

IDS Bulletin

Transforming Development Knowledge

Volume 55 | Number 1 | March 2024

UNDERSTANDING GENDER BACKLASH: SOUTHERN PERSPECTIVES

Issue Editors Jerker Edström, Jenny Edwards,
Tessa Lewin, Rosie McGee, Sohela Nazneen and
Chloe Skinner



Notes on Contributors	iii
Introduction: Understanding Gender Backlash Across Regions Jerker Edström, Jenny Edwards and Chloe Skinner, with Tessa Lewin and Sohela Nazneen	1
Voice: A Useful Concept for Researching Backlash and Feminist Counter-Actions? Sohela Nazneen	15
Backlash and Counter-Backlash: Safeguarding Access to Legal Abortion in Brazil Cecilia Sardenberg, Teresa Sacchet, Maira Kubik Mano, Luire Campelo, Camila Daltro, Talita Melgaço Fernandes and Heloisa Bandeira	27
'It's a Family Matter': Inaction and Denial of Domestic Violence Maheen Sultan and Pragyna Mahpara	41
Public University Students' Experiences of Anti-Feminist Backlash in Dhaka, Bangladesh Adeepo Intisar Ahmed, Ishrat Jahan, Israr Hasan, Sabina Faiz Rashid and Sharin Shajahan Naomi	55
The Centaur's Kick: Backlash as Disruptive Upgrades to Patriarchal Orders Jerker Edström	71
Disrupting Anxious Masculinity: Fraternity as Resistance Abhijit Das, Jashodhara Dasgupta, Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay, Sana Contractor and Satish Kumar Singh	85
Virulent Hindutva, Vigilante State: Situating Backlash and its Implications for Women's Rights in India Shraddha Chigateri and Sudarsana Kundu	101
Gender Equality vs 'Morality': The Erosion of Gender Agendas in Kenya Phil Erick Otieno and Alfred Makonjio Makabira	117
Unravelling and Countering Backlash: Uganda's Sexual Offences Legislation Amon Ashaba Mwiine and Josephine Ahikire	129
Queering Gender Backlash Tessa Lewin	141
Deconstructing Anti-Feminist Backlash: The Lebanese Context Nay El Rahi and Fatima Antar	151
Glossary	165

The Centaur's Kick: Backlash as Disruptive Upgrades to Patriarchal Orders*

Jerker Edström¹

Abstract Backlash is not always pushing back against progress for women, but how is it still patriarchal? Sliced into three sections – on confluence, contestations, and cartographies – this article draws on a thesis about backlash as the exploitation of insecurity wrought by apparent crises to re/shape social orders, through re-fixing symbolic sites, namely the body, family, and nation. It begins by describing a confluence of types of actors and projects silencing feminist voice. Contesting gendered backlash narratives about the three sites are then explored, followed by a more theoretical section reflecting on cartographies of resonant concurrence and contradictions in backlash. Reflecting on masculinities, identification, and levels of hegemonic power, the argument is that the fixing of sites re/naturalises three deep-level patriarchal logics – phallogocentric binary (body), hierarchical (family), and categorical closed-systems (nation) principles – which helps us theorise the evolution of patriarchal hegemonies. This may inform more strategic countering of backlash.

Keywords patriarchal backlash, patriarchy, masculinities, hegemonic power, crisis, symbolism, affect, identification.

1 Introduction

After years of collaborations on masculinities between the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and partners from Kenya, India, and Uganda, we came together at a symposium for 'Undressing Patriarchy' a decade ago. At that time, we noted that emerging

anti-feminist backlashes [*sic*] and a more general backsliding on progress in gender equality have led some to warn of feminisms in crisis... with a neoliberal co-option of key terms and concepts in the service of global capitalist, religious or other geopolitical agendas. (Edström, Das and Dolan 2014: 3)

Meanwhile, in a more private conversation in Rome in 2014, Joseph Ratzinger (or Pope Benedict XVI), predicted that 'the next great challenge the Church is going to face is gender ideology... the ultimate rebellion against God the Creator' (Caldwell 2023). A decade later, we find ourselves indeed overtaken by a global tide of what Faludi (1991) termed 'patriarchal backlash'.

