsán, 2021). For example, we increasingly see organised protests that bring feminists, sexuality and other gender activists together with new actors that have 'reformulated old ideas in feminist politics and reoriented action accordingly' (Nazneen and Okech, 2021, p. 232).

To conclude, this article sought to advance a timely new methodology for studying gender, amongst other issue areas, within (European) foreign policy. In the latter, as an academic field of analysis and as a site of practice – there has been little attempt to listen to interlocutors in an open way, much less to reconstruct policies in light of micro-scale voices and concerns. Integrating contrapuntal listening into diplomatic practice, as such, could enhance the EU's legitimacy and efficacy in a multifaceted world where liberal sources of the Union's 'normative' power are increasingly contested from within and beyond.

Correspondence:

Nora Fisher-Onar, University of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA, USA.
email: nfisheronar@usfca.edu

References

- Acharya, A. (2004) 'How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism'. *International Organization*, Vol. 58, No. 2. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818304582024>
- Acharya, A. (2017) 'After Liberal Hegemony: The Advent of a Multiplex World Order'. *Ethics & International Affairs*, Vol. 31, No. 3, pp. 271–285. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S089267941700020X>
- Achilleos-Sarll, C., Sachseder, J. and Stachowitsch, S. (2023) 'The (Inter)visual Politics of Border Security: Co-constituting Gender and Race Through Frontex's Risk Analysis'. *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 54, No. 4, pp. 374–394. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09670106231182314>
- Archer, N. and Provost, C. (2020) *Revealed: \$280m 'Dark Money' Spent by US Christian Right Groups Globally*. openDemocracy. Available from: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/trump-us-christian-spending-global-revealed/> [Accessed 29th April 2024].
- 'Council Directive 92/85/EEC of 19 October 1992 on the Introduction of Measures to Encourage Improvements in the Safety and Health at Work of Pregnant Workers and Workers Who Have Recently Given Birth or Are Breastfeeding (Tenth Individual Directive Within the Meaning of Article 16 (1) of Directive 89/391/EEC), OJ L 348, 28.11.1992'.
- Bajomi-Lázár, P. (2013) 'The Party Colonisation of the Media: The Case of Hungary'. *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 27, No. 1, pp. 69–89. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325412465085>
- Barbieux, F. and Bouris, D. (2024) 'Decentring European Union Foreign Policy: Addressing Colonial Dynamics in EU-Algeria Relations'. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 4, pp. 1138–1157.
- Bergman Rosamond, A. (2025) Researching feminist foreign policy in militarising times. In: Kronsell, J.J., Al & Dalmer, N. (Eds.) *Handbook on gender and security*. Edgar Elgar, pp. 86–97. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781803928364>
- Bernhard, M. (2020) 'What Do We Know About Civil Society and Regime Change Thirty Years After 1989?' *East European Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 3, pp. 341–362. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2020.1787160>
- Bertrand, S. (2018) 'Can the Subaltern Securitize? Postcolonial Perspectives on Securitization Theory and Its Critics'. *European journal of international security*, Vol. 3, No. 3, pp. 281–299. <https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2018.3>
- Bicchi, F. (2006) "'Our Size Fits All': Normative Power Europe and the Mediterranean". *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 286–303. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760500451733>

