‘They Put You in a False Dichotomy’: In Search of Conceptual Diversity Through the Spanish ‘Anti-Gender’ Landscape

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CHAPTER 11

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Introduction

The Greek mythological figure of Procrustes, also known as *the stretcher*, was a bandit from Attica who offered hospitality to strangers passing by the busy road next to his house. He would give them food and allow them to rest on an iron bed. When guests were asleep, he would then either stretch their body or hammer their legs off until they would fit the frame,

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leading to their death. The Bed of Procrustes has become an allegory for the arbitrary (and sometimes violent) stretching of something to make it fit a given standard. In academia, it is not uncommon to deploy stretching manoeuvres to make a concept fit a desired purpose, which can make it possible to explore a phenomenon further but also risks creating partial or fictitious accounts of both phenomena and their explanatory or analytical concepts. This has also happened, at times, for the various concepts which circulate in academia, activist circles, and the media in relation to 'anti-gender' mobilisations, such as opposition to feminist, women's, and LGBTQ+ issues, or sexual and reproductive rights. Concepts like 'anti-gender', 'antifeminist', 'anti-trans', and 'anti-gender ideology' enable fruitful theorisations about distinct aspects of these rapidly evolving transnational phenomena. But there is also a tendency for the people who constitute these phenomena to disappear from processes of conceptualisation or categorisation, the risk of which is that disparate lived experiences and complex issues become conflated for the purpose of neatly fitting an argument. This, in turn, impacts the ability of conceptual language to make sense of the 'messiness' of what is happening.

We have ourselves been stuck with this conundrum, wondering what concepts work best, and then struggling to make them work for all the varied situations that we have encountered in the field. Whilst there are highly significant examples of organised campaigns influenced by powerfully coordinated transnational actors such as the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Christian Right, we have also encountered far less organised people who actively disavow relationships with organised religion and the far right and who vociferously disassociate themselves from other apparently 'anti-gender' issues or groups. In relation to our own work, and in conversation with one another, we have asked: how can we make sense of disparate realities across national contexts? What concepts help us to understand movements that are characterised by contradictory dynamics; being often both highly localised yet with transnational links, with varying organisational structures and fluctuating issues-based alliances? Can and should the concept of 'anti-gender', for instance, account for oppositions to LGBTQ+ rights, and particularly those of trans people, within feminism? What unites opponents of 'gender ideology' when some defend LGBT rights whilst rejecting feminism, yet others appropriate feminism for cis-gendered women only? What shapes global right-wing networks with significantly disparate degrees of inclusion, rejection, and instrumentalisation of LGB(T) rights? How are oppositions to feminism and

queerness shaped differently across the political spectrum and between localised sites? Questions like these have encouraged our thinking about the implications of stretching and mangling different concepts to fit the disparate groups and individuals we come across in our fieldwork. As researchers who uphold feminist epistemological commitments, and in our quest to understand the tangle of localised and transnational connections, we argue for situated knowledges that emerge from empirical investigations, foregrounding and embracing the messiness of the field.

Given its wide recognition amongst researchers, we have used 'anti-gender' as an umbrella concept in this chapter to signify the broad field, which includes a range of mobilisations over sex/gender, sexualities, and sexual and reproductive rights. However, we frequently draw attention to the complexity of this field through the employment of other concepts throughout. David Paternotte and Roman Kuhar describe 'anti-gender movements' as 'the mobilizations and campaigns against gender which have appeared since the late 1990s in several European countries and elsewhere (particularly in Latin America)' (2017, 253). They focus on mobilisations which 'address "gender ideology" or "gender theory" as the root cause of the reforms they want to combat', and they suggest that 'these mobilizations, which have often been studied separately, can be gathered under a single notion' (2017, 253). Concepts like 'anti-LGBT' or 'anti-trans' reference the specific ideas and practices of those who might not necessarily oppose other areas of gender, feminism, and/or sexuality. Whilst we have found all these concepts to be enlightening, we suggest that to make sense of the varied mobilisations around gender and sexuality, more inductive approaches are needed that make use of empirical evidence. In this regard, we find particular forms of in-depth qualitative research useful as they allow us to deepen our understanding of localised complexities, whilst identifying how transnational links operate and are integrated with everyday lives. We are particularly interested in sustained and situated studies which can take a variety of forms, including life stories, ethnography, in-depth interviews, and action research. For the purpose of this chapter, we relate our discussion of the processes of conceptualisation to explorative in-depth qualitative data collected in Spain. We begin by situating the reader within this national context and its historical particularities, before addressing some of the key findings in relation to the conceptualisation of these mobilisations. We consider how situated knowledge production furthers the field of anti-gender studies in its examination of the entanglement between the local and the transnational.

