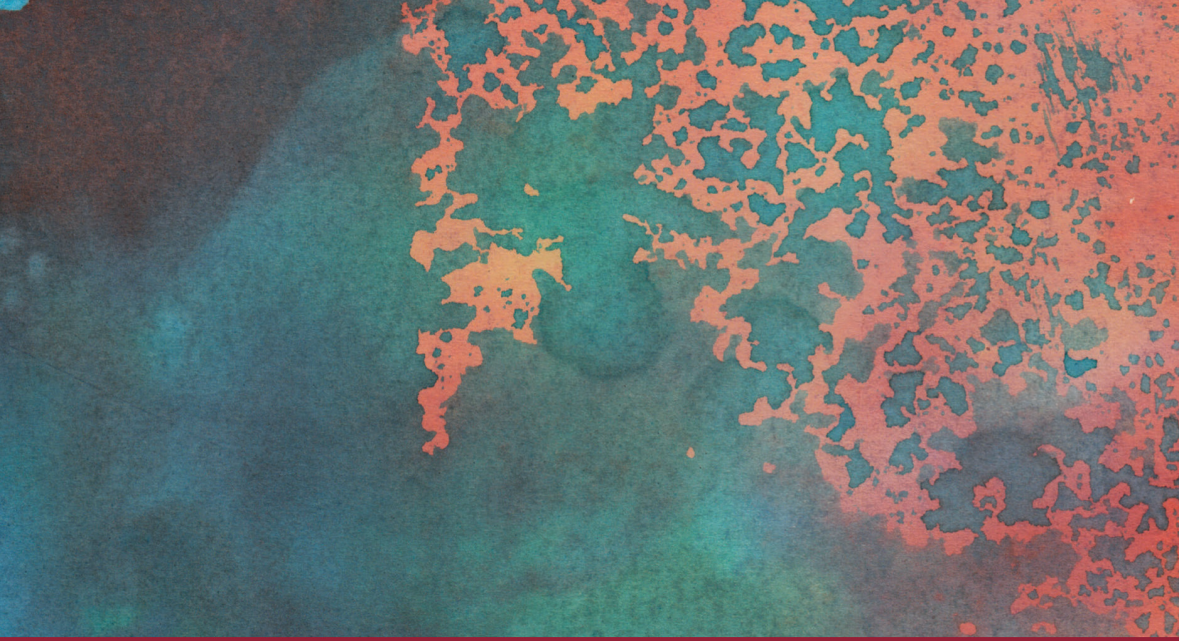

Routledge Studies in Gender, Sexuality and Politics

ANTI-GENDER POLITICS IN THE POPULIST MOMENT

Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk

Anti-Gender Politics in the Populist Moment

This book charts out a new phase in the global struggles around gender equality and sexual democracy: the ultraconservative mobilization against "gender ideology" and feminist efforts to counteract it. It argues that anti-gender campaigns, which emerged around 2010 in Europe, are not a simple continuation of the anti-feminist backlash dating back to the 1970s, but part of a new political configuration. Opposition to "gender" has become a key element of the rise of right-wing populism, which successfully harnesses the anxiety, shame and anger caused by neoliberalism, and threatens to destroy liberal democracy.

Anti-Gender Politics in the Populist Moment offers a novel conceptualization of the relationship between the ultraconservative anti-gender movement and right-wing populist parties, examining the *opportunistic synergy* between these actors. The authors map the anti-gender campaigns as a global movement, putting the Polish case in a comparative perspective. They show that the anti-gender rhetoric is best understood as a reactionary critique of neoliberalism as a socio-cultural formation. The book also studies the recent wave of feminist mass mobilizations, viewing the transnational revolt of women as a left populist movement.

This is an important study for those doing research in politics, cultural studies, gender and sexuality studies and sociology. It will also be useful for activists and policy makers.

