

18th Conference of the Commission on Women's and Gender Research in the German
Society for Empirical Cultural Studies (DGEKW)

CALL FOR PAPERS

Mapping Gender Struggles

Gender as a Field of Conflict in Contemporary Social Movements

23–25 November 2023, LMU Munich

A co-operation between the Institute for European Ethnology and Cultural Analysis at the
LMU Munich and the Women's Academy Munich

Gender seems to have become a central category of contemporary social movements, even though in very different ways. It represents the central argument in feminist and LGBTIQ+ movements, which have in recent years again become an important social force worldwide (Wichterich 2020). Their issues, such as sexual self-determination, the right to abortion or the fight against sexualized violence, are currently highly contested and on the global political agenda – not only of social movements but also of governments. On the one hand, pro-choice struggles in Poland, Ireland or the USA, the protests against femicides in Argentina and Spain, or political actions against trans and queer hostility in Hungary, Saudi Arabia or Kenya serve as examples. On the other hand, movements for climate justice, anti-racism or freedom rights do not primarily concern gender-political issues but their demands are permeated by feminist convictions and, above all, women are becoming visible as leaders of these protests more than ever before (Redecker 2021). Not only transnational groups such as *Fridays for Future* or *Black Lives Matter* illustrate this fact, but also the democracy movements in Belarus or Chile, the mass mobilization for reproductive rights in Ireland and Poland or, most recently, the protests in Iran, where the murder of a young Kurdish woman was the trigger, and the actors' demands are ultimately aimed at regime change. At the same time, right-wing movements that are gaining global strength are also arguing along gender lines, both in the sense of an openly articulated anti-feminism and through the appropriation of feminist concerns for racist and nationalist politics (Farris 2017; Hark/Villa 2017; Eszter/Põim 2015). Concepts we can refer to in this context are Sara Ahmed's analysis of gender as a "map of the moment" (2021) or Eszter Kováts and Maari Põim's as "symbolic glue" (2015). **In the context of this conference, we want to ask whether this observed centrality of gender in contemporary social movements is actually new or what has changed, both regarding discourses and representations as well as in reference to the political practice of social movements. What diagnoses of the times can also be made if we look at social movements and their areas of conflict from a gender-theoretical perspective?**

We understand social movements – also an expression of overall social dynamics – as collective actions of a group of people with the common political goal of bringing about or preventing social change (Joas 2007). These collective actions include a variety of strategies and follow different logics. We are not only interested in classic forms of mass mobilization and street protests but also in other – sometimes more silent – political practices, such as media representations (e.g. social media, autosociobiographical texts, aesthetic modes of expression, artistic works, statements), application-oriented formats (such as in the field of social work, workshops, educational work, therapeutic approaches) or forms of producing counter-knowledge (e.g. archives, libraries, congresses). The ethnographic exploration of social movements in particular makes it possible to focus on not only formalized protest but also everyday forms of resistance, subjective perspectives and the affective impacts of political participation (Bonilla 2018; Goodwin et al. 2001). Naisargi Dave (2012) emphasizes that activism is more than the spectacular moments of actions and demonstrations, and always involves practices of reflecting on and shaping of everyday interpersonal relationships. Subsequently, in the context of this conference, we would, firstly, like to interpret the concept of social movements broadly and fill it with content inductively, with the help of the analyses and studies contributed. **In the sense of a “mapping”, we want to bring together the many and varied current conflicts and struggles about the category of gender in social movements and interrelate them.** At all times, the aim is to question the hierarchical structure of knowledge and commence a dialogue between the movement and the academic knowledge. From a gender-theoretical perspective, we are particularly interested in four analytical levels that are closely linked to each other:

Gender as a contested concept: Gender is obviously not understood uniformly in these different movement contexts, but is a contested concept. **We are interested in how gender is currently defined and problematized in social movements. In which hegemony and power relations are these concepts integrated, and with which social ideas and political concerns are they accompanied? To what body of knowledge do they refer? How do they relate to each other? Where can we find lines of connection and where lines of conflict? What is the relationship between gender as an analytical category, on the one hand, and as human experience, on the other hand, intended to be in social movements?**

Gender as a structural category: The powerful categorization based on gender and sexuality assigns people a specific position within social structures, which – entangled with other categories of difference, such as *race*, *class* and *age* – decisively determines opportunities and life chances. Specific social struggles and political demands arise from the disadvantage and oppression of women and queer people as well as the violence against these groups. **We would like to take them into account and ask about the reasons for current practices of organizing and mobilizing. On which structural exclusions, inequalities and associated affections is the political practice of social movements based? To what extent are they gendered? And to what extent can they be understood as the starting point for feminist thought and action? To what extent does gender as a category of social structuring impact on the struggles against other forms of structural disadvantage?**

Gender and political practice: Gender is also closely intertwined with the political practice of social movements and is produced, maintained or even subverted in them on a daily basis. Political practice encompasses different dimensions – inside and outside of social movements – which can or should be addressed from a gender-theoretical perspective. **We would like to pay attention to how gender mobilizes political action, when and how gender may also prevent political participation, and what part do affects and emotions enact here. How is gender negotiated in the daily routine of social movements – in their interactions and action logics – also in relation to other socially effective categories of difference? How is gender staged, represented and made visible in public – for example, in protest actions on the street or the internet? Which modes of expression, formats and forms are used?**

Gender at the intersection of science and social movements: The conference should also provide space for further reflections on the interface between social movements and science or cultural anthropology from a gender-theoretical perspective. Knowledge is not created exclusively in university institutions, but is also generated in the context of social movements and the field of tension between these two poles of knowledge production. **We want to ask how we can deal with this tension between academic and political practice and the attacks and accusations that go with it. How do we position ourselves at the intersection of science and social movements? How close or distant to social movements do we design our research? What role does our own gendered positioning play in this? And what does it mean to consequently define yourself as a feminist scientist?** Last but not least, we also want to use these questions as an opportunity to take up and continue the debates of the last Commission's conferences.

We welcome contributions from individuals or groups from the field of empirical humanities and social sciences, as well as from the movements themselves. We do not want to assign any particular regional restrictions, but are primarily interested in bringing local and global perspectives together. We are also interested in historical perspectives that explore the emergence and becoming of social movements in relation to the present. The analytical levels proposed here should serve more as an inspiration than as a fixed definition and are welcome to be broadened and complemented. In addition to the classic formats, such as lectures and panels, we also invite other forms of knowledge production, such as open space or roundtables. Thematically suitable artistic interventions, such as performances, installations, exhibitions, film or sound projects, are also welcome. The abstracts submitted should not exceed a maximum of 300 words. In addition, brief information on the person(s) involved in the contributions and their affiliation is requested. We are aiming at a face-to-face conference, but would also like to enable hybrid forms of participation. If there is a need for a hybrid format (for example, because not all speakers can attend the conference face-to-face), contact us and we will try to implement it. The conference languages are German and English.

Conception and organization:

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