Here, we set out a way of framing patriarchal backlash by addressing the question 'How is backlash patriarchal?' The framing comes out of a period of simultaneous literature reviews and conceptual discussions with partners, a co-organised series of five events at the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium 2020–21, and the development of a thesis with colleagues about backlash as a form of patriarchal crisis management (Edström, Greig and Skinner 2024). We draw on that thesis of how backlash works at times of apparent systemic crises through the exploitation of ontological insecurity, to divide constituencies and re/shape social orders into new or old patriarchal forms of oppression (*ibid.*). The sections that follow are framed around three Cs: a **confluence** of actors and projects silencing feminist voice (2), in **contestations** over the symbolic sites of bodies, families, and nations (3), and across **cartographies** of resonant – if also contradictory – concurrence (4). The article ends with a brief conclusion (section 5) about how this pair of spectacles may be helpful for further analysing patriarchy and countering backlash.

2 Confluence of disruptive politics of angst: framing patriarchal backlash

Feminist analyses have often diagnosed backlash as being 'different from politics-as-usual' and as fundamentally 'a reaction to progressive change' (Piscopo and Walsh 2020: 266). However, debates have increasingly grappled with the complexities of anti-feminist backlash playing out in conjunction with other divisive and oppressive politics. By looking at currently resonant forms of backlash the world over, and at what they seem to represent, we find it is not always reactive, nor always necessarily even pushing back, as we will illustrate below. To preface this analysis, Table 1 provides a schematic and simplified overview of different framings of such backlash politics, by the types of actions involved, nature of apparent aims (or attitudes to change), and likely protagonists involved, also providing examples of writers reflecting each perspective in the literature.

Debates over male resistance to change with women's empowerment and men reactively lashing back in 'crises of masculinity' are familiar in gender and development literatures and are often linked to men's violence against women (e.g. Silberschmidt 2005). However, debates over major backlash being a reaction or apprehensive preventive actions/strategies are also linked to whether these are conceived of mainly as actions by individuals, groups, and organisations

Table 1 Backlash framings by types of actions, aims, protagonists, and writers

Actions	Aims	Protagonists (examples)	Writers (examples)
Defensive reactions	Restorative/reversal	Various men's rights groups, illiberal civil society organisations (CSOs)/faith-based organisations (FBOs), online manosphere communities	Mansbridge and Shames (2008); Halperin-Kaddari and Freeman (2016)
Anticipative actions	Pre-emptive/delay/cancel	Elites with broader interests in status quo and/or growing profits	Rowley (2019); Townsend-Bell (2020)
Proactive strategies	Revolution/new future	Conservative/aspiring theocrats, ethnonationalist, fascist/far right	Graff, Kapur and Walters (2019); Fekete (2019)
Opportunistic convergence	Instrumental/mobilisation	Populist movements, authoritarian politicians, leaders	Paternotte and Kuhar (2017); Datta (2021); Denkovski, Bernarding and Lunz (2021)

Note Not all the authors cited here use the term 'backlash', but they debate essentially similar phenomena. Source Author's own.

(e.g. Mansbridge and Shames 2008) or also more systemically embedded dynamics (e.g. Rowley 2019; Townsend-Bell 2020).

The ways in which backlash is understood as exceptional tends to bring in considerations of how it may be systemically rooted. Some pushback against changing gender relations within the context of development is not unexpected. For example, Eastin and Prakash (2013) find evidence of a 'Gender Kuznets Curve' as gender equality rises along with economic growth and development, to then stall or fall, but also that such pushback tends to later dissipate and equality increase again with further growth. They test a range of systemic (socioeconomic, political, and other) explanations, but this phenomenon can still not explain the recent concurrence of backlash across the globe – South, North, East, and West.

Teasing out the types of likely or typical protagonists linked to different types of backlash, as in Table 1, can help us to link typical actors and their aims to more systemic dynamics. Aside from reactive resistance from men's rights groups (Halperin-Kaddari and Freeman 2016) or more pre-emptive resistance from diverse networks of established economic, religious, and political elites and interests (Rowley 2019), recent radical agendas for societal change by certain fundamentalist faith-based movements more proactively lash out at feminist ideals of gender equality and inclusivity, portraying those as foreign and/or culturally contaminating.