- Bigio, J. and Vogelstein, R. (2020) *Understanding Gender Equality in Foreign Policy: What the United States Can Do*. New York, NY: Council on Foreign Relations. Available from: <https://www.cfr.org/report/understanding-gender-equality-foreign-policy>
- Bilgin, P. (2016) “Contrapuntal Reading” as a method, an ethos, and a metaphor for global IR. *International Studies Review*, 18(1), 134–146. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viv018>
- Bouris, D., Fisher-Onar, N. and Huber, D. (2025) ‘Towards Allyship in Diversity: Critical Approaches to the European Union as a Global Actor’. *Journal of Common Market Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13763>
- Bouris, D., Kenny, S. and Mühlenhoff, H.L. (2025) ‘Queering European Union Foreign and Security Policy: Invisibility, Heteronormativity and Binaries in the EU’s Approach to Women, Peace and Security’. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13750>
- Breiding, M. (2025) ‘Global Queer Agonism: Normative Theory of the European Union in Times of Dissensus Over LGBT Equality’. *Journal of Common Market Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13758>
- Buyse, A. (2018) ‘Squeezing Civic Space: Restrictions on Civil Society Organizations and the Linkages With Human Rights’. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 22, No. 8, pp. 966–988. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2018.1492916>
- Buzmaniuk, S. (2023) Gender equality in Europe: a still imperfect model in the world. *European Issues*, 659, 1–7.
- Chowdhry, G. (2007) ‘Edward Said and contrapuntal reading: Implications for critical interventions in international relations’. *Millennium*, Vol. 36, No. 1, pp. 101–116. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030582980703600107>
- Colella, D. (2021) ‘Femonationalism and Anti-gender Backlash: The Instrumental Use of Gender Equality in the Nationalist Discourse of the Fratelli d’Italia Party’. *Gender and Development*, Vol. 29, No. 2–3, pp. 269–289. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2021.1978749>
- Collins, P.H. (1998) *Fighting words: black women and the search for justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (2023) ‘Concluding Observations on the Ninth Periodic Report of Hungary [CEDAW/C/HUN/CO/9]’.
- Council of the European Union (2009) ‘Council Conclusions on Democracy Support in the EU’s External Relations’. 2974th External Relations Council Meeting, Brussels.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991) ‘Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color’. *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 43, No. 6, pp. 93–118. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Cross, M.A.K.D. (2013) The military dimension of European security: an epistemic community approach. *Millennium*, 42(1), 45–64. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829813497821>
- David, M., Guerrina, R. and Wright, K.A.M. (2023) ‘Nakedly Normative: A Feminist (Re-) imagination of Planetary Politics’. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 62, No. 3, pp. 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13496>
- Demirsu, I. (2024) ‘The Making of a Translocal Anti-gender Alliance and Hope for Progressive Change’. *Mobilization: An International Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 4, pp. 527–546. <https://doi.org/10.17813/1086-671X-29-4-527>
- Elomäki, A. (2023) ‘“It’s a Total No-No”: The Strategic Silence About Gender in the European Parliament’s Economic Governance Policies’. *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 44, No. 3, pp. 403–417. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512120978329>
- Eschle, C. and Maignushca, B. (2018) ‘Theorising Feminist Organising in and Against Neoliberalism: Beyond Co-optation and Resistance?’ *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, Vol. 1, No. 1–2, pp. 223–239. <https://doi.org/10.1332/251510818X15272520831120>

- Escudero-Alías, M. (2021) 'A Reparative Reading of Feminism'. *The European Legacy*, Vol. 26, No. 3–4, pp. 358–373. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10848770.2021.1890335>
- European Commission (2025) 'Communication From the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. A Roadmap for Women's Rights'. Brussels, 7.3.2025, COM(2025) 97 Final. Available from: https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/0c3fe55d-9e4f-4377-9d14-93d03398b434_en?filename=Gender%20Equality%20Report%20Chapeau%20Communication.pdf [Accessed 14th April 2025].
- European Parliament and Council (2024) Directive (EU) 2024/1385 of 14 May 2024 on combating violence against women and domestic violence. PE/33/2024/REV/1, OJ L, 2024/1385, 24.5.2024.
- Farris, S.R. (2017) *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism* (Duke University Press). <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822372929>
- Fisher-Onar, N. (2021) 'Remembering Empires: Between Civilisational Nationalism and Post-national Pluralism'. In Chovanec, J. and Heilo, O. (Eds.) *Narrated Empires* (Modernity, Memory and Identity in South-East Europe). Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 387–398. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-55199-5_17
- Fisher-Onar, N. (2023) 'Beyond Binaries: (European) Security in Feminist and Postcolonial Perspective'. *European Security*, Vol. 32, No. 3, pp. 508–518. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2023.2233436>
- Fisher-Onar, N. and Nicolaïdis, K. (2013) 'The Decentring Agenda: Europe as a Post-colonial Power'. *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 48, No. 2, pp. 283–303. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00108367134853>
- Fisher-Onar, N. and Nicolaïdis, K. (2021) 'The Decentring Agenda: A Post-colonial Approach to EU External Action'. In Ghstol, S. and Shunz, S. (eds) *The External Action of the European Union: Concepts, Approaches, Theories*, pp. 288–304.
- Futák-Campbell, B. and Schwieter, C. (2020) 'Practising Populism: How Right-Wing Populists Negotiate Political Competence'. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 58, No. 4, pp. 890–908.
- Gagyi, Á. (2021) *The Political Economy of Middle Class Politics and the Global Crisis in Eastern Europe: The Case of Hungary and Romania* (International Political Economy Series) (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing). <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-76943-7>
- Government of Hungary (2015) 'T/5954. Számú TÖRVÉNYJAVASLAT A MAGYARORSZÁG 2014. ÉVI KÖZPONTI KÖLTSÉGVETÉSÉRŐL SZÓLÓ 2013. ÉVI CCXXX. TÖRVÉNY VÉGREHAJTÁSÁRÓL: 4. Fejezeti Kötet XVIII. KÜLGAZDASÁGI ÉS KÜLÜGYMINISZTERIUM, XIX. UNIÓS FEJLESZTÉSEK'.
- Government of Hungary (2019) '1177/2019. (IV. 2.) Korm. Határozat Az Afrika Stratégiáról'.
- Grzebalska, W. and Pető, A. (2018) 'The Gendered Modus Operandi of the Illiberal Transformation in Hungary and Poland'. *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 68, pp. 164–172. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2017.12.001>
- Guerrina, R., Haastруп, T. & Wright, K.A. (2023) Contesting feminist power Europe: is feminist foreign policy possible for the EU? *European Security*, 32(3), 485–507. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2023.2233080>
- Guerrina, R. and Murphy, H. (2016) 'Strategic Silences in the Brexit Debate: Gender, Marginality and Governance'. *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, Vol. 12, No. 4, pp. 872–880. <https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v12i4.814>
- Guerrina, R. and Sloomaeckers, K. (2023) *The Sound of Silence: EDI in the European Studies Canon* (University Association for Contemporary European Studies).