Agnieszka Graff is Associate Professor at the American Studies Center, University of Warsaw. She is a feminist activist and public intellectual. Her articles on gender in Polish and U.S. culture have appeared in *Public Culture*, *Signs, European Journal of Women's Studies, Feminist Studies* and *East European Politics and Societies*. She has authored five books of feminist essays in Polish, among them *Świat bez kobiet* (*World without Women*, 2001, anniversary edition 2021) and *Matka feministka* (*Mother and Feminist*, 2014, Spanish edition 2021). She coedited the Spring 2019 theme issue of *Signs* "Gender and the rise of the global right."

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Introduction

The demonization of "gender" and the crisis of democracy

In the fall of 2013 we accepted an invitation to participate in what promised to be an interesting exchange: a discussion on "gender" organized at the Dominican Church in Warsaw, a place known for featuring Catholic progressives and fostering public debate. A few minutes into the discussion a smoke bomb was deployed by a group of extremists gathered in the audience, several men holding up a sign which read: "Gender equals 666." Clearly, someone believed demonic forces were in play – a thought we found highly amusing at the time. The church was promptly evacuated; the Dominican priests were shocked and apologetic. They said we should meet again soon, but ultimately no such invitation was extended (Graff 2014a). At the time, what was happening in Poland around women's rights, the rights of sexual minorities as well as the concept of "gender" itself appeared exceptional or aberrant. We thought so, too. Polish conservatism seemed somewhat extreme and slightly grotesque. Still, we believed that dialogue with ultraconservatives was possible and much needed. After the incident at the Dominican Church, however, we began to understand that such exchanges might no longer be safe or even possible. The very word "gender," previously a neutral-sounding term used by social scientists and cultural studies scholars in academia, was becoming the center of a new phase of culture wars.

Several years later – in the spring of 2020 – continuous attacks on feminists, liberal proponents of gender quality policies and the LGBT community have led to street riots and direct violence. In July 2019 the Białystok Equality March was attacked by 4,000 neo-Nazis, football fans and representatives of Catholic groups, enjoying the full support of the local Catholic Church and the Law and Justice (PiS) party (Dehnel 2019). Although representatives of the ruling party distanced themselves from the violent acts, claiming that the perpetrators were just hooligans, the direct incentive for these attacks came from the party's leader Jarosław Kaczyński. In April 2019 he went on record claiming that "the LGBT movement and gender are a danger to our identity, our nation and our state" (Chrzczonowicz 2019). As the Covid-19 pandemic unfolded in March 2020, one of the Polish bishops likened the virus to "gender ideology" and declared he was not sure which was more dangerous

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to the nation (Steinhagen 2020). The view that the pandemic is a punishment for homosexuality was also expressed by other priests, echoing views on AIDS that had been promulgated by ultraconservatives in the United States back in the 1980s. Spring and summer of 2020 witnessed a pandemonium of politicized homophobia in Poland: the entire presidential campaign was dominated by the theme of "LGBT ideology" as a threat to the nation and Christianity, and soon thereafter the Minister of Justice officially announced the intention to terminate Poland's ratification of the Istanbul Convention, the Council of Europe's treaty to prevent violence against women (Szczęśniak 2019). In August 2020 Poland was again present in the world media as a country where police violence was used against LGBT activists, the rainbow flag becoming the emblem of resistance against the populist-right government (Cain 2020; Human Rights Watch 2020). Another wave of mass protests emerged in the fall 2020 in response to yet another assault on reproductive rights: the ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal that deemed abortion in case of fetal abnormalities unconstitutional. On 30 October, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, almost half a million people, mostly of the younger generation, took to the streets of over 600 Polish cities and villages in what appears to be the biggest street protests since the Solidarity upheaval. While the demonstrations were triggered by legislation concerning abortion, the real stakes were expressed in thousands of homemade banners and popular chants demanding that the Law and Justice party "Get the f…k out!" For the first time in Polish history, the Catholic Church became the target of protests: young women entered local churches demanding separation of church and state. These events showed that gender, religion and politics are inextricably linked in the current moment: the conflict around "gender" is also a struggle over the future of democracy.