Similarly, hard-right neofascist and ethnonationalist formations and parties aggressively push patriarchal programmes for a brave new world, if motivated more by xenophobic fears over replacement and 'demographic fever dreams' of ethnic

purification (Gökarkınel, Neubert and Smith 2019). A plethora of protagonists are involved, but of recurring types across contexts and converging organically and opportunistically (Paternotte and Kuhar 2017; Datta 2021). Yet the interests and aims of such diverse actors are often contradictory and, whilst fought out in heated national struggles with resonant anti-globalist or anti-foreign rhetoric, backlash politics is always simultaneously imbricated with transnational connections and dynamics (Korolczuk and Graff 2018; Edström *et al.* 2024).

Whilst anti-feminist backlash emerges and intersects with such a diversity of interests and agendas beyond gender, it is crucial to understand how it is still gendered patriarchal, and how masculinity and angst over identity is exploited in this. Rather than representing an ever-present state of systemic maintenance or a one-off phenomenon, backlash appears episodically as resurgent when broader crises signal the unsustainability of prevailing orders and relations. A multiplicity of complex crises – financial, governance, security, pandemic, and environmental – are sometimes seen as interacting to create 'perfect storms' and threatening established interests. Yet, they are often simplified and selectively presented to stoke fear and anxiety for political gain, such as when security crises or economic collapse in one part of the world leading to displacement then gets presented as 'migrant crises' as described above.

It thus works at times of perceived crises through the exploitation of existential angst – or what Anthony Giddens (1991) termed 'ontological insecurity' – to divide constituencies along idealised ideas of identity and to subvert potential challenges, precisely in order to re/shape social orders into updated forms of oppression and expropriation, often justified with new mythologies of the 'good old days'. This is done through various forms of discourse capture, and the co-option and repurposing of narratives and language (Lewin 2021) for fixing three deeply symbolic 'spatial sites' – body, family, and nation – to resecure order in the face of looming chaos (Edström *et al.* 2024).

3 Contestations over the body, family, and nation

Backlash narratives about identity rely on the reduction of gender to binaries of male vs female sexed bodies, and they result in tangible repression of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex+ (LGBTQI+) and women's rights and freedoms. The uniting message is that 'It's Biology: Boys are boys... Girls are girls... always will be' (Corredor 2019: 629), as broadcast by the ultraconservative transnational advocacy group CitizenGO on a bus on international tours in 2017.² This also rests on a persistent undermining of social sciences and a fetishising of (pseudo-scientific) biology, even falling back on religion and creationism. In a highly proactive mode, conservative and faith-based formations (including the Vatican), illiberal civil society groups, and their transnational networks have long

been warning against 'gender ideology' as a nihilistic threat to mankind, as alluded to in the Introduction (section 1). Pope Francis apparently confirmed Ratzinger's earlier warning in a recent interview, namely that 'gender ideology, today, is one of the most dangerous ideological colonizations' (Mares 2023). Such theocrats and connected actors draw ideological power from religious doctrines to push campaigns to criminalise LGBTQI+ sexuality (such as in Uganda, Kenya, or Russia) and/or portray it as immoral (as in Egypt or Turkey), or doggedly protect personal status laws subordinating women, as, for example, in Lebanon, Pakistan, and India, trading in narratives that privilege some bodies' rights over others, such as the 'right to life' of the unborn.

A plethora of actors involved include certain men's rights groups (discussed immediately below) and more diffuse communities across the online 'manosphere' who engage in a highly reactive mode of backlash body politics. In response to increasing debates over gender-based violence, they mete out and trivialise misogynistic violence, as well as symbiotically engage in highly marketised cultural promotion of racialised hypermasculinity and femininity (Shaw 2018). Tapping into such hate-fuelled frustrated male entitlement, right-wing parties, political leaders, and militant, religious, and far-right groups opportunistically join a broader pushback against sexual and reproductive bodily rights. Examples of this include rolling back abortion rights in the United States (US) and some European Union countries, through the US global 'gag rule' reducing access to contraception in the global South, or through the 2017 amendment to the Child Marriage Restraint Act in Bangladesh.

