

[eavramovska@gmail.com](mailto:eavramovska@gmail.com), [Eva-Maria.Euchner@gsi.uni-muenchen.de](mailto:Eva-Maria.Euchner@gsi.uni-muenchen.de),  
[Martina.Avanza@unil.ch](mailto:Martina.Avanza@unil.ch), [alberta.giorgi@gmail.com](mailto:alberta.giorgi@gmail.com), [roman.kuhar@gmail.com](mailto:roman.kuhar@gmail.com),  
[mariachiara.giorda@gmail.com](mailto:mariachiara.giorda@gmail.com)

## **Gender, Sexuality and Public Religion**

Alberta Giorgi and David Paternotte

Chair: Eva-Maria Euchner (Ludwig-Maximilians-University, Munich)

Discussant : Martina Avanza (Université de Lausanne)

Researchers on gender and politics have recently insisted on a return of religion in the public sphere and on its effect on gender equality. Following José Casanova's seminal book (1994), they contest the idea of a "deprivatisation" of religion, and they claim that faith-based organisations are increasingly involved in public debates, influencing policy-making in decisive ways. This is crucial to understand the recent anti-gender mobilizations in Europe, and would also contribute to what has sometimes been analysed as European culture wars.

This panel will discuss these hypotheses and unpack the idea of a return of religion. It examines both religious activism and the role of religious organisations and institutions in the spheres of gender and sexual politics. It highlights the complex and sometimes contradictory influence of religion on gender equality, and calls for an analysis of religion which does not reduce the latter to a mere obstacle to gender equality.

## **Anti-gender movements in Europe: Between catholicism and populism**

Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte

After decades of steady progress in terms of gender and sexual rights, several parts of Europe are facing new waves of resistance to a so-called 'gender ideology' or 'gender theory'. Opposition to progressive gender equality is manifested in challenges to marriage equality, abortion, reproductive technologies, gender mainstreaming, sex education, sexual liberalism, transgender rights, antidiscrimination policies and even to the notion of gender itself.

In this paper, we examine how the academic concept of gender, when translated by religious organizations such as the Roman Catholic Church, can become a mobilizing tool for, and the target of, social movements. How can we explain religious discourses about sex difference turning into massive street demonstrations? How do forms of organization and protest travel across borders? Who are the actors behind these movements? This paper offers an overview of a transnational and comparative research project which focuses on national manifestations in eleven European countries, including Russia. It insists on the intersections of religious politics with rising populism and nationalistic anxieties in contemporary Europe.

## **The debate around "gender" in Portugal and Italy: similarities and differences**

Alberta Giorgi (University of Coimbra)

In recent years, the debate around the so-called “gender ideology”, or “gender theory”, thrived in Portugal and Italy, as in many other European countries. Under the religious profile, Italy and Portugal are very much alike: both Catholic-majority countries, Italy and Portugal have experienced similar paths of politicization of religion in the past. In both countries, recent developments in the political regulation of same-sex partnerships – marriage (2010) and adoption (2016) in Portugal, and civil union (2016) in Italy – have raised the opposition of the national Catholic Episcopal Conferences, which firmly condemned the supposedly ‘gender ideology’ underpinning these developments.

In this paper I analyse the Catholic Church mobilization and discourse against the so-called ‘gender theory’ in Italy and Portugal, highlighting the differences in the public role of religion and the different outcomes of the public and the political debates; more specifically, I explore the extent to which the discursive opportunity structure plays a role in explaining the differences in the frames, arguments, and mobilization strategies adopted.

### **Mobilization for Gender Equality and the Role of the Catholic Church in the Case of the Philippines**

Elena Avramovska (Université de Genève & Université libre de Bruxelles)

In addition to emerging scholarship researching the “coming back” of Catholic groups that act as major oppositional forces to gender and sexuality policy developments in Europe, the following paper aims at diverting attention to non-Western contexts. Through the analysis of the case of the Philippines, the paper will delineate how the Catholic Church in fact has never stopped influencing the areas of gender equality and sexuality. The Philippines has been recognized as a forerunner in Southeast Asia in terms of gender equality advancements in legislative, electoral and bureaucratic spheres. Simultaneously, reproductive health rights are highly contested and abortion and divorce are still illegal. While it is well documented that the Catholic Church of the Philippines has been continuously curtailing advancements in the sphere of reproductive health rights, the paper will demonstrate that the Church in fact – albeit unintentionally – has mobilized and trained some of the main supporters of gender equality. The Catholic tradition in the Philippines is a legacy of a four hundred years long colonial reigning under Spain, which was heavily challenged once the United States took the colonial power over the Philippine islands. Endangered by the secular ideas of the United States, the Catholic Church of the Philippines created widespread and inclusive programs on grassroots activism and social action. This strong organizational structure posed by the Catholic Church served as an arena for mobilization and training of the gender activists that channelled vast number of gender equality advancements in the period of democratic transition. Furthermore, throughout the dictatorial period under Ferdinand Marcos, the Church based organizations were the only safe spaces for consolidation of gender equality strategies. Hence, the paper will delineate how from nuns and church based community organizers a generation of strong gender activists was created. The theoretical claims put forward by this paper will be supported with interviews, document analysis and archival research.

### **Religions, women and food practices between inclusion and exclusion**

Giorda Mariachiara (University of Turin)

Contemporary societies are dealing with issues related to diversity, among which food and cooking are privileged means for exploring otherness. Food is always a vehicle for both keeping and transmitting tradition, but also important innovations. Concerning the meeting and the conflict among cultural and religious diversities, food is pivotal for reflecting about symbolic and corporal necessities of minorities.

The dimension of the links between food and cultural practices is linked to conflicts among identities, the respect of individual freedom, the recognition of cultural and religious communities and the contrast of discriminations. Urban scale is one of the most interesting contexts for exploring potential innovations in political practices of citizenship of religious minorities. In this sense, ones of the first subjects involved by institutional good practices in defending the rights linked to differences, promoting cultural and social inclusion, managing conflicts, are families and in particular women.

My paper analyses the roles of women of religious communities of Turin, Italy, involved in a pilot project regarding cultural and social cohesion, promoted by the city and their relation with food and cooking, based on the perspective of innovation/tradition and of the transmission of knowledge and especially practices.