

Laudation

From the 2023 Jury for the Joni Lovenduski PhD Prize in Gender and Politics

The Jury has this year chosen to award the prize jointly to **Leandra Bias** for her doctoral thesis ***The (Im)Possibility of Feminist Critique in Authoritarianism: Revisiting Western Knowledge-Transfer in Russia and Serbia*** and **Cecilia Josefsson** for her doctoral thesis ***Adaptive Resistance: Power Struggles over Gender Quotas in Uruguay***.

The jury reported the following about Leandra's thesis.

Leandra makes a strong empirical and theoretical contribution with her work investigating how feminists under authoritarian regimes position transnational feminism in the context of authoritarian discourses. They attach positive meaning knowledge transfer considered as between equals, and strategically reject East–West distinctions between feminisms. Bias demonstrates how solicited and supportive transnational feminist encounters took place between Yugoslavia and Soviet Russia, highlighting the latter's agency in critiquing and re-contextualising Western feminist ideas. Doing so her work deconstructs the ways in which gender equality has been constructed as a Western idea, has supported specific political projects, and how the marginalisation of this discourse by contemporary Serbian and Russian feminists is itself a political act. The reconceptualisation of East–West knowledge transfer is innovative as is the critique of critical theory in authoritarian times.

Her work is also significant in its implications regarding how the EU exports gender mainstreaming policies. It showcases an innovative approach, gathering extensive empirical material previously neglected, including data about the recent history of the feminist movements in the two countries under study.

Although focused on gender, the work has implications for strategies to cope with authoritarian regimes. The timeliness of the research is undeniable in the face of both Russian feminist resistance to state violence at home and abroad, as well as anti–gender authoritarianism across Europe. This empirical contribution supports a theoretical critique of the understanding of transnational feminism in one-directional and asymmetric terms. The topic has been important for decolonising post–communist research and contributes to the discussion about knowledge production in the East and West. It has wide implications for studying global social inequalities and hierarchies, as well as feminist theories of knowledge production beyond politics.

Leandra conducted more than 60 interviews, providing a rich quantitative and qualitative analysis of the discourses, which she nicely contextualised. The justification for case selection is rigorous and detailed. Both the conduct of interviews and analysis of transcripts is sophisticated and sensitive, reflecting an empathetic handling of interviews and actors. The writing is extremely reflexive, and thoughtful regarding the positionality of both Russian and Serbian feminists in relation to both state powers and critical theory on knowledge exchange. The analysis is extensively theoretically grounded. The manuscript is beautifully written throughout, combining both nuance and passion to an exceptional degree.

Petra Meier (Chair)

On behalf of the Joni Lovenduski Prize Jury
European Consortium for Political Research

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The jury reported the following about Cecilia's thesis.

Cecilia's 'adaptive resistance stage model' studying the case of Uruguay is a strong and very original contribution. While gender quotas have received a great deal of scholarly attention, Josefsson takes a very innovative approach to the topic. Existing literature focuses on women's progress and the (institutional) constraints they face, but not on resistance from those defending the status quo. The idea of studying policy failure and the agency of those who resist progressive change is refreshing and sheds new light on political processes. It improves our understanding of which actors resist and the strategies they deploy, defining resistance as action different from institutional constraints. She provides for an important conceptual distinction between resistance and backlash, thereby tapping into current ongoing debates. Both the theorization of a model of resistance to gender equality measures and the empirical study is a hugely welcome contribution to the field of gender and politics research.

The author makes a very convincing case for the broader applications of this research, particularly in relation to policy failure and electoral reform. Her contribution is useful to understand policy failure at various stages of the policy making process.

The processual and sequential construct of the thesis allows for the coherent grasping of a variety of factors. Cecilia's work can travel to other situations of resistance to power and marginalized social groups. It opens up new pathways for future study but also provides for a blueprint for strategic applications to policy processes and making. The model and research approach could be applicable for other cases of resistance against egalitarian practices and policies and the role of privileged political elites. The work's main conclusions extend to suggest conditions for successful feminist action and politics.

The research design and methodology are well explained and applied coherently, the work is conducted meticulously. The theoretical justification of the choice of Uruguay is excellent, the use of time and within-country variation extremely elegant.

Her research approach is an interesting methodological contribution to capture resistance. She develops a carefully considered strategy in relation to the significant methodological difficulties related to identifying, documenting and analysing resistance within political institutions, and to operationalising policy failure. The process tracing approach utilises detailed and painstaking evidence gathering, unfolding between 2013 and 2020 and including 70 interviews. The work contains a vast amount of useful empirical detail discussed systematically. The writing style is clear, authoritative and engaging throughout.

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