Binary backlash narratives about sexed bodies (reducing the social complexity of gender relations and identities to bodily biological sex, or the meaning of 'woman' to 'female') are complemented by a globally resonant hallowing of supposedly traditional families, fundamentally patriarchal and hierarchical. Men's rights groups have a long history of reactive anti-feminism, with aggrieved fathers resisting domestic change arising from women's improved rights and status (Jordan 2016) and reported crises of masculinity from the loss of traditional male breadwinner roles (Halperin-Kaddari and Freeman 2016). Save Indian Family Foundation (SIFF) describes itself as a 'Men's Rights Organisation [sic]' which 'seeks to protect men and their families from... social experiments', on a mission to 'expose... large-scale violations of... Human Rights in the name of women's empowerment' (SIFF n.d.). Being a clear example of what Lewin (2021) refers to as the capture and repurposing of apparently progressive discourse, Srimati Basu (2016: 49) argues that SIFF's messaging reflects deep anxieties over marriage which she sees as central to 'the current crisis of the gender order in India, a "crisis of masculinity" [where] marriage features at the core'. At a global level, whilst headquartered in the US, the World Congress of Families 'opposes same-sex marriage, pornography, and abortion, while supporting

a society built on "the voluntary union of a man and a woman in a lifelong covenant of marriage" (World Congress of Families, International Organization for the Family & Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society 2002–2022).

This trend has long received proactive leadership and support from powerful Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Hindu, and other religious organisations, and the symbolic trope of 'family values' has been central in aspiring/ambitious theocrats' proactive rapprochement and occasional challenges to state power, which had, over the twentieth century, gradually secularised governance in many countries. For example, despite same-sex marriage being legal in England and Wales since March 2014, the head of the Church of England, Archbishop Justin Welby, told some Muslim UK students that 'marriage is between one man and one woman for life and sexual activity should be confined to marriage, that's in the Church of England's laws' (Selby 2015). But there is also more subtle collusion from neoliberal institutions and interests (including within the development sector) to effectively domesticate or privatise the social costs of care through women-only economic empowerment and 'women-as-mothers' social protection approaches, to obfuscate the unpaid care economy. In Turkey, Deniz Kandiyoti (2016: 106) describes this as a 'marriage of convenience between neoliberal welfare and employment policies and (neo)-conservative familialism', and a new form of 'family mainstreaming' policy is increasingly linking family and nation in, for example, Hungary, Poland, and Turkey (Moghadam and Kaftan 2019).

Narratives of the nation, then, also run deep in backlash politics, complementing the binary visions of bodies in docile domesticity within hierarchical families, by creating coherent categories of patriotic peoples. Despite the transnational organising of anti-feminist movements, national framings predominate strongly in their politics. We see ethnonationalists, neofascists, and paramilitary organisations proactively pushing for revival of national identity to strengthen national boundaries and military defence, or to rebuild old empires – American, Ottoman, Slavic, or Hindu. Resonant anti-feminist jingoistic narratives are also deployed in formerly colonised countries and framed as anti-colonial national regeneration projects, even if drawing on broader regional identities and/or faith-based ideologies, such as Africanism (Otieno and Makabira, this *IDS Bulletin*) or Hinduism (Das *et al.*, this *IDS Bulletin*).

Populist political parties and authoritarian leaders opportunistically draw on such sentiments to promote culturally specific racialised forms of male supremacy, using hypermasculine nationalist rhetoric. The masculinist ethnonationalism of the Indian ruling party presents majoritarian Hindu communities as being under threat from insider/outsider Others, especially Muslims (Das *et al.*, *ibid.*), and proffers a virilising project to restore the

nation, whilst turning towards authoritarianism with increasing restrictions on civil society and civil rights (Chigateri and Kundu, this *IDS Bulletin*). There are also strong links between the nation and capital, as hyper-capitalists seek deregulation of international capital flows and to dismantle multilateral frameworks on fiscal regulation and taxation, or worker and environmental protection or rights.

4 Cartographies of connected conflicted concurrence

In contemplating the resonant yet conflicted concurrence and connections in backlash across vastly diverse countries, the current tide of intensified patriarchal politics can increasingly be seen as an epochal shift at a rather fundamental level, pertaining to the age-old question of the evolution of patriarchy itself.

