

Grounding cosmopolitanism: Theory and practice through the prism of women's rights

The project will explore the outstanding question – both theoretical and practical - of how to live together in diversity through the prism of women's activism in polarized societies. In so doing, we will engage cosmopolitanism which has become a major framework for meeting the challenge of managing difference. At the heart of the cosmopolitan framework is a dilemma to which women's issues speak in multi-faceted ways. On one hand, it is argued that we can live together by recognizing our common humanity; on the other, particularities, thick solidarities, and conflict mark everyday politics, calling into question our capacity for engaging the 'Other.'

Recognizing this, we pose a crucial and underexplored question with regard to the cross-cutting cleavages and aspirations that mark women's movements: **How is mutual recognition negotiated?** By seeking to understand the modalities of mutual recognition in practice, our agenda builds on burgeoning research at the nexus of theory and praxis. In so doing, we aim to address one of the most serious criticisms faced by cosmopolitanism - that it does not have much purchase in reality. Specifically, we are interested in the way cosmopolitan aspirations and grounded commitments unite and clash with respect to women's rights which are often cited as a core component of an emerging cosmopolitan canon. Yet, the way(s) they are understood, enacted, and indeed the forms of resistance they generate are deeply informed by particularistic positions. Women's rights therefore represent a promising foil for exploring the tensions involved in the cosmopolitan framework, at once presenting a universal challenge and conjuring up thick significations.

To this end, we are convening an international conference to 1) identify cutting-edge work at the interstices of theory and empirics; 2) learn from empirical studies about how women's rights are practiced, contested, and negotiated; 3) generate insights for theory building and reflect on implications for extant theoretical frameworks; and 4) facilitate dialogue between leading theorists, scholars conducting fieldwork, and activists. In this way, we aim to establish a sustained network and platform to explore the relationship between women's rights and cosmopolitanism in our shrinking, fragmenting world.

Select conference proceedings may be published in a special edition of *Women's Studies International Forum* following a second event in the United States. The events are being realized in collaboration with the Istanbul Policy Center, the Center for the Study of the Middle East, and the University of Tennessee College of Law.

The themes that will be explored in the conference include but are not strictly limited to:

- What are the experiences of women's movements in polarized societies (e.g. Turkey, Spain, northern Ireland, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Bosnia-Herzegovina...) In such contexts, what are the sources of cleavages? In what instances do they become more pronounced? How does it impact women's mobilization?

- What do we learn from the dramatic mobilizations in the Arab world and the CIS in recent years in terms of women's rights and roles in the process of democratization? How much do women's rights figure in public debates and election campaigns? How are women's issues constructed? Are there any explicit or implicit references to cosmopolitan ideas and the universality of women's rights?
- How do women's groups position themselves vis-à-vis ethnic, cultural, religious and national ties and commitments?
- To what extent do women's rights groups perceive European values about gender issues as universal? Are they contested? Are they empowering?
- What strategies do they use to engage the global/European women's movement? How do they establish and use transnational links?
- What resistance do women encounter? What kinds of patriarchal strategies exist? How is patriarchy manifested differently in different contexts? What are the implications for understanding tensions between particularistic attachments and cosmopolitan commitments?
- How is mutual recognition possible? How is it negotiated in practice?
- Are cosmopolitan solidarities an oxymoron?

Timeline

4 January: Abstract Submission Deadline

11 January: Notification of authors

1 March: Deadline for papers

18-19 March: Conference

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