

Outlawing Gender: A Comparative Study of Anti-Gender Studies Legislation in the U.S. and Global Contexts

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Abstract : Recently, the rise of concerted right-wing and authoritarian movements has put feminists as well as women, queer, trans, and non-binary folk, immigrants, refugees, the global poor, and people of color in their crosshairs. The U.S. is seeing unprecedented attacks on liberal democratic institutions, escalating “culture wars,” and increased anti-intellectual vitriol specifically targeting feminist and anti-racist educators and scholars. Such vitriol has fueled new legislation curtailing or outright banning of “gender studies” for its ideological commitment to theorizing gender identity as a cultural construct and an inherently political project rather than a “natural” binary that can not be contested or interrogated. At the same time, across the globe—in Afghanistan, Argentina, Brazil, France, Haiti, Hungary, Kenya, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Russia, South Korea, Sweden, Turkey, Uganda, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere—emergent anti-feminist, nativist, and white-supremacist political parties, as well as established autocratic and authoritarian regimes, have instituted blatantly misogynistic, anti-queer, and anti-trans legislation, often accompanied by governmental and extra-governmental policies explicitly intended to marginalize, erase, suppress, or extinguish gender studies as a legitimate academic discipline, topic of research, and teaching field. This paper considers the origins and effects of such legislation -as well as the strategies exhibited by practitioners of gender studies to counter these effects and resist erasure- from a cross-cultural perspective. The research underpinning this paper’s conclusions includes a survey of nearly 2000 gender studies programs in the U.S. and interviews with dozens of gender studies scholars and administrative leaders of gender-studies programs located worldwide. The goal of this paper is to illuminate distinctions, continuities, and global connections between anti-gender studies legislation that emanates from within national borders but arises from rightwing movements that supercede those borders, and that, ultimately, require globalist responses.

Keywords : anti-feminist, anti-LGBTQ, legislation, criminalization, authoritarianism, globalization

Conference Title : ICFLTGL 2024 : International Conference on Feminist Legal Theory, Gender and Law

Conference Location : Athens, Greece

Conference Dates : April 04-05, 2024