Whilst attempting to undress patriarchy and to follow Nancy Fraser's (2009) call to excavate the deep structures of gender injustice, which she explored within a three-dimensional view of 'social totality' – seeking economic redistribution, political representation, and sociocultural recognition for women – I proposed that we need to focus more directly on the underlying patriarchal features of societal orders (Edström 2014). The proposal was to search for the deeper structures of patriarchy through four dimensions (*ibid.*), after which a fifth was added (Edström, Singh and Shahrokh 2016); i.e. as: materially male privileged, socioculturally male centred, ideologically/politically male supremacist, and ethno-historically male identified, as well as epistemologically 'male ordered' (through a kind of reductive and peculiarly patriarchal Foucauldian power-knowledge). Yet at least three dilemmas remain. First, how do we account for intersectionality if it is gendered patriarchal? Second, how do we connect diverse national or regional variants geographically? Third, how do we explain backlash in relation to change in gender orders themselves? Reflecting on the above analysis, these deeper questions are raised here to consider three hopefully fruitful turns for further investigations.

The first question about intersectionality might be addressed by taking a decolonial turn, to tease out the multi-perspectival experiences of being in the world and understandings of our histories, which get exploited in backlash. This is connected to our sense of futurity and Anthony Giddens' (1991) notion of 'ontological security' with its associated psycho-sexually-to-socially supercharged potency of affect (Strick 2019). Our proposed ethno-historical dimension of Male³ identification (Edström *et al.* 2016), inspired by Simone de Beauvoir (1949) and other French feminists, can help us locate the role of ontological insecurity for affective identification, particularly when linked to intersectionally contested ideals of masculinity (Rich 2021; Das *et al.*, this *IDS Bulletin*). As touched on previously, we have seen plenty of resonant examples of backlash protagonists' deployment of notions of peoples' histories (contested as those are) and myths

of origins, which intersectionally shape their/our sense of identity, security, and place in the world, useful for backlash protagonists in Othering minorities and 'misfits'. Indeed, today's variegated politics of backlash are typically patriarchal and male identifying in ways that are already racialised, classed, and sexualised.

The second question about interconnected regional diversity might be approached by taking more of a spatial turn, to think critically about geographic levels of place, local to global. This analysis hinges on powerful protagonists within patriarchal orders responding to complex multilevel and interacting crises, by deploying David Harvey's (2001) notion of the 'spatial fix' to secure down order in the face of crises.⁴ In a sense, bodies, families, and nations can be related to levels, most obviously from the local to the national (except when we transgress various boundaries and borders, as more of us increasingly do). Yet this spatial fixing is not purely geographic, but also about social ordering, so we can equally relate the three sites to socioecological levels (from internal/individual and interpersonal to collective/communal to institutional and structural to ideological superstructure), and this may help explain the importance of symbolism in this spatial fixing; the sites are contested **because** of their symbolic power for ordering social relations.

But why not also focus on other symbolic sites ripe for spatial fixing? Think of the temple/church/mosque as a symbolically gendered (and gendering) meeting place for community (or contested religious sites), cemeteries (being desecrated in ethnic conflicts), or schools (Should they be secular or faith-based? Should they teach gender and sexuality, or perhaps creationism?) or, indeed, faith-based health services, and so forth (as new forms of gendering coloniality). Perhaps such analyses will also prove fruitful but, whilst also spatial and relatable to levels (whether geographic or socioecological) in similar ways, such sites also become increasingly institutional, which brings new analytical possibilities as well as likely a need for additional conceptual tools.

A major difference – and reason for focusing on the body–family–nation triad – is that the latter appears universally personal, intimate, and emotive, whereas gendered contestations over these other social institutions are perhaps more context specific. We should also make clear that the symbolic sites in focus here, imbricated in a type of spatial thinking, are different from types of policy issues, or deliberative political spaces where movements articulate voice, including their agendas and tactics (Nazneen, this *IDS Bulletin*), which may also be more appropriately linked to the latter types of social and political institutions.

Finally, then, the third and age-old question of how patriarchy survives and evolves might be linked to backlash and re-broached in a more deconstructivist turn. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) foregrounded the role of multiple

interdependent ideals of – and configurations of practices of – ‘masculinities’ as central to sustaining and evolving gender orders. They deploy Gramsci’s notion of hegemony to explain how configurations of ‘blocs’ of such masculinities – organised hierarchically – secure consent through incentives, rewards, and cajolement, but also through competition and violence when required. Gramsci (1971: 169–70) described hegemony from a ‘dual perspective... corresponding to the dual nature of Machiavelli’s Centaur – half animal and half human...[,] the levels of force and consent’.⁵ At the systemic level then, arguably patriarchal backlash reveals the moment of the Centaur’s brutish kick.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) also explain the coexistence of geographically diverse masculinities by describing national-to-regional-to-global interconnected and overlapping blocs of hegemonic masculinities. To some degree, this may help us to understand the interconnectedness and historical concurrence of backlash in so many places at a time of seeming interlocking crises. Yet we also need to link this to specific types of actors, interests, mechanisms, and material or other resources as structurally embedded, as discussed in the sections above.⁶