Is the rise in politicized homophobia and misogyny a uniquely Polish phenomenon? Why has "gender" become such an important and controversial term in recent years? And what is the relation between the anti-gender movement and right-wing populists? This book seeks to explain the growing visibility and power of anti-gender movements, discourses and campaigns, and to conceptualize the relationship between anti-gender actors and right-wing populist parties in Poland and beyond. For decades, liberal feminism has operated on an assumption of progress: human rights discourse was successfully expanded to include women's rights, liberal democracy was spreading, and gender studies were getting more and more sophisticated, inclusive and self-aware. Many women in Eastern Europe shared in this optimism with particular eagerness; gender equality was part of what was called "democratization" in the region. Meanwhile, things have gotten worse. Around the world, people committed to gender equality, pluralism and democracy have begun to share a sense of danger, perhaps even doom. In recent years, abortion rights, sex education and gender studies, gay marriage, transnational treaties concerning gender-based violence have all come under attack from what appears to be an increasingly influential

and coherent global anti-gender movement. At the same time, the populist right has not only taken over Poland, Hungary, the United States, Turkey and Brazil, but also won the hearts of millions of people in countries with strong democratic traditions and relatively weaker religious influences, such as Germany, the UK, France and Sweden. Parties such as Vox in Spain and Lega in Italy have included the anti-gender agenda in their political platforms. They have undertaken large-scale campaigns against women's and transgender rights, often in unison with ultraconservative networks such as CitizenGo. In short, millions of people in Europe and beyond have been mobilized against "gender ideology" and in support of what they call "family values." We explore this phenomenon, its historical roots, cultural and political dimensions and its far-reaching consequences for today's world. The book expands from the Polish example to discuss similar dynamics in other locations, also looking at international cooperation between various players in the anti-gender movement and in politics. We show that Polish anti-gender campaigns are a part of a broader resurgence of right-wing extremism and religious fundamentalism, a coordinated transnational effort to undermine liberal values by democratic means.

Gender in the populist moment

We conceptualize the recent struggles over "gender" as part of a broader conflict, where what is truly at stake is the future of democracy. The conflict between ultraconservative and progressive forces over gender equality and sexual democracy exemplifies a key aspect of the political dynamic which several scholars have dubbed "the populist moment" and the "populist Zeitgeist" (Krastev 2007; Mudde 2004; Mouffe 2018). Ivan Krastev warns against the dangers of the populist moment, interpreting it as a time of intense anti-elite resentment, irrationality and increasing anti-democratic tendencies. He states:

> the defining feature of populism is the view that society falls into two homogenous and antagonistic groups: "the people as such" and "the corrupt elite." It proceeds to argue that politics is the expression of the general will of the people and that the social change is possible only via the radical change of the elite.
>
> (Krastev 2007)

While we share his anxiety over the possible outcomes of such trends, our understanding of this phenomenon is closer to Chantal Mouffe's, who sees it as "a new conjuncture" in which neoliberal hegemony is "being called into question by a variety of anti-establishment movements both from the right and from the left" (2018: 5). A crucial aspect of this dynamic is that many movements and parties claim to be giving a voice back to "the people" and rejuvenating democracy. Competition among these forces consists

in forging and mobilizing disparate definitions of "the people" and their interests: exclusionary in right-wing populism and pluralistic in left populism. To cite Mouffe:

> We can speak of a "populist moment" when, under the pressure of political or socioeconomic transformations, the dominant hegemony is being destabilized by the multiplication of unsatisfied demands. […] As a result […] the possibility arises of constructing a new subject of collective action – the people – capable of reconfiguring a social order experienced as unjust.
>
> (Mouffe 2018: 11)