- Gwyn Jones, M. (2024) 'EU Agrees First-Ever Law on Violence Against Women. But Rape Is Not Included'. Euronews. Available from: <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/02/07/eu-agrees-first-ever-law-on-violence-against-women-but-rape-is-not-included> [Accessed 28th April 2024].
- Haas, P.M. (1992) 'Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination'. *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 1, pp. 1–35. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300001442>
- Haastrup, T. (2023) 'Building Gender Norms into Regional Governance and the Limits of Institutionalising Feminism', in Sawyer, M. et al. (Eds.) *Handbook of Feminist Governance*. Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 371–383. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800374812.00040>
- Haastrup, T. and Hagen, J.J. (2020) 'Global Racial Hierarchies and the Limits of Localization via National Action Plans', in S. Basu, P. Kirby, and L. Shepherd (Eds.) *New Directions in Women, Peace and Security*. 1st edition. Bristol University Press, pp. 133–152. <https://doi.org/10.46692/9781529207774.010>
- Hegedüs, J. and Péteri, G. (2015) 'Közzolgáltatási Reformok És a Helyi Önkormányzatiság'. *Szociológiai Szemle*, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp. 90–119.
- Held, V. 2006 *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*. 1st edition. Oxford University Press. New York. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0195180992.001.0001>
- Hoijsink, M., Mühlenhoff, H.L. and Welfens, N. (2023) 'Whose (In)security? Gender, Race and Coloniality in European Security Policies: Introduction to the Special Issue'. *European Security*, Vol. 32, No. 3, pp. 335–346. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2023.2235286>
- Horváth, T.M. (2016) 'From Municipalisation to Centralism: Changes to Local Public Service Delivery in Hungary'. In Wollmann, H., Koprić, I. and Marcou, G. (Eds.) *Public and Social Services in Europe: From Public and Municipal to Private Sector Provision* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK), pp. 185–199. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-57499-2_13
- İşleyen, B. (2024) 'Non-Western Agency in Refugee Humanitarianism: Turkey and 'Operation Provide Comfort''. *International Studies Review*, Vol. 26, No. 2, viae028. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viae028>
- Kantola, J. and Lombardo, E. (2021) 'Strategies of Right Populists in Opposing Gender Equality in a Polarized European Parliament'. *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 42, No. 5, pp. 565–579. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512120963953>
- Karlsson, I. (2022) "'We Try to Be Nuanced Everywhere All the Time": Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy and Discursive Closure in Public Diplomacy'. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 18, No. 4, pp. 325–334. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-021-00245-z>
- Korosteleva, E. (2017) 'Eastern Partnership: Bringing "The Political" Back In'. *East European Politics*, Vol. 33, No. 3, pp. 321–337. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2017.1340882>
- Kunz, R. and Maisenbacher, J. (2017) 'Women in the Neighbourhood: Reinstating the European Union's Civilising Mission on the Back of Gender Equality Promotion?' *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 122–144. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066115621120>
- Levi-Faur, D. (2011) 'Regulatory Networks and Regulatory Agencification: Towards a Single European Regulatory Space'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 18, No. 6, pp. 810–829. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2011.593309>
- Luciani, L. (2024) 'European Values, Eurasian Family, or Neither? A Contrapuntal Reading of the EU's Agenda to Combat Domestic Violence in Armenia'. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*.
- McEwen, H. (2022) 'The (Geo)politics of Gender and Sexuality Diversity in a Multipolar World: Reading African Anti-genderisms Beyond the Transatlantic'. *Politique africaine*, Vol. 168, No. 4, pp. 95–113. <https://doi.org/10.3917/polaf.168.0095>

