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Backlash and fundamentalism

Shantel Marekera

A summary report of discussions at the 3rd
MenEngage Global Symposium (the Ubuntu
Symposium), 2020-2021



MenEngage Alliance
working with men and boys for gender equality

About the symposium

The 3rd MenEngage Global Symposium represents the most ambitious collective activity that MenEngage Alliance has ever embarked on as an international social change network working to transform patriarchal masculinities and engaging men and boys for gender, social, and climate justice.

The convening (also known as the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium) was adapted from plans to meet for three days in person to a seven-month online event. It was an unprecedented journey for the Alliance and for everyone involved: 5,000-plus registered participants from 159 countries and 600-plus speakers involved in 178 global sessions (plus many more at the regional, country, and local levels).

MenEngage Alliance members and partners came together to take stock of the work being done and assess what is needed going forward. The symposium provided space to share experiences, evidence, and insights on how to effectively challenge and dismantle oppressive patriarchal norms and constructions of masculinities; to identify new goals, frontiers, and strategies; and to create a forum to rearticulate a political agenda that seeks to transform unjust and deeply embedded power structures.

The [Ubuntu Declaration & Call to Action](#) is one of the key outcome documents from the symposium.

About MenEngage Alliance

MenEngage Alliance is an international social change network harnessing the collective energies of its members towards ending patriarchal power and supporting women's rights; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) rights; and human rights—and achieving gender justice and social justice for all.

The Alliance is a space for organisations to come together, in solidarity with those most targeted by gender injustice and patriarchal systems, to collectively dismantle structural barriers to women's rights and gender equality. As a global network, MenEngage Alliance brings together people and organisations with a shared vision of a world in which gender justice and human rights are recognised, promoted, and protected and in which all people are equal and free from discrimination and oppression.

The mission of MenEngage Alliance is to transform unequal power relations and dismantle patriarchal systems by transforming patriarchal masculinities and rigid, harmful norms around 'being a man'; by working with men and boys on gender justice through intersectional feminist approaches; by building inclusive collaborations from the local to regional to global levels; and by developing joint actions in partnership with and accountable to women's rights, gender justice, and other social justice movements.

As members, and as a collective, the Alliance aims towards a shared vision and mission for positive change and to transform unequal power for the benefit of all.

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The patriarchal backlash we're witnessing today is deep, it's insidious, and it's complex. It's both online and offline and has spread deeply into all areas of our lives.

— NIKKI VAN DER GAAG (SENIOR FELLOW, PROMUNDO),
[*BACKLASH, BODY POLITICS AND ONLINE MISOGYNY*](#)

1. Context and problem analysis

This paper aims to consolidate the insights, collective discussions, and recommendations provided by panellists and speakers during the 3rd MenEngage Global Symposium (also referred to as the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium) in a bid to understand the political contexts in which MenEngage Alliance and its partners work. This context is informed by anti-gender politics, accentuated by the global growth of fundamentalist groups and movements and by the increased patriarchal backlash against women's rights and gender equality. The content of this paper is shaped by crosscutting themes identified by MenEngage Alliance and its members to help shape the symposium: intersectionality, feminisms, accountability, 'power with', and transformation. Together, these themes represent the symposium's overarching political framework.

Definitions

Women Against Fundamentalism defines **fundamentalism** as 'a type of modern political movement which uses religion as a base from which to try to gain power and extend social control.'¹ Over the years, 'fundamentalism' has been widely used as an umbrella term for literalist, ultraorthodox movements that derive their identity primarily from a posture of resistance to modern movements they view as threats to their religious doctrines.²

By contrast, the term '**patriarchal backlash**' is heavily contested, and our understanding of the concept is constantly evolving. In her 1991 book *Backlash*, feminist author Susan Faludi defined patriarchal backlash as the outrage, growing conservative resistance, and intense pushback against women's rights and against ideas of gender equality and diversity more broadly. She specifically characterised it as 'an attempt to retract the handful of small and hard-won victories that the feminist movement did manage to win for women.'³

¹ Feldman, R., & Clark, K. (1996). Women, religious fundamentalism and reproductive rights. *Reproductive Health Matters*, 4(8), 12–20.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0968-8080\(96\)90297-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0968-8080(96)90297-9)

² Wenzel, N. G. (2011). Postmodernism and religion. In P. B. Clarke (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of the sociology of religion*.