When it comes to the question of how consent to and support of backlash can be secured through the violent kick of backlash, we need to go beyond an analysis of actors and cultural and material interests and resources. The above discussion of exploitation of ontological insecurity to mobilise affect for Othering minorities and for identification may explain a large part. Yet we also need to account for how this oppressive racialised, classed, and sexualised gender order is naturalised and made to seem obvious or natural to so many. The more invisible epistemological dimension of Male order power-knowledge can help us here. The earlier (Edström 2014) proposal to explore this dimension provisionally characterised Male order ‘as: discriminating and reductive ..., abstract and binary (including gender binary, thus phallogocentric), homogenising and categorising...’ (*ibid.*: 119). This can then help us interpret how the three symbolic sites are used to re/naturalise three deep-level patriarchal principles: phallogocentric binary (body), hierarchical (family), and categorical closed-systems (nation) logics. Indeed, Maria Lugones (2010: 742) also identifies just such a tripartite ‘categorical, dichotomous, hierarchical logic’ as being ‘central to modern, colonial, capitalist thinking about race, gender, and sexuality’.

Many will recognise this kind of epistemological orientation as one of a Western logical positivist or empiricist bent, reifying natural and formal sciences. As briefly mentioned in the opening of section 3, backlash in body politics devalues social sciences and reifies natural sciences, but this also draws on a long history of subordination of the supposedly less hard sciences, under the more hegemonic and robustly masculine disciplines within academia. For instance, Steven Shapin (2022: 287) traces the

history of the common 'distinction between the "hard" and "soft" ..., widely invoked to contrast the natural and the social sciences', noting 'that it was good to be "hard"'. Exploring the drivers of the distinction and 'academic efforts to give the contrast coherent meaning', he also links the promotion of this duality-to-resource distribution for sciences (involving commercial and military interests), noting that the distinction is less secure today than it was in the 1960s–1970s (*ibid.*: 289). He notes how the 'gendered aspect of the distinction is quite clear, as are the historically situated relative values placed on the hard and the soft that trade on attitudes to gender' (*ibid.*: 290), which helps us to link this binary to the gender binary in a supremacist/subordinating way. He also links the distinction to 'other pertinent social distinctions – for example... the master and the servant, the powerful and the powerless' (*ibid.*), naturalising racialised and classed social hierarchy.

5 Conclusion

The myriad phenomena of patriarchal backlash across the globe today are no simple reaction to advances in the status of women, but rather a complex constellation of political, economic, and cultural forces and protagonists responding – reactively, pre-emptively, proactively, and opportunistically – to threats and opportunities wrought by apparent perfect storms of concurrent global crises, collapsing across spatial levels to threaten or unsettle our most intimate lives. Apprehension or angst over crises and uncertain futures – or ontological insecurity and identity crises, including racialised, classed, and sexualised crises of masculinity – are disruptively exploited through divisive gendered Othering, forcing binary choices to mobilise affinity with – and support for – backlash politics. Being about far more than women's rights, this is still very patriarchal at the core, simultaneously always classed, racialised, and sexualised. Deeply potent – both symbolically and practically – gender is always politicised in such politics in order to weave divisive narratives and tropes about our bodies, families, and nations. In order to control these unruly symbolic sites, backlash politics offers illusions of order amidst chaos.

Fraught with contradictions, backlash is both mythically nostalgic and defiantly nihilistic. It gets framed as local struggles against the foreign/global, whilst being transnationally connected (and often resourced). It converges as united against a purportedly political 'gender ideology' but is itself deeply politicising gender whilst deflecting from the conflicting interests of diverse protagonists and their followers. A better understanding of backlash is essential for building the critical consciousness needed for meaningful strategies to counter it. We must expose the contradictions, trace the links between the various types of actors, their typical narratives on bodies, families, and nations, and how the politics plays out at different levels. Any strategic approach to countering backlash holistically will demand an understanding of the bigger picture and deeper problem.