Gender and Sexuality in Spain

Spanish mobilisations against women's and LGBTQ+ rights have taken shape in response to strong social movements that achieved significant legislative changes in the country, particularly under the governments of Presidents Zapatero (2004–2011) and Sánchez (2018–present).[1] The Spanish feminist movement has gained increasing visibility and is characterised by its interconnectivity through online platforms, its fight for sexual and reproductive rights, and against gender-based violence. Several landmarks were key to its recent history, such as the 2013–2014 *El tren de la libertad* (Freedom Train) movement to oppose the conservative government's proposed restrictions to abortion rights (Suárez Suárez 2022). In 2016, the so-called *La Manada* (Wolfpack) gang rape case led to massive demonstrations across the country, as a result of the light sentences given to the perpetrators of the filmed rape of an 18-year-old woman (Cabana et al. 2018). Organised at the same time as the global *#metoo* movement, the marches took place under the motto and hashtag *#Yositecreo* (I believe you) to demand legislative changes and to question the judges' ability to understand sexual violence. In the years that followed, feminist mobilisations for International Women's Day on 8th March grew substantially (Galdón Corbella 2018).

Likewise, Spain's LGBTQ+ rights continue to be contested, yet experienced significant improvements after the 1970s transition to democracy, with a shift from prohibition and persecution to protection against certain hate crimes and the securing of rights, such as same-sex marriage and adoption, and improvements in trans rights (Martínez 2017; Noriega 2023). Whilst internationally Spain is often situated at the forefront in terms of LGBTQ+ rights, this view often disregards active resistance, as well as Spain's comparatively underdeveloped hate crime laws (Gorostiza and Carrera 2018). The latter has become evident in the killing of Samuel Luiz, who was beaten to death in July 2021 (Jones 2021). Despite clear evidence pointing to a homophobic hate crime, the hate element was initially discarded in the police investigation, leading to significant protests around the country. That said, the evolution of Spanish anti-gender mobilising can only be understood through the lens of its repressive history.

[1] At the time of writing.

Historicising Spain's 'Anti-Gender' Movements

When Franco died in 1975, Spain transitioned from a dictatorship of so-called National Catholic ideology into a parliamentary democracy yet kept much of its former legacy untouched. The transition was led by members of the dictatorship's apparatus, through agreements that buried the past without room for social justice for the victims of the Civil War (1936–1939) and the cruel repression that followed. Many former Francoist politicians would later find their place in the political party *Partido Popular* (PP), which encompassed the country's right-wing spectrum almost in its entirety, and represented many of the preoccupations of the Spanish far right (Urbán 2015). During Zapatero's ostensibly progressive government, the PP organised marches against same-sex marriage, against the reform of the abortion law, and against proposals to increase the protection for women in cases of gender-based violence. In 2004, with the imminent passing of the Spanish law for same-sex marriage, the country saw some of the earliest mass demonstrations in Europe against gay and lesbian rights (Paternotte and Kuhar 2018).

In 2013, Santiago Abascal left the PP—which had returned to government under President Mariano Rajoy—to co-found the far-right party Vox and mobilise a population disenchanted with the PP through a more extreme discourse. Before Vox, the Catholic Church had initially played a significant role in the mobilisations against same-sex marriage during the early 2000s (Aguilar Fernández 2010). However, with the election of Pope Francis and his announced distancing from the sexual conservatism of his predecessors (Sgró Ruata and Vaggione 2017), the Spanish Catholic Church lessened its visible role in organising activism against women's and LGBTQ+ rights. Other organisations, such as the *Foro español de la familia* (Spanish Family Forum), *Abogados Cristianos* (Christian Solicitors), several anti-abortion groups and the ultra-Catholic organisation *HazteOir* (Make Yourself Heard) remained determined in their activism (Cornejo and Pichardo Galán 2017). HazteOir has openly encouraged its followers to vote Vox (Urbán 2019) and is responsible for various media campaigns, including the circulation of two buses with banners against both trans rights and gender-based violence laws. The campaigns were later exported into other Spanish-speaking countries like Chile (Troncoso and Stutzin 2019) and translated into English for their circulation in US cities (La Vanguardia 2017).