³ Faludi, S. (1991). *Backlash: The undeclared war against American women* (1st ed.). Crown.

In terms of recent efforts to understand today's patriarchal backlash against gender justice, scholar David Paternotte cautions scholars and activists in the field against reducing such attacks to mere reactions. In fact, Paternotte prefers not to even use the word 'backlash', although he recognises that it offers a framework to examine the advances of the far-right's conservative, anti-feminist, anti-rights movement.⁴ While these attacks and responses to the liberal achievements of the 1990s and 2000s can be observed as 'resistance to progressive social change, regression on acquired rights or maintenance of a non-egalitarian status quo',⁵ Paternotte and sociologist Roman Kuhar emphasise that so-called 'backlash' as a political strategy involves: 'discursive and conceptual struggles...to increase confusion among average citizens and to re-signify what progressive voices have been trying to articulate over the last decades'.⁶

In that sense, 'backlash' as a social phenomenon seeks to re-signify human rights values, concepts, and aims in support of a strictly binary (male-female) family structure, male authority, and power structures that negate the universality of human rights. Paternotte and Kuhar also contest the idea that progressive action always precedes conservative reaction. Instead, they argue, anti-gender campaigns against sexual and reproductive rights; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) rights; children's rights (including the right to sex education); gender justice; and protection against violence, discrimination, and hate speech are often employed to impede and derail future efforts to reform policies and systems that uphold progressive values.⁷

Several panellists and speakers during the symposium described the phenomenon of backlash as a rise in authoritarian populism and right-wing political leadership (with strict positions against feminism, LGBTIQ rights, and activism by men for gender equality) in an attempt to hinder progress.



⁴ Paternotte, D. (2020, March 30). Backlash: A misleading narrative. *Engenderings*. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2020/03/30/backlash-a-misleading-narrative/>

⁵ European Parliament resolution of 13 February 2019 on experiencing a backlash in women's rights and gender equality in the EU (2018/2684(RSP)). (2019, February 13). https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2019-0111_EN.html, as cited in Paternotte, D. (2020, March 30). Backlash: A misleading narrative. *Engenderings*. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2020/03/30/backlash-a-misleading-narrative/>

⁶ Paternotte, D., & Kuhar, R. (2015). *Gender ideology: Mobilization of conservative groups against gender equality and sexual citizenship*. <https://eige.europa.eu/resources/Report%201%20Gender%20Ideology%20-%20strategies.pdf>

⁷ Ibid.

1.1. Background

During the symposium sessions, panellists and speakers agreed that while resistance to feminism and gender equality has always existed, patriarchal backlash is a new form of opposition to gender rights that has become more dynamic over the past few years. For example, men's rights movements began using the language of equality, discrimination, and rights in order to politicise a narrative of male victimhood and exclusion, denouncing 'feminist bias against men' in all things gender. This form of co-opting or re-signifying meaning was effective in undermining initiatives to protect the rights of women and girls, and it led to portrayals of feminists as domineering and exclusionary. It was also an attempt to promote disagreements among feminists themselves.

Similarly, conservative opponents of gender justice felt traditional patriarchal masculinities were threatened when national gender policies took up gender as a concept to articulate discrimination against LGBTIQ people and recognise their human rights (such as in the early 2000s in the Caribbean). In this context, backlash emerged as a focus on exclusively binary (male-female) families as 'natural' to impede gender from being brought in as a category of analysis. Men could still be equally centred, and normative family life could be emphasised in a way that precluded LGBTIQ rights. Thus, backlash narratives kept adjusting to each case and context to emphasise their own values and concepts.