- Muehlenhoff, H.L. (2017) 'Victims, Soldiers, Peacemakers and Caretakers: The Neoliberal Constitution of Women in the EU's Security Policy'. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 19, No. 2, pp. 153–167. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2017.1279417>
- Muehlenhoff, H.L. (2022) 'Unpacking the Making of National Action Plans: Governmentality, Security, and Race in the Dutch Implementation of UNSCR 1325'. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 24, No. 5, pp. 744–766. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2022.2042353>
- Müller, P. and Gazsi, D. (2023) 'Populist Capture of Foreign Policy Institutions: The Orbán Government and the De-Europeanization of Hungarian Foreign Policy'. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 2, pp. 397–415. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13377>
- Musina, D. (2023) 'Militarising Gender: A (Contrapuntal) Reading of Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Applications in EU-Tunisian Security Assemblages'. *European Security*, Vol. 32, No. 3, pp. 464–484. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2023.2233961>
- Namubiru, L. and Soita Wepukhulu, K. (2020) 'Exclusive: US Christian Right Pours More Than \$50m into Africa'. openDemocracy. Available from: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/africa-us-christian-right-50m/> [Accessed 29th April 2024].
- Nazneen, S. and Okech, A. (2021) 'Introduction: Feminist Protests and Politics in a World in Crisis'. *Gender and Development*, Vol. 29, No. 2–3, pp. 231–252. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2021.2005358>
- Newton, C. (2023) 'Hungarian-Funded NGO to Host Hate Groups, International Politicians at New York Summit'. Southern Poverty Law Center. Available from: <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2023/11/08/hungarian-funded-ngo-host-hate-groups-international-politicians-new-york-summit> [Accessed 29th April 2024].
- Pirro, A.L.P. and Stanley, B. (2022) 'Forging, Bending, and Breaking: Enacting the "Illiberal Playbook" in Hungary and Poland'. *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 86–101. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592721001924>
- Pollack, M.A. and Hafner-Burton, E. (2000) 'Mainstreaming Gender in the European Union'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 432–456. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760050086116>
- Porter, E. (2018) 'Ethics and Feminist International Relations Theory'. In Steele, B.J. and Heinze, E.A. (eds) *Routledge Handbook of Ethics and International Relations* (1st edition) (London; New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group), pp. 146–159.
- Rahman, M. (2024) 'The Transnational Homocolonial Dilemma and the Pivot to Queer Muslim Intersectionality'. In Rahman, M. and Khan, M. (eds) *Queer/Muslim/Canadian: Identities, Experiences and Belonging* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 145–172.
- Reuters (2021) *Leaders Slam Migration, LGBTQ at 'Family Values' Summit*. dw.com. Available from: <https://www.dw.com/en/hungary-leaders-slam-migration-lgbtq-at-family-values-summit/a-59283286> [Accessed 29th April 2024].
- Robinson, F. (2011) 'Stop Talking and Listen: Discourse Ethics and Feminist Care Ethics in International Political Theory'. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 845–860. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829811401176>
- Roggeband, C. and Krizsán, A. (2021) 'Democratic Backsliding and the Backlash Against Women's Rights: Understanding the Current Challenges for Feminist Politics'. UN Women – Headquarters. Available from: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/06/discussion-paper-democratic-backsliding-and-the-backlash-against-womens-rights> [Accessed 29th April 2024].
- Roggeband, C. and Lettinga, D. (2016) 'In Defence of Gender Equality? Comparing the Political Debates About Headscarves and Honor-Related Crimes in France and the Netherlands'. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society*, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 239–262. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxu024>