Emerging (Trans)national Synergies

Whilst Spanish anti-gender movements are largely centred around localised issues, they are also interconnected through cross-border collaborations. Key Spanish anti-gender actors, such as the president of HazteOir, Ignacio Arsuaga, the former ministry of the interior Jaime Mayor Oreja, and the leader of Vox, Santiago Abascal, regularly attend international events. These include events organised by the conservative Christian organisation World Congress of Families, which advocates against abortion rights and same-sex marriage, or events run by the Political Network for Values, which operates with a similar agenda. In 2013, HazteOir launched the online platform CitizenGo, which has been recognised as an essential tool in the running of antifeminist campaigns in various European countries (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017). Another group that receives cross-border influences but which often remains overlooked is what can be considered a Spanish form of 'manosphere' (Ging 2019); a group of mostly far-right social media influencers who focus their content on advocacy for 'men's rights', against feminism and sometimes against what they call the 'LGBT lobby'. They are active on platforms that are looser in the regulation of their content, such as YouTube, and right-wing forums like *Forocoches*. Beyond (far-)right mobilisations, in recent years, transphobic voices have also gained traction in left and feminist spaces. Some of the leading Spanish feminists met at a 2019 conference, where they joked about and questioned trans people (Assiego 2019). A year later, the long-standing feminist activist Lidia Falcón had found a new ally in the newspaper *Actuall*, run by HazteOir/CitizenGo, where she published a piece questioning trans rights (Falcón 2020). The far right was quick in praising Falcón, and in 2022, she appeared in a debate organised by Vox about the purported negative effects a new law on trans rights would have for children and cis women (Rivera Barrera 2022). In what follows, it is precisely these contradictions, apparent inconsistencies, and strange alliances that we will explore in more detail, to argue for situated knowledges and conceptual diversity in the field of anti-gender studies.

Situated Knowledges

Spain is our point of departure, though throughout this chapter we commit to a co-constitutive, relational understanding of 'the' local and transnational. The empirical work we draw on here was conducted by Marcel between September 2019 and May 2020. The wider project involved in-depth semi-structured interviews, research on social media, and participant observation at a variety of events organised by Spanish anti-gender actors, such as conferences, seminars, demonstrations, rallies, and film screenings. Research was mostly carried out in Madrid, given that the city concentrates large parts of anti-gender activism, but included a few other Spanish locations. Whilst some links between Spanish anti-gender actors exist, the difficulty of doing research with them lies in their loose organising throughout the country, creating the methodological challenge of performing multi-sited research of disparate groups. The project was openly presented to participants as a study into critical positions towards 'gender ideology' and 'feminism', and participants received an information sheet and signed a consent form. Participants were able to withdraw after an interview—but none did—and all names and identifiable data were anonymised. Here, we primarily draw on interviews with participants. Our collaborative analysis of the Spanish data presented in this chapter is also informed by Liz's experience of conducting research in the UK and Ireland as part of a transnational study into oppositions over gender, sexualities, and reproductive rights. During 2020 and 2021, Liz conducted observations at online events and held 70 semi-structured interviews with people who identified themselves as concerned about either abortion, marriage equality, gender identity, trans inclusive policies, cis women's rights, or teaching about LGBTQIA+ relationships in schools, among others.