In [*Backlash, Body Politics and Online Misogyny*](#), Neil Datta of the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights explained that three forces at play in Europe are resulting in a strategic effort to impose conservative views and conditions: far-right fascist movements, populist forces, and religious fundamentalism. While these movements have always existed in society, they were isolated forces with different agendas until the early 2000s. Over the past two decades, however, leaders in each of these movements have begun to come together and engage in transactional ways, and they have even begun to fund each other. Far-right fascist movements are made up of right-wing extremists whose politics centre around features such as fear of difference, machismo, rejection of modernism, and social frustration.⁸ Populist forces claim 'to represent the unified will of the people in opposition to an enemy, often embodied by the current system—aiming to “drain the swamp” or “tackle the liberal elite”'.⁹ Religious fundamentalism undermines individuality in an effort to construct a collective identity based on religious norms.¹⁰

The amalgamation of these forces has made it possible for far-right fascist movements, populist forces, and religious fundamentalists to become more influential by accessing official government positions. Thus, backlash has grown more powerful through reorganising and rebranding, which has allowed these actors to expand their scope and create a form of patriarchal backlash that is more pervasive, nuanced, and complex.

⁸ Eco, U. (1995). Ur-fascism. *The New York Review of Books*, 42(11), 12–15.

⁹ Moffitt, B. (2020). *The global rise of populism*. Stanford University Press.

¹⁰ Castells, M., & Cardoso, G. (Eds.). (2005). *The network society: From knowledge to policy*. Johns Hopkins Center for Transatlantic Relations.

2. Backlash in its various forms

“We’re in a moment of history that is not easy to navigate and where we have legitimate worries about the kind of world that this resistance, these anti-progressive movements will create, and we can see how their triumph would lead to a world with more fear, more insecurity, more hatred, and more violence, and that’s something we legitimately want to prevent.

— RAEWYN CONNELL, [MEN AND MASCULINITIES PANEL \(PART 1\)](#)

All around the world, there has been an intensification of anti-gender rhetoric, a regression in women’s reproductive rights, and a shrinking of civil society space, all underpinned by a rise in authoritarian populism and fundamentalist movements both online and offline. This backlash is expressed through full-frontal assaults, overt myth-making, and undercover myth-making, among other tactics.



Soraya Chemaly (executive director of The Representation Project) speaking at “Digital Contexts: Media, Attention Economies and the Manosphere”.

2.1. Online backlash

The digital age has resulted in the rise of a manosphere 'constructed around a narrative of feminism's oppression of men, and a rejection of the evidence of men's patriarchal oppression of women.'¹¹ The manosphere is made up of four broad groups: men's rights activists, pick-up artists, incels, and 'Men Going Their Own Way' (MGTOW).¹² These groups use the internet to troll, slut-shame, and make rape threats against feminists, LGBTIQ people, and male gender justice activists, as well as to manufacture outrage through fake news and WhatsApp. An example of this online hostility can be seen through the vicious troll attacks against musician Rihanna and climate justice activist Greta Thunberg after they tweeted in support of farmers' protests in India. Another example is 'Gamergate' in the United States, when video game promoters ran a general harassment campaign against women in the video game industry under the guise of 'ethics in journalism'—all to express their anger over increasing diversity in the video game industry.

In the session *Digital Contexts*, Soraya Chemaly (executive director of The Representation Project) explained that we should not underestimate the efflorescence and power (in scope and scale) of transnational networks created by the internet through the manosphere. Transnational solidarity has made it possible for misogynists in, for example, the United States to attack and harass a female politician in South Africa. In extreme cases, the trolling begins online and translates into political action.