Notes

- * This *IDS Bulletin* was produced as part of the Countering Backlash: Reclaiming Gender Justice programme, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The opinions are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the funder.
- 1 Jerker Edström, Research Fellow, Institute of Development Studies, UK.
 - 2 **CitizenGO** is an ultraconservative transnational advocacy group headquartered and founded a decade ago in Madrid, Spain. It claims to have over 18 million active members 'stopping radical lobbies imposing their agendas on societies'.
 - 3 Whilst it may look odd to capitalise ordinary phrases such as 'Male supremacy' and 'Male privilege', I have taken de Beauvoir's (1949) lead from her capitalising 'Male identification' (as she does 'Othering'), because of its central function in the argument. This is very much so for 'Male order' which will be a new term for many readers, so I capitalise the 'Male' through all dimensions.
 - 4 I am particularly indebted to Alan Greig for suggesting David Harvey's notion of the 'spatial fix' of the symbolic sites to resecure – or fix down – order and rule in our article (Edström *et al.* 2024).
 - 5 Machiavelli (1532) had, in *Il Principe*, of course borrowed the metaphor from Greek mythology, where the Centaur – half-horse, half-man – coached Achilles in lethal military skills along with humane kindness and charismatic leadership.
 - 6 Of course, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) did not focus on backlash as such, since their article was written before the onset of the current tide of anti-feminism, at a time of a more secure neoliberal 'consensus'.

References

- Basu, S. (2016) 'Looking through Misogyny: Indian Men's Rights Activists, Law, and Challenges for Feminism', *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 28.1: 45–68
- Caldwell, S. (2023) '**Pope Benedict Predicted Gender Ideology Would Be Final Rebellion Against God**', *Catholic Herald*, 18 May (accessed 3 November 2023)
- Connell, R.W. and Messerschmidt, J.W. (2005) 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept', *Gender and Society* 19.6: 829–59
- Corredor, E.S. (2019) 'Unpacking "Gender Ideology" and the Global Right's Antigender Countermovement', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 44.3: 613–38
- Datta, N. (2021) ***Tip of the Iceberg: Religious Extremist Funders Against Human Rights for Sexuality and Reproductive Health in Europe 2009–2018***, Brussels: European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (accessed 3 November 2023)
- de Beauvoir, S. (1949) *Le deuxième sexe: les faits et les mythes* [*The Second Sex*], trans. by C. Borde and S. Malovany-Chevallier (2010), London: Vintage Books

- Denkovski, D.; Bernarding, N. and Lunz, K. (2021) *Power Over Rights: Understanding and Countering the Transnational Anti-Gender Movement. Volume I*, Berlin: Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy
- Eastin, J. and Prakash, A. (2013) 'Economic Development and Gender Equality: Is There a Gender Kuznets Curve?', *World Politics* 65.1: 156–86
- Edström, J. (2014) '**The Male Order Development Encounter**', *IDS Bulletin* 45.1: 111–23 (accessed 3 November 2023)
- Edström, J.; Das, A. and Dolan, C. (2014) '**Introduction: Undressing Patriarchy and Masculinities to Re-Politicise Gender**', *IDS Bulletin* 45.1: 1–10 (accessed 3 November 2023)
- Edström, J.; Greig, A. and Skinner, C. (2024) '**Patriarchal (Dis)Orders: Backlash as Crisis Management**', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 49.2: 277–309 (accessed 20 November 2023)
- Edström, J.; with Singh, S.K. and Shahrokh, T. (2016) '**Intersectionality: A Key for Men to Break Out of the Patriarchal Prison?**', *IDS Bulletin* 47.5: 57–74 (accessed 3 November 2023)
- Faludi, S. (1991) *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*, London: Chatto & Windus
- Fekete, L. (2019) *White Supremacy, Racial Patriarchy: Two Sides of the Same Coin*, Verso Blog, 27 August (accessed 27 July 2023)
- Fraser, N. (2009) 'Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History', *New Left Review* 56 (March/April): 97–117
- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge: Polity Press
- Gökarksel, B.; Neubert, C. and Smith, S. (2019) 'Demographic Fever Dreams: Fragile Masculinity and Population Politics in the Rise of the Global Right', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 44.3: 561–87
- Graff, A.; Kapur, R. and Walters, S.D. (2019) 'Introduction: Gender and the Rise of the Global Right', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 44.3: 541–60
- Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. by Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith (1992), London: Lawrence and Wishart
- Halperin-Kaddari, R. and Freeman, M.A. (2016) 'Backlash Goes Global: Men's Groups, Patriarchal Family Policy, and the False Promise of Gender-Neutral Laws', *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 28.1: 182–210
- Harvey, D. (2001) 'Globalization and the "Spatial Fix"', *Geographische Revue* 3.2: 23–30
- Jordan, A. (2016) 'Conceptualizing Backlash: (UK) Men's Rights Groups, Anti-Feminism, and Postfeminism', *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 28.1: 18–44
- Kandiyoti, D. (2016) 'Locating the Politics of Gender: Patriarchy, Neo-Liberal Governance and Violence in Turkey', *Research and Policy on Turkey* 1.2: 103–18
- Korolczuk, E. and Graff, A. (2018) 'Gender as "Ebola from Brussels": The Anticolonial Frame and the Rise of Illiberal Populism', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 43.4: 797–821