Through examples from the Spanish field, we aim to shed light on the significance that in-depth qualitative research has for bringing out the complexity and the perspectives of anti-gender and antifeminist actors. Whilst we provide some examples of methods we find useful, we are deliberately inclusive in our call for 'in-depth qualitative research methods'. This is because we argue the key lies in *situated*, *in-depth*, and *sustained* research and the suitability of particular methods may vary for different contexts and research designs. We therefore acknowledge Haraway's (1988) epistemological approach of situated knowledges, to both recognise and refute the masculinist tradition of knowledge production and its

search for objectivity, and to call for the study of anti-gender through localised and embodied case studies. Furthermore, we consider how participants mobilise their own knowledges and understandings of their lives, including how they conceptualise and delegitimise feminism and LGBTQ+ issues, and how they link them with matters like migration.

Everyday Negotiations of 'Anti-Gender' Mobilisations

In Spain, whilst the concept 'anti-gender' is useful in analytic terms, *antifeminista* (antifeminist) is predominantly used by activists themselves instead of 'anti-gender', given that most activism operates around concerns over cis women's rights. As Hark and Villa (2017, 26, our translation) suggest, 'in contrast to the forerunners of antifeminism, today's attacks are no longer mostly centred around contesting feminism and the political idea of equality. The argumentative line is not that women* cannot be equal in rights because they are different in nature, but that women* and men* are equal in rights, yet different in nature'.[2] This, they argue, has led to a shift from an opposition to feminism to one against the academic concept of 'gender'. According to Maihofer and Schutzbach (2017), despite this shift, antifeminist and anti-gender arguments can coexist, with 'feminism' often being considered the 'lesser evil' if compared to 'gender' and 'gender ideology'. Rodríguez-Rondón and Rivera-Amarillo (2020) have observed a similar differentiation in the South American context between 'acceptable feminism'—meaning the fight against the gender pay gap or some forms of gender-based violence—and 'extremist feminism'—namely, the questioning of the gender and sexual order. Whether one ought to conceptualise a particular localised phenomenon as antifeminist or anti-gender therefore depends on both the debates that occur in that local setting and the focus of the researcher. Reflecting the complexity of the research settings we have experienced, Bonet-Martí (2020, 65, our translation) additionally suggests that because antifeminism is 'diverse and complex, and changes historically and geographically', it is more adequate to speak about 'antifeminisms' in plural.

We have witnessed a range of identifications and dis-identifications with feminism among the so-called antifeminist movement in Spain, with individual actors occupying a range of positions both in relation to being

[2] The asterisks in the original in German highlight the social construction of gender and makes explicit the inclusion of anyone identifying with a given gender.

proponents of antifeminist ideas and often self-identifying as *antifeministas*. Pablo[3] is a participant in his 50s who is involved in various initiatives that define themselves as 'antifeminist' and who expressed some alliance with gay and lesbian groups that he perceived to be equally negatively impacted by feminist movements. He describes the multiplicity of antifeminist movements in Spain as originating from a range of backgrounds and covering different political aims, yet who converge around the same end goal of resisting the (perceived) disproportionate influence of women in society. For Pablo, the perception of feminism and feminists as women seeking superiority and ideological dominance has turned many into 'proud' and 'legitimised' antifeminists:

> There are a variety of antifeminist currents and all of them are valid, and in the end they all converge in their aim of eliminating the excessive power it [feminism] has. (Pablo)[4]
>
> I think I'm one of the most radical antifeminists because I see feminism as totalitarianism, I mean, more than as an ideology, as a religion […] a totalitarian religion, because it tries to control all aspects of life. (Pablo)

Whilst Pablo will contentedly wear the label 'antifeminist', Bea, a regional member of parliament for the far right, feels misrepresented by such a term, describing the frustration she feels being categorised as 'antifeminist' and old-fashioned when she disagrees with some aspects of feminism:

> […] they ['social justice warriors'] try to criminalise you, and the moment you are critical of certain things it turns out that you are critical of everything and that's not true. They put you in a false dichotomy: you either find feminism wonderful, or you are an antifeminist *señora*. (Bea)

Bea's concern is shared by Ismael, a YouTuber active in Spanish 'masculinist' or 'manosphere' communities, who profoundly disagrees with being called *antifeminista*. Whilst many of his ideas correspond with misogynist and antifeminist traits, in his videos he describes himself as standing for 'real equality' and therefore feels himself to be a feminist, yet not someone who follows 'mainstream' feminism. His identification with feminism problematises the notion that what unites people like Pablo,

[3] Participants' names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

[4] All quotes have been translated from Spanish by Marcel.