It is through such online spaces, and among young people, that false narratives of masculinities circulate; this includes the politics of victimhood, which fuels anti-feminist sentiments. Stereotypical ideas about feminists 'being out to get them' are intentionally circulated online to influence antidemocratic organising and to claim power. Under this impression, young men seek justice for themselves by leading the offensive against LGBTIQ people and women's rights defenders through doxxing, hacking, and threatening. Of particular concern is the fact that these misogynistic spaces sometimes appeal to young people as a place of guidance, safety, and understanding among a group of peers. As Christian Mogensen (specialist consultant at the Centre for Digital Youth Care) said during *Angry Young Men and the Misogynistic, Populistic Backlash in Europe*:

Joining a counterculture moves the focal point from me who is unhappy and 'I don't want to focus on me; I don't want to deal with the fact that I'm unhappy' to someone else, to those that are making me unhappy. Now, I'm not a victim. Now, I understand myself as a fighter. I get a sense of belonging, I have a way, a place to direct my anger. I have a purpose, and most importantly, I have a purpose with other people.

2.2. Offline backlash

At the forefront of offline backlash are religious and secular groups resistant to the concept of gender equality, as well as authoritarian political leaders and right-wing groups that oppose recognition for women's and LGBTIQ rights. In United Nations and global policy spaces, for example, we see attacks against long-accepted sexual and reproductive rights positions adopted by international conferences, as well as new alliances of conservative governments and religious leaders seeking to reverse debates about gender equality. As Gary Barker (CEO of Promundo-US) said during the *first part of the Men and Masculinities* panel:

My two home countries of Brazil and the US have seen leadership that we can only call fascist, and they've rolled back health rights, human rights, economic rights, gender equality.

¹¹ MenEngage Alliance. (2021). *Contexts and challenges for gender transformative work with men and boys: A discussion paper*. <http://menengage.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Contexts-and-Challenges-for-Gender-Transformative-Work-with-Men-and-Boys-A-Discussion-Paper-English.pdf>

¹² Basu, T. (2020, February 7). The "manosphere" is getting more toxic as angry men join the incels. *MIT Technology Review*. <https://www.technologyreview.com/2020/02/07/349052/the-manosphere-is-getting-more-toxic-as-angry-men-join-the-incels/>

2.3. Backlash in United Nations and global policy spaces

Through a competitive mimicry of feminist nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), ultraconservative voices seek to obstruct negotiations in United Nations and global policy spaces. Conservative civil society organisations and NGOs continue to work with government delegations to revisit accepted United Nations language, re-signifying accepted terminology to convey patriarchal views. Conservative nations and leaders are consulting with each other and forming global alliances to actively influence United Nations discussions and decisions through their lobbying efforts in the Commission on the Status of Women in the United Nations General Assembly, and even within the Human Rights Council:

Conservative NGOs' advocacy in the [United Nations] includes investing substantial effort in preventing feminist NGOs from furthering women's rights. At the same time, they work hard on reversing the norms and interpretations that feminists have already enshrined in the [United Nations].¹³

Their efforts involve mobilising outside United Nations venues, conducting social media campaigns, and setting up shop in key human rights locations (e.g., Geneva, where the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights meets).

Outside of United Nations spaces, conservative NGOs are also capturing, twisting, and re-signifying gender justice policy advocacy, portraying it as 'gender ideology'; they are advancing the claim that these are biased views by extremist feminist groups. This can be seen in the French anti-gender movement *La Manif Pour Tous*, which was created to oppose a bill on same-sex marriage in France but has since broadened its remit to the defence of the 'traditional', exclusively gender-binary family. In the *Hijacking Gender?* session, Tessa Lewin (research fellow at the Institute of Development Studies) explained that two immediately apparent expressions of discourse are used in the group's name. '*Manif*' is short for *manifestation* (the French word for demonstration, a phenomenon traditionally associated with the left in France), and '*pour tous*' means 'for all', co-opting the language of the same-sex marriage bill (*le mariage pour tous*, or 'marriage for all').