- Lewin, T. (2021) '**Nothing Is As It Seems: "Discourse Capture" and Backlash Politics**', *Gender and Development* 29.2–3: 253–68 (accessed 3 November 2023)
- Lugones, M. (2010) 'Toward a Decolonial Feminism', *Hypathia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 25.4: 742–59
- Machiavelli, N. (1532) *Il Principe [The Prince]*, trans. by T. Parks (2011), London: Penguin Classics
- Mansbridge, J. and Shames, S.L. (2008) 'Toward a Theory of Backlash: Dynamic Resistance and the Central Role of Power', *Politics and Gender* 4.4: 623–34
- Mares, C. (2023) '**Pope Francis: Gender Ideology is "One of the Most Dangerous Ideological Colonizations" Today**', *Catholic News Agency*, 11 March (accessed 3 November 2023)
- Moghadam, V.M. and Kaftan, G. (2019) 'Right-Wing Populisms North and South: Varieties and Gender Dynamics', *Women's Studies International Forum* 75 (July): 1–9
- Paternotte, D. and Kuhar, R. (2017) ' "Gender Ideology" in Movement: Introduction', in R. Kuhar and D. Paternotte (eds), *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality*, London: Rowman & Littlefield
- Piscopo, J.M. and Walsh, D.M. (2020) 'Introduction: Symposium, Backlash and the Future of Feminism', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 45.2: 265–78
- Rich, B. (2021) '**Political Extremism, Conflict Identities and the Search for Ontological Security in Contemporary Established Democracies**', *Academia Letters*: 602 (accessed 3 November 2023)
- Rowley, M.V. (2019) 'Anything but Reactionary: Exploring the Mechanics of Backlash', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 45.2: 278–87
- Selby, J. (2015) '**Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby Discusses Gay Rights with Muslim Students: "Who am I to Judge Them for Their Sins?"**', *The Independent*, 24 February (accessed 3 November 2023)
- Shapin, S. (2022) '**Hard Science, Soft Science: A Political History of a Disciplinary Array**', *History of Science* 60.3: 287–328 (accessed 3 November 2023)
- Shaw, D.O. (2018) 'The New Language of Hate: Misogyny and the Alt-Right', in D. Kusá (ed.), *Identities in Flux: Globalisation, Trauma, and Reconciliation*, Bratislava: Kritika & Kontext
- SIFF (n.d.) **FAQs**, Save Indian Family Foundation (accessed 27 July 2023)
- Silberschmidt, M. (2005) 'Poverty, Male Disempowerment, and Male Sexuality: Rethinking Men and Masculinities in Rural and Urban East Africa', in L. Ouzgane and R. Morrell (eds), *African Masculinities: Men in Africa from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present*, New York NY: Palgrave Macmillan
- Strick, S. (2019) 'Right-Wing World-Building: Affect and Sexuality in the "Alternative Right"', in J. Gebhardt, H. Paul and U. Prutsch (eds), *The Comeback of Populism: Transatlantic Perspectives*, Heidelberg: Universitaetsverlag Winter

Townsend-Bell, E. (2020) 'Backlash as the Moment of Revelation',
Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 45.2: 287–94
World Congress of Families, International Organization for the
Family & Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society
(2002–2022) **Web Archive**, Library of Congress (accessed
27 July 2023)