Bea, and Ismael is that they are 'anti'-something. Bea and Ismael regard themselves not so much as standing against feminism, but in support for 'real equality', in line with Gunnarsson Payne and Tornhill's (2021) argument that we should refrain from understanding anti-gender as merely oppositional. Instead, examples like Pablo and Ismael show the range of different (dis-)identifications with feminist ideas and identities, therefore problematising any notion of a homogenous or united antifeminist movement.

Ismael also reflected on the kind of people that make up his audience and why they are drawn to his channel, stating that viewers were not just men or those on the (far) right, but included people from the LGBT community. He emphasised an apparent synchronicity between what we describe as an antifeminist position and what he perceived to be frustrations from LGBT audience members:

> Many of my followers are homosexual, lesbian, bisexual, or trans. […] This idea that all LGBT groups are in favour of feminism and advocate for it is completely wrong. It's the image that we are sold but it doesn't show the reality, which, to the contrary, sees increasing tension between LGBT and feminist groups. (Ismael)

Ismael suggests that what he perceives as increasing differences between so-called 'mainstream' feminism and LGBT issues have distanced some of his LGBT viewers from feminism entirely, driving them to connect with people like himself, who might ordinarily be considered a strange ally. In particular, he identifies the hostility from some feminists towards trans people as alienating some LGBT people from feminism(s) and towards certain antifeminist positions:

> [T]here are more and more feminists against transsexuality […] and it's not two or three random ones, but many of the key feminists in Spain are TERFs [Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminists]. (Ismael)

These 'key feminists in Spain', such as Lidia Falcón, question trans people and the LGBTQ+ community more broadly from an explicitly trans-exclusionary feminist perspective. In contrast, both Pablo and Ismael indicated some acknowledgement of, and support for, sexual and gender diversity whilst simultaneously disavowing and delegitimising mainstream feminism's perceived dominance. That said, whilst Ismael was supportive

of LGBT rights without apparent hesitation, Pablo's narrative moved quickly from initially articulating his support for lesbians and gays, to a much harsher view of LGBT activist methods and the supposed imposition of equality measures. His position in favour of equality shifted when he mentioned a concrete example on how gay relationships should be discussed at school.

> They tell you that feminism is equality and that equality is good. And they claim that sexual diversity is good. But, in reality they want to sneak in the message that you must experiment, you must be friends with a gay boy because he's gay and being gay is good. I'm sorry! Being gay is something I shouldn't meddle with. You can be whatever you want, and I will learn maths, history, physics, chemistry, and philosophy […] If you want to teach me human rights, teach all of them! (Pablo)

Empirical data also shows the entanglement of anti-gender narratives with other forms of alterity that co-constitute it. Here, Pablo articulates several concerns which are rooted in overlapping homophobic discourses: from his distrust about the motives behind LGBT equality measures ('they want to sneak in the message that you must experiment'); to questioning the assumption that 'being gay is good'; and his exasperation that, to him, LGBT rights seemed to take precedence in schools over teaching more general 'human rights' (see also Rédai; McEwen, this volume).

During interviews, sentiments against gender and sexuality were interwoven with statements towards migrants, yet they manifested in very different and sometimes contradictory ways. For instance, Ismael insisted on one of the key messages that the Spanish far right has capitalised on by spuriously connecting gender violence to increased migration into Spain.

> I believe the latest statistics show that about 42% of murders of women in cases of gender-based violence have been committed by immigrants. I mean, more than 40%, when they are about 10% of male population. So, there is a tremendous disparity, they do it way more than locals! (Ismael)

Here, Ismael repeats the Spanish far right's attempt to lend legitimacy to their arguments by using false or questionable statistics. Whilst he had previously questioned 'mainstream' feminism, his argument now draws on a form of 'femonationalism' (Farris 2017) that seeks to defend (white) women's rights vis-à-vis racialised and othered men (Sager and Mulinari

2018). This is articulated alongside his view that mainstream feminism is 'getting it wrong', enabling him to position himself as a 'real' feminist who stands for 'actual' equality. Elsewhere, though, the link between anti-feminist and anti-immigration sentiments were challenged. Teresa, a young student and anti-abortion activist, spoke about her pro-immigration views alongside her anti-abortion rhetoric. She considered being pro-immigration a logical extension of her 'pro-life' views:

> My ideas about morality, for example the right to live, is way more on the right […] [but] for example, in everything related to immigration I much prefer the socialist view […] If someone comes from outside [Spain], their life has the same value as mine and as the one inside the pregnant mother […] for me the defence of life goes above all, no matter where you are from, the party you represent, […] how you think. (Teresa)

For Teresa, it is not incompatible nor inconsistent to hold a traditionally associated left-wing pro-immigration position whilst also maintaining a traditionally associated right-wing position on abortion. She described how, for her, occupying a 'pro-life' (anti-abortion) position was a 'moral part' that 'goes above all', which she believed should be decoupled from its predominant association with the right. For Teresa, defending the life of the unborn must be inevitably attached to also defending the life of any human being, including migrants who arrive at Spanish borders. Elsewhere in the interview, she also expressed some attachment to the wellbeing of pregnant women, arguing that alternatives to abortion should be found to support women. However, her reference to 'supporting women' is a common trope deployed by the contemporary 'pro-life' (anti-abortion) movement in response to the success of pro-abortion campaigns which centred women's bodily autonomy and rights. Like Pablo, Bea, and Ismael, Teresa illustrates not only the diversity of antifeminist positions in Spain, but the emergence of apparently strange or unlikely alliances (Corrêa et al. 2018) between individuals and groups who may have historically been considered to hold irreconcilable positions. So how best to make sense of these strange alliances, fluctuating connections, and overlaps between people and ideas as they move between localised and transnational forms? In the following section, we explore the potential of in-depth qualitative research to unravel these connections and differences.

Tracing Transnational Connections

In-depth qualitative research has helped us to understand the complex contestations around gender and sexuality as they manifest both locally and transnationally, providing insights into how individuals make sense of discourses around 'gender ideology' and enact antifeminist practices in daily life. Whilst Spain has not seen prominent oppositions to the European Union (EU) or the dominance of anglophone gender theory, some participants expressed admiration for countries which, in their view, have resisted the imposition of gender theory and feminism. Certain national governments, such as Hungary and Poland, became a model to follow because of the limitations imposed on women's and LGBTQ+ rights that have been witnessed over recent years. Whilst the fight against feminism in Spain is very focused on local issues, the account from Adrián, a young student at a private Catholic university, exemplifies how larger international conspiracy theories have also reached Spain and suggests that Spanish anti-gender figures have a shared feeling of transnational alliance with global actors and movements in other countries who share their values.

> [T]he European Union and all of that, […] is full of these people from the New World Order. That's why these politics aren't even presented to states as options. It's an imposition! You either support these politics—like gender ideology, abortion and who knows what—or your funding is gone. […] Imposition! Imposition! Imposition! That's why Hungary and Poland, for example, which are two countries that have opposed much of these ideological things […] have been accused by the Union and been publicly portrayed as totalitarians. (Adrián)

Beyond Adrián's concern for localised issues in Spain, he expresses sympathy for what is happening in other countries, connecting anti-gender conspiracy theories to antisemitic discourses with his reference to a perceived 'New World Order' acting behind the scenes of state power (see Holzberg, this volume). In suggesting that Hungary or Poland have been wrongly penalised by the EU for opposing 'gender ideology', Adrián also reiterates a concern by anti-gender actors from other national contexts; one that conflates the 'imposition' of gender and LGBTQ+ equality frameworks with unwelcome interference in national governance by supranational neoliberal institutions (Graff and Korolczuk 2021; see also McEwen, this volume).