PHOTO CREDIT: weniliou/Shutterstock.com

¹³ Cupać, J., & Ebetürk, I. (2021). Backlash advocacy and NGO polarization over women's rights in the United Nations. *International Affairs*, 97(4), 1183–1201. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iab069>

2.4. Backlash at the regional and country levels

In addition to concerted efforts within United Nations negotiation spaces, several countries are increasingly adopting legislation that denies women their reproductive rights and criminalises same-sex relationships and behaviours by LGBTIQ people. The emergence of campaigns and legislative proposals to restrict or ban abortion in the United States is a clear example of efforts to revoke existing laws—and these campaigns have provoked a mushroom effect of 83 abortion restrictions enacted across 16 states in the United States from January to early June 2021.¹⁴ Other countries, such as Brazil, have also attempted to curtail access to legal pregnancy termination in cases of rape during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, Bangladesh's adoption of a British colonial penal code section criminalising same-sex relationships has meant a complete exclusion of LGBTIQ people from the rights afforded to others.



Stine Helding and Christian Mogensen, from Centre for Digital Youth Care, Denmark, speaking at "Angry young men and the misogynistic, populist backlash in Europe".

¹⁴ Nash, E., & Cross, L. (2021). 2021 is on track to become the most devastating antiabortion state legislative session in decades. (updated June 14, 2021). <https://www.guttmacher.org/article/2021/04/2021-track-become-most-devastating-antiabortion-state-legislative-session-decades>

3. Core domains and narratives of backlash against gender justice

At the core of the messaging employed by fundamentalist groups is the idea of the male ‘other’ and narratives around the ‘national family’ and its ‘others’, often referred to as ‘outsiders’—such as immigrants, men of colour, and Jewish and Muslim men. The conservative rhetoric evokes the image of the male protector, but also of men as victims of the so-called ‘gender ideology’.

3.1. Rising ethnonationalism and narratives around the ‘national family’

“There is a growing tangled relationship between renewed forms of authoritarian nationalism and a masculinized version of multiculturalism, one that selectively incorporates some people of color into a nationalist framework performed as patriarchal traditionalism, online ultra-misogyny, or street-brawling bravado. Masculinity bridges racial difference for populist, fascist, and even white-nationalist politics.

— HOSANG AND LOWNDES (2019),¹⁵ QUOTED BY ALAN GREIG (COFOUNDER, CHALLENGING MALE SUPREMACY PROJECT),
[*UNDERSTANDING THE GLOBAL TIDE OF PATRIARCHAL BACKLASH*](#)

¹⁵ HoSang, D. M., & Lowndes, J. E. (2019). *Producers, parasites, patriots: Race and the new right-wing politics of precarity*. University of Minnesota Press.

Rising ethnonationalism can be observed in growing narratives about the 'national family' and its 'others'. Feminists, LGBTIQ people, and pro-feminist groups are portrayed as a threat to the social order, and as such, a danger to the future of the nation. Ethnonationalism that emphasises the male protector is also used to mobilise fundamentalist movements under the guise of defending women and children against the perceived threat of feminists, LGBTIQ people, and human rights and gender justice groups.

For example, former US President Donald Trump described immigrants from Mexico to the United States by saying: 'When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists.'¹⁶ Trump demonized immigrants as a threat to white women and exhorted white men to sound the alarm and act as protectors. The European far-right has also used the idea of the sexual threat from the male other to support its anti-immigrant rhetoric. As Alan Greig of the Challenging Male Supremacy Project said during *Understanding the Global Tide of Patriarchal Backlash*:

The idea of the male protector is being reinvigorated by a racialization of masculinities, so the racialization of the sexual threat of the male other is a significant part of the far-right discourse around men needing to step up and protect their families.

3.2. Men as victims

“The common narrative between all the young men that we talked to was that they needed to belong to this violent or this oppositional or antagonistic group because, if not, someone would hurt them or trump them or just roll over them.