- Said, E.W. (2012) *Culture and Imperialism* (Vintage).
- Saltnes, J.D. and Thiel, M. (2021) 'The Politicization of LGBTI Human Rights Norms in the EU-Uganda Development Partnership'. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 59, No. 1, pp. 108–125. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13141>
- Schimmelfennig, F. (2015) 'Europeanization Beyond Europe'. *Living Reviews in European Governance*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 5–36. <https://doi.org/10.14629/lreg-2015-1>
- Sierakowski, S. (2019) How eastern european populism differs from its western European counterpart. *Old and New Cleavages in Polish Society*, 27.
- Solanke, I. (2009) 'Putting Race and Gender Together: A New Approach to Intersectionality'. *The Modern Law Review*, Vol. 72, No. 5, pp. 723–749. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2230.2009.00765.x>
- Tarrósy, I., Trabelsi, H. & Voöroös, Z. (2024) Hungary's relations with the BRICS in the context of the changing world order. *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies*, 18(4), 59–82. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.51870/BPGR3349>
- Towns, A.E. and Niklasson, B. (2018) 'Where Are the Female Ambassadors? Gender and Status Hierarchies in Ambassador Postings', in K. Aggestam and A.E. Towns (Eds.) *Gendering Diplomacy and International Negotiation*. Cham: Springer International Publishing (Studies in Diplomacy and International Relations), pp. 25–44. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-58682-3_2
- Trueman, C.R. (2023) 'Gender Ideology and the Future of the Human Person'. The Heritage Foundation. Available from: <https://www.heritage.org/gender/report/gender-ideology-and-the-future-the-human-person> [Accessed 29th April 2024].
- Van der Vleuten, A. (2016) *The Price of Gender Equality: Member States and Governance in the European Union* (Routledge) <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315554006>
- Väyrynen, T., Parashar, S., Féron, É. & Confortini, C.C. (Eds.) (2021) *Routledge handbook of feminsit peace research*. New York.
- Verloo, M. (2006) 'Multiple Inequalities, Intersectionality and the European Union'. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 211–228. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506806065753>
- Von Der Burchard, H. (2020) 'EU's Foreign Policy Gender Plan Faces Resistance From Poland and Hungary'. POLITICO. Available from: <https://www.politico.eu/article/eus-gender-equality-push-for-external-relations-faces-trouble-from-the-inside/> [Accessed 29th April 2024].
- Walby, S. (2004) 'The European Union and Gender Equality: Emergent Varieties of Gender Regime'. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 4–29. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxh024>
- Walby, S. (2020) 'Varieties of Gender Regimes'. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society*, Vol. 27, No. 3, pp. 414–431.
- WO=MEN. (2021) 'Report of a Consultation Meeting on Feminist Foreign Policy for the Netherlands'. July 08, 2021. <https://www.wo-men.nl/kb-bestanden/1631267189.pdf>
- Wolff, S. (2022) 'Gender Equality in Tunisia: The EU's Tripartite Dialogue'. *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 435–455. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2021.1883285>
- Wolff, S., Gazi, D., Huber, D. and Fisher-Onar, N. (2022) 'How to Reflexively Decentre EU Foreign Policy: Dissonance and Contrapuntal Reconstruction in Migration, Religious and Neighbourhood Governance'. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 6, pp. 1611–1628. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13335>
- Woodward, A. (2003) 'European Gender Mainstreaming: Promises and Pitfalls of Transformative Policy¹'. *Review of Policy Research*, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 65–88. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1541-1338.d01-5>
- Zalan, E. (2020) 'Poland and Hungary Battle to Eradicate 'Gender' in EU Policies'. EUobserver. Available from: <https://euobserver.com/eu-political/ara1930255> [Accessed 29th April 2024].