Consuelo, a consecrated laywoman in her 50s working for a bishopric, shared a similar anxiety of the 'imposition' of 'gender ideology' being used as a substantial tool to undermine Spanish democracy, suggesting that the adoption of 'gender ideology' by the state will ultimately lead to flouting the Spanish Constitution and democracy itself:

> I think it will get worse in that… when a state decides to adopt gender ideology as its central ideology, it's because it wants to impose it on everyone. I think that means it's getting worse. When a non-denominational state goes for a specific creed and imposes it through laws, I think that means it's getting worse and it means flouting the Constitution, flouting democracy. That's what I think is disastrous. (Consuelo)

Consuelo echoes Adrián's language of the 'imposition' of unwanted—and, by implication, 'un-Spanish'—'gender ideology', with both their accounts pointing to the 'imposition' process as capable of undoing Spanish sovereignty, autonomy, and democracy. This highlights the need to understand Spanish anti-gender mobilisations in the context of the endurance of conservative Spanish nationalism and its commitment to a 'traditional' gender order. Participants argued that a process of de-democratisation was taking place through the introduction of feminism, merging their individual preoccupations for Spain with those of wider transnational campaigns that warn of a global conspiracy responsible for undoing the traditional heteronormative family and imposing 'gender ideology'. This threat, Adrián suggests, is of a global dimension, with Spain being just one of its victims. Similarly, Pablo argued that Spain is no more than a field of experimentation for the imposition of feminism on a global scale. Hence, participants drew direct connections between their perceptions of transnational processes of 'imposition' and their everyday experiences of localised issues. These examples illustrate the moments when the abstract concerns of participants are solidified into concrete opposition or when a rhetoric of support for equality is overturned in the face of perceived negative material consequences.

In our view, it is through in-depth qualitative research, such as participant observation, that we can best make sense of the messy, localised particularities of anti-gender. We suggest there is a need for more in-depth studies in the field to avoid assumptions about the position and activities of anti-gender activists and supporters. That said, we are aware of the risks associated with ethics and researcher safety when conducting close-up research with anti-gender actors. We maintain that anti-gender studies can produce particularly horrible effects for researchers—which are

experienced differently according to structural inequalities—and more is needed to recognise this in the field and take action to support lone researchers during periods of data collection. We argue that doing anti-gender research requires adequate institutional support, with more resources directed towards supporting researcher emotional wellbeing and the establishment of collective responsibility and accountability frameworks to avoid lone research in this area. Formalised 'collective responsibility and accountability frameworks'—such as access to experienced mentors in the field and the improved availability of, and financial support for, therapy for researchers—would particularly benefit early career researchers. With caring, accountable, and supportive formal measures in place, in-depth qualitative approaches allow researchers to more safely explore the complex local/transnational entanglements of anti-gender actors, which we suggest are far less stable and organised than sometimes imagined. Using an empirical approach that orients itself towards understanding the dynamic relationship between the local and transnational—without losing the specificity of the former—is vital in order to trace connections and differences across time and space. Yet whilst empirical approaches can provide vivid accounts of the 'messiness' of the field of anti-gender mobilisations, we have also seen ourselves reflected in Procrustes' allegory, wondering how to best make use of existing concepts in relation to our data. In the following section, we conclude by considering this conceptual conundrum in greater detail.

Conclusion: An Argument for a Richer Conceptual Landscape

In trying to make sense of disparate movements, organisations, and lived experiences, we have faced the difficulties of naming phenomena and processes of conceptualisation within the field of anti-gender studies. We have tried stretching and chopping concepts and found ourselves on the verge of building our own mythological iron bed, finding it difficult to use the concepts outlined in the introduction to this chapter to account for the overall complexity of the picture. We have struggled to draw on one overriding concept to account for and analyse the disparate participants and their alliances with, for example, a misogynist manosphere that nonetheless claims to support LGB(T) rights; left-wing feminists who question trans rights; and the strange alliances that can occur across the political spectrum in the name of 'gender' or 'sex'. To understand these dynamics,

we therefore needed to draw on the constellation of available concepts and in-depth qualitative research methodologies to confront the paradoxes of sexual and gender politics within the right and beyond (Möser et al. 2022). Yet these have also proved difficult to 'stretch' to fit the Spanish case.