— CHRISTIAN MOGENSEN (SPECIALIST CONSULTANT, CENTRE FOR DIGITAL YOUTH CARE), *ANGRY YOUNG MEN AND THE MISOGYNISTIC, POPULISTIC BACKLASH IN EUROPE*

The narrative around male victimhood and vulnerability is a favourite tactic used by men's rights activists and fundamentalists to garner support among men and spearhead patriarchal backlash. A commonly employed discourse is that feminism has gone too far and men are now experiencing 'reverse discrimination'. For example, a fathers' movement recently formed in Trinidad and Tobago opposes feminism by 'positioning men as the real victims of (mothers') childhood abuse, (women's) partner violence, (feminised) state discrimination and an ideologically sexist gender division of labour.'¹⁷

¹⁶ Phillips, A. (2017, June 16). 'They're rapists.' President Trump's campaign launch speech two years later, annotated. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/06/16/theyre-rapists-presidents-trump-campaign-launch-speech-two-years-later-annotated/>

¹⁷ Hossein, G. (2021, June 23). Fathering in a pandemic. *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*. <https://newsday.co.tt/2021/06/23/fathering-in-a-pandemic/>

During the [Social Contexts](#) session, Alan Greig of the Challenging Male Supremacy Project referenced a quote from a 2019 article titled 'The New Authoritarians Are Waging War on Women':

At stake are advances made to legalize same-sex marriage, achieve gender-wage parity, access contraception and abortion services, balance care work with greater feminization of the economy, and end discrimination of LGBTQI persons. Importantly, challenging the far-right's war on gender is also central to advancing racial justice, ensuring the rights of refugees and migrants, and promoting inclusive societies.¹⁸

3.3. Family and nation

At the centre of backlash on gender equality and justice, we see more than the defence of 'family values'. The neoliberal worldview is a strong component of these tactics to protect a form of government that is centred around ethnonationalistic feelings, state non-interference in family and private matters, and liberal tax codes for corporations (along with the reduction of social welfare).

This type of government structure has created an enormous gap in the social justice agenda of countries that are predominantly under neoliberal economic models. That gap has been filled in many cases by conservative religious groups, such as Catholic charities. Others have also acted: For example, local gangs and politically active fundamentalist religious groups see in this social welfare gap an opportunity to advance their views and values. By providing needed support to the most marginalised people, they could also share and legitimise conservative views about the role of government, family structures, and gender and sexual identity.

For that reason, fundamentalist organisations can be effective in their missions, particularly because they provide answers, a safe space, and a sense of purpose in organising against 'other' social actors that they identify as a threat to the moral order they seek to represent—with the added impact of meeting the community's basic needs (such as through zakat, food hampers, and donations).



¹⁸ Beinart, P. (2019, January/February). The new authoritarians are waging war on women. *The Atlantic*.

3.4. 'Natural' gender order, individual freedom, and social hierarchies

It is important to recognise the various forms of backlash, as well as their intended effect on the social fabric. Organised conservative groups usually address people's material needs and expectations to engage with those who become supporters. By fulfilling survival needs, they also provide 'order' and a sense of stability. Even hierarchical, exclusionary, and arbitrary forms of order tend to be well accepted when contrasted to conspiracy theories. The narrative used in ultraconservative tactics—such as by populist leaders and fascist forms of government—promises to protect people, defeat the chaos and uncertainty caused by 'socialist' and 'feminist' political views, and restore a 'natural social order' and way of life.

In the effort to win power, gain followers, and become influential, conservative movements are betting on long-term tactics. By infiltrating well-established structures—such as judicial courts and the boards of essential industries (such as healthcare, medicine, news, technology, and media)—their aims and principles can have lasting effects and be mutually reinforcing. Collaborating with religious groups and charities, and demonstrating support for their agenda, are a means of securing reciprocity.



