

THE FIGHT TO STUDY GENDER

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The fight to study gender and its impacts is never won for good. Many of us learned that the hard way when Victor Orbán, in Hungary, decided to shut the educational institutions dedicated to the pursuit of the truth about how gender shapes our lives. But the attack on gender studies that Orbán and later Donald Trump has represented also shows us that we are right when we say: studying gender and putting our knowledge to use is always a threat to those who unjustly seek power and oppress their people.

This is because studying, discussing, and fighting (!) over the issues of gender, sexuality, bodies and power always challenges oppression at its roots. Feminists are not afraid of asking difficult questions that can be painful to face head on. Not only for those who oppress us, but also rightly, for ourselves. We often find that we are in situations where we must take a long, hard look at our own privileges, choices and ways of life.

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Looking back on the last 100 years all over the world, it is impossible not to be stunned by the successes of the feminist movement. Over just a few generations, not a single life has not been touched by the fight to live free of oppression on the basis of gender.

But as the case with Orbán and Trump shows, we cannot rest on our laurels. As we celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the Gender Studies Center and the Gender Studies Journal “La Ventana” of the University of Guadalajara, we are also facing a significant backlash. Everywhere there is feminist success, there is pushback. Neoconservative influencers and anti-feminist leaders are gaining on most continents. I think many feminists are scared that we might lose much of what we have gained.

This fear cannot paralyse us or turn us into cynics. It was always thus, the fight for rights and equal access to power. It was never a straight line going up, up, up. We tug and we pull, push and squabble. And this is where the need for knowledge comes in.

Journals like “La Ventana” are crucial to the feminist fight because they create a shared language and an access to knowledge about the structural causes of the injustices of our lives. From sexual abuse to low salaries, women’s suffering has always been assigned to individual factors: What were you wearing? If you deserved higher pay you would have gotten it!

Journals make sense of these experiences and show that they are all connected, that there are words we can use to describe what is happening. And for a long time, that was what women didn’t have: words.

And we are going to need words to fight back and envision new realities. Whatever the next 30 years will bring.