'Anti-gender' has been a primary concept to define an essentialist opposition to a constructivist approach to gender, making a valuable and substantial contribution to the field. The concept has facilitated the necessary expansion of studies focussing on the intensification of these mobilisations with an affinity to the far right and conservative religious movements, and we have ourselves drawn on it throughout this chapter. We believe that this focus on conservative anti-gender movements is highly necessary, yet it can nonetheless serve to disregard anti-gender or antifeminist mobilisations that occur outside of right-wing or conservative sectors. So-called gender critical feminists are actively shaping gender equalities and rights in numerous countries, most frequently with trans lives and bodies as the focal point of scrutiny (Platero 2016; Pearce 2018). Specific feminists, feminisms, and contested invocations of feminist history and futures are deeply implicated in 'gender critical' mobilisations (Camminga 2020; Koyama 2020). In both Spain and the UK, where both authors are located, the most vocal trans opposition comes from highly organised left-wing feminist spaces, with some high-profile 'gender critical' feminists forming alliances with right-wing groups they would otherwise not politically reconcile with.[5] An important aspect that connects trans-exclusionary left-wing feminists and right-wing conservatives is the ontological investment in their certainty that sex is 'real' and gender is 'fake' and that it is therefore 'common sense' to counteract perceived threat to this 'truth' (Hemmings 2020). Wary of stretching the concept of 'anti-gender' to accommodate left-wing anti-trans feminisms, how can we make sense of feminist mobilisations against gender diversity? How can we critique transphobic positions without automatically conflating them with neoconservatism or the far right, particularly when they emerge in left-wing spaces? To better understand and

[5] See, for example, the case of Lidia Falcón discussed earlier in the chapter and that of other known Spanish feminists (https://www.pikaramagazine.com/2019/07/transmisoginia-feminismo), or the division of the Spanish Women's March in 2022, with a smaller parallel demonstration largely driven by anti-trans sentiments: https://www.lavanguardia.com/vida/20220309/8110185/8-m-madrid-division-lujo-ricos.html. In the UK, this is seen in the coalitions of interest between trans exclusionary British feminists and the American far right: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/07/opinion/terf-trans-women-britain.html and https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2019/10/15/gender-critical-posie-parker-interview-jean-francois-gariepy-mumsnet.

account for the relationship between left-wing, feminist, and anti-trans politics, it is vital to consider what it is about the structuring of contemporary feminisms and left-wing politics that allow these coalitions to emerge.

A variety of other useful concepts (i.e. antifeminist, anti-LGBT, anti-trans, or anti-gender ideology) have emerged alongside 'anti-gender' to address contemporary issues around gender and sexuality, yet each concept has its own limitations, localised specificities, and traditions of use. The Spanish case and our Spanish participants clearly indicate the need for a richer conceptual landscape. The Spanish far right have capitalised on their opposition to equality legislation and have been partially successful in re-signifying the term 'equality' amongst their supporters to distort its meaning and claim that they are the ones to stand for gender equality, not feminists. As discussed earlier, participants have suggested that feminists pose a threat to democracy, in contrast with research that has shown that it is anti-gender actors who are part of a process of de-democratisation (Lombardo et al. 2021). To reflect this, it seems more appropriate to employ the term 'antifeminists' to describe these actors. Yet on other occasions the far right has capitalised on an opposition to the notion of gender as a social construct, for instance, to oppose a draft law in 2021 that would improve trans rights in Spain. Equally, manosphere actors occupy varied positions that move between pro-LGBT and misogynist and homophobic views. As discussed earlier, Ismael appeared knowledgeable about LGBT issues whilst pointing to what he believed to be a fake symbiosis between LGBT communities and feminism. So how to best conceptualise antifeminist actors as they move between homophobic rhetoric and apparent LGB(T) inclusivity? We were initially tempted to try to stretch the meaning of 'anti-gender' to include much of the misogynist, transphobic and homophobic narratives that circulated among participants, but we think to do so would be to uncritically conflate its definition with transphobic tendencies within feminism or antifeminist discourses that favour LGB(TQ+) rights. Instead, we call for an awareness of the concept's limitations and its role in overshadowing positions that fall outside its prevailing focus on the right. Our contribution therefore lies in our call for in-depth qualitative research capable of shedding light on local lived experiences as they connect with transnational frameworks, whilst allowing for concepts to emerge that more closely represent what our research has uncovered. Hence, whilst we recognise the common use of 'anti-gender' as an umbrella for this emerging field, rather than straining this concept we propose a richer conceptual constellation to serve as a tool for nuanced research that results in less stretching and cutting manoeuvres.

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