PHOTO CREDIT: Ezell Jordan / Shutterstock.com

4. Recommendations and the way forward



We seek a radical transformation of a world in crisis, putting women, people, and the planet over profit.

— WOMEN RADICALLY TRANSFORMING A WORLD IN CRISIS,¹⁹
QUOTED BY ALAN GREIG (COFOUNDER, CHALLENGING MALE SUPREMACY PROJECT), [SOCIAL CONTEXTS](#)

The various symposium panels that addressed backlash in different parts of the world, and in its many forms, sought to understand and analyse the phenomenon. They also considered the impact of backlash and the conditions making it possible for backlash to thrive and advance, with the goal of finding solutions or strategies to counter backlash's effect in today's social and political human rights agenda. Presenters and attendees alike, however, did raise the need to be mindful of backlash narratives and tactics.

In today's context—the symposium showed—efforts to realise gender equality and justice require an awareness of patriarchal backlash and its adaptability. Some steps that progressive movements could take to stay informed and prepared include:

- Organising a learning initiative on how to better understand and respond to backlash from a feminist-informed and men and masculinities perspective
- Synthesising and sharing feminist critical analysis of anti-gender, men's rights, and anti-feminist offensives globally
- Identifying and sharing lessons from how members and partners are confronting men's rights and conservative anti-feminist messaging and mobilisation
- Developing regional and global messages to counter anti-feminist narratives, including by elevating messages from members and partners doing such work

The following are specific recommendations for the gender justice movement as a whole—including for MenEngage and its partners.

¹⁹ Women radically transforming a world in crisis: A framework for Beijing+25 shaped at a strategy meeting of feminist activists: Mexico City, 22-24 August 2019. (2019, September 29). https://resurj.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/eng_mexico_city_strategy_meet_framework_for_beijing25_0.pdf

Conduct cross-movement-building. Fascist movements, fundamentalists, and populist forces have managed to access positions of power and expand their scope of influence through cross-movement-building. Through a shared analysis and understanding of the problem, progressive movements could identify and build alliances to prevent further erosion of the human rights and gender justice agenda. We need to not only have intersectionality of identities but intersectionality of struggles as well.²⁰

The way forward is reframing the gender justice agenda, at all structural levels, in a way that acknowledges the intersectionality of the various social justice struggles, with solidarity between movements working on different causes: 'Structures that exist in our society do not operate in a siloed manner, and thus cannot truly be discussed as mutually exclusive.'²¹

Therefore, women's rights are related to LGBTIQ rights and male privilege. Progressive social justice movements must equally work with other movements, including climate justice, economic justice, and racial justice movements, to strengthen capacity and develop resilience. As Undariya Tumursukh (advisor at the MONFEMNET National Network) said during the [first part of the Men and Masculinities panel](#): 'There needs to be this cross-fertilization and solidarity between different kinds of movements.'

Have critical awareness and accountability by having critical dialogues about patriarchal structures that must be transformed, by challenging men to see patriarchy not as personal but as political and economic systems of oppression, and by questioning the root causes of the patriarchal backlash we see today. As Michael Flood (associate professor of Queensland University of Technology) said during the [first part of the Men and Masculinities panel](#), 'Accountability is about trying to live in gender-equitable ways.'

Acknowledge young people as leaders. By working with young people, listening to and amplifying their voices, social justice movements can be more effective and creative. Understanding the types of platforms that young people consider worth investing in and the political spaces they see benefits in occupying, older leaders can open doors and facilitate real change. During the [Youth Leadership and Movement Building panel](#), Abel Koka of Restless Development advised:

Invest in programmes which will unleash the power of young people, amplify their voice, but also nurture their leadership ability in order for them to stand at the front and centre of making gender equality a reality.

Embrace feminist systems change. A key element addressed during the symposium sessions on backlash was the need for feminist systems change that is rooted in discursive subversion, displacement, and reconstruction. To facilitate such a reconstruction, there is a need for a structural understanding of power and

²⁰ Davis, A. Y. (2016). *Freedom is a constant struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the foundations of a movement*. Haymarket Books.

²¹ *The intersectionality of struggles*. (n.d.). Northeastern University. Retrieved November 23, 2021, from <https://northeastern.edu/diversity/event/the-intersectionality-of-struggles/>

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Sandra Pepera (senior associate and director of gender, women, and democracy at the National Democratic Institute) speaking at "Political Contexts: Authoritarianism Ethnonationalism and Militarism"

domination using a feminist approach to power analysis.

The question of gender has always been defined and contested by different kinds of patriarchy, and women and girls have always been forced to conform to societal norms of what it means to be a 'good woman'. A radical systems change involves overhauling structures and institutions that have facilitated and promoted inequality. It may start with questioning family norms and structures, but it is about broader institutions—capitalism, colonialism, faith, and more—that support patriarchy and its gendered division of roles; therefore, it requires change in workplaces, cultural traditions, government institutions, and the economy. Sandra Pepera (senior associate and director of gender, women, and democracy at the National Democratic Institute) said during [Political Contexts](#):

We are in a moment of anti-imperialism, which is more than decolonization, which is obviously a moment of an inherently feminist change. We are being asked to revisit decolonization and put the final nail in the coffin of neoliberalism, but we first have to hold the mirrors up to ourselves and understand and accept our own privilege and power, and in doing that, we may be able to move into a transformative state with less hubris, more honesty, and more humility.

Annex 1. Links to the symposium sessions on backlash and fundamentalism

1. 10 November 2020: [*Opening plenary*](#)
2. 11 November 2020: [*Youth Leadership and Movement Building panel*](#)
3. 11 November 2020: [*Intersectional Feminist Movement Voices panel*](#)
4. 11 November 2020: [*Men and Masculinities panel \(part 1\)*](#)
5. 12 November 2020: [*Men and Masculinities panel \(part 2\)*](#)
6. 1 December 2020: [*Understanding the Global Tide of Patriarchal Backlash*](#) ('Backlash' series session 1)
7. 2 February 2021: [*Political Contexts: Authoritarianism, Ethnonationalism and Militarism*](#)
8. 4 February 2021: [*Backlash, Body Politics and Online Misogyny*](#) ('Backlash' series session 2)
9. 9 February 2021: [*Angry Young Men and the Misogynistic, Populistic Backlash in Europe*](#)
10. 18 February 2021: [*¿Qué Rol Juegan los Hombres Para Contrarrestar el Avance de Discursos Contra la Igualdad de Género?*](#) (What Role Do Men Play in Counteracting the Advance of Discourses Against Gender Equality?)
11. 2 March 2021: [*Social Contexts: Anti-Feminism, Normalized Violence and Politicized Religion*](#)
12. 10 March 2021: [*How to Recover From the Global Gag Rule*](#)
13. 11 March 2021: [*Hijacking Gender? Backlash in Policy and Practice*](#) ('Backlash' series session 3)
14. 20 April 2021: [*Digital Contexts: Media, Attention Economies and the Manosphere*](#)
15. 12 May 2021: [*Backlash, Radicalization and Prevention Strategies in Working With Young Men*](#)
16. 13 May 2021: [*Deconstructing the Logic of Masculinist Protection*](#)
17. 13 May 2021: [*Movement-Building to Counter Patriarchal Backlash: A Conversation Space*](#) ('Backlash' series session 4)
18. 1 June 2021: [*Uniting to Counter Backlash: A Roundtable Discussion Looking Forward*](#) ('Backlash' series session 5)

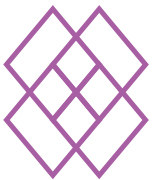
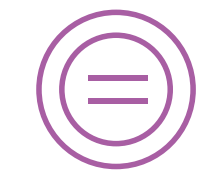


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MenEngage
UBUNTU
SYMPOSIUM
I AM
BECAUSE
You are