Gender is at the heart of this political realignment. We argue that analyzing conflicts revolving around gender equality and sexuality is a necessary step in order to properly grasp the logic behind the current crisis of democracy, the global rise of the populist right and also the prospects for progressive opposition. The good news for feminists is that it is no longer possible to think seriously about democracy and politics while ignoring gender issues. This is equally true for the new populist right and for those on the liberal left who want to effectively oppose de-democratization. The bad news is that the right has been remarkably successful in its efforts to reframe the debate: they have managed to capture the word "gender," to redefine its meaning and demonize it, making gender equality appear like an enemy of the people. This book aims to make sense of these developments from a feminist perspective, as we analyze both ultraconservative anti-gender campaigns and the mass feminist mobilizations responding to them.

We examine the campaigns against "gender" or "gender ideology" that have been spreading around the world since the mid-2000s (e.g. Aghdgomelashvili et al. 2014; Graff 2014a; Grzebalska 2016; Grzebalska, Kováts and Pető 2017; Hennig 2018; Korolczuk 2014; Kováts and Põim 2015; Krizsán and Roggeband 2019; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017; Verloo 2018a). Opposition to the term "gender" and to gender equality policies is not new: due to its focus on reproductive rights, anti-gender mobilization has been interpreted as a continuation of resistance to feminism and as yet another stage in the culture wars – a global clash of pro-modern and anti-modern sensibilities, a countermovement against the gains of second wave feminism (Bob 2012; Corredor 2019). In fact, anti-genderists use the term "culture war," depicting themselves as peaceful yet besieged, and warning against the alleged violence of genderists. For example, right-wing German sociologist Gabriele Kuby repeatedly uses combat-related words such as "weapon," "battle," "fight" and "threat," calling for resistance to "the 200-year cultural war to create autonomous, manipulable, controllable people" (2015: 17). This morally heightened militant rhetoric should not divert our attention from the actual goals of the struggle against "gender." In tandem with right-wing populists, the ultraconservative groups are aiming

for a wholesale elite change in the spheres of politics, culture, education and transnational institutions, ending the decades-long ideological and political dominance of progressive liberalism in the West.

For several decades, a key issue in the culture wars has been the politics of reproduction, as evidenced by the history of conservative resistance to UN population policies (see, e.g. Bob 2012; Buss 2004; Buss and Herman 2003; Chappell 2006; Favier 2015; Omang 2013). The present wave of global ultraconservative activism – with its characteristic focus on the word gender – is rooted in the Vatican's opposition to gender equality policies promoted on the transnational level after the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women. At the time, a loose-knit cooperation of multi-denominational organizations and groups coalesced around "traditional family values." It gradually evolved into what Bob (2012) calls a "Baptist-burqa" network, an interfaith alliance that cooperates internationally on different policy goals. Locally, specific aims have included defending conservative Christians persecuted for home-schooling their children in Germany, providing legal and ideological support for legislation outlawing abortion in Nicaragua and speaking against gay rights in Uganda (Bob 2012: 37–38; Kaoma 2012).

In the last decade these struggles have grown considerably more complex, while alliances between different actors have changed. This is partly because of economic and political factors, such as the growth of Islamophobia following 9/11 and the 2015 "refugee crisis." Due to the fact that the populist right has embraced strong anti-Muslim sentiments the Baptist-burqa alliance has largely been dissolved on a transnational level, thus fundamentalist Muslim and Islamist groups are not a part of the global anti-gender movement. Nonetheless, some conservative Muslims and Christians continue to collaborate both locally, as in the case of the 2019 battles over sex education in Birmingham (BBC News 2019), and globally at the level of transnational institutions such as the United Nations (UN). As reported by the Catholics for Human Rights advocacy group:

> The Holy See's coalition building at the UN over the past two decades has revealed that disparate groups such as highly conservative Muslim governments (i.e. Egypt and Saudi Arabia) or religious traditions like Mormonism and Evangelical Christianity are united in a common desire to prevent women from having control over their bodies and their fertility and to prevent gender non-conforming people and LGBT people from achieving protection under the law and freedom from violence and discrimination.
>
> (Catholics… 2019: 15)

What has also changed during the last decade is the level of acceptance in most Western countries for new family configurations. This shift includes the legalization of gay marriage and growing acceptance for homosexual families as well as new developments in the field of reproductive technologies

including IVF and surrogacy. These developments are perceived by conservative groups as a threat to the "natural order of things" and part of a global plan to dissolve the "traditional" heterosexual family. Anti-gender pundits consider biomedical intervention in the human body as an extension of Malthusianism and eugenics, both of which they see as the foundation of contemporary transnational gender policies.[1] Ultraconservative actors frame these developments in terms of decline of Christian civilization: gender equality is presented as a path to degeneration and demographic decline, a theme that occasionally takes on explicit racist undertone. The falling fertility rates in Europe are juxtaposed against dynamic population growth among ethnic minorities and the influx of immigrants and refugees, both of which will allegedly result in the ultimate fall of the West (Gökarıksel et al. 2019).

Anti-gender mobilization comes in different shapes and forms, depending on the local cultural and political dynamics. In some cases, e.g. France, it includes strong opposition to assisted reproduction reflecting the ideological conflict about the nature/culture frontier. In other locations, such as Poland and Russia, the focus of anti-gender campaigns is to demonize non-normative sexualities and family configurations, whereas in Spain the central target is anti-violence legislation, which is reframed by the anti-gender movement as an attack on the family. In one way or another politics of reproduction, kinship and hierarchy of power between genders are always at the center of anti-gender campaigns. One way to connect these diverse themes is through masculinity: what is really at stake here is the social status of men in general and the role of the father in the family (Golec de Zavala and Bierwiaczonek 2020; Gökarıksel et al. 2019; Kimmel 2013). Birgit Sauer argues persuasively that right-wing populism can be interpreted as a masculinist identity politics, an effort to restore the authority of men, allegedly reduced to subordinate position by well-educated women and migrants:

> In this discourse of drawing boundaries, of exclusion and "Othering," right-wing populism contributes to the self-affirmation of masculinity by offering points of reference for the re-establishment of traditional gender constellations and thus for the abolishment of gender equality policies. The right-wing interpellation of the "little man in the streets" is part of a masculinist identity politics, which includes the promise that a charismatic leader might increase the self-confidence of subordinated masculinities.
>
> (2020: 30)

The conflict is not merely one over the rights or prerogatives of men as a group, but also the ways in which democracy itself is gendered. Myra Marx Ferree (2020) claims that the current wave of masculinism is a reaction to an ongoing shift within liberal democracy, namely the transition from an understanding of democracy as "brotherhood" toward a truly inclusive paradigm, which she calls a partnership model, in which men and women

are equal both in the family and in politics. This new model is being violently contested, various conservative movements coming to the defense of the *ancien régime*.

What sets present-day anti-gender campaigns apart from earlier forms of backlash is not just their focus on the term "gender," but also their close relationship to right-wing populism. As we show throughout this book, contemporary anti-gender discourse is structured as a populist discourse, in that it persistently juxtaposes innocent, gender-conservative people, whom it claims to represent, against corrupt, immoral elites who are accused of spreading "gender ideology." Anti-gender actors consistently position themselves as warriors for justice and defenders of ordinary people against the corporate greed of global capital. Thus, they list among their enemies not only transnational institutions such as the UN and World Health Organization, but also iconic figures of global capitalism such as George Soros and Bill Gates, pharmaceutical companies seeking to sell contraception and the medical establishment offering abortion and IVF.

Populist right-wing parties in many locations have allied themselves with ultraconservative religious actors and embraced anti-gender rhetoric in order to enhance their popular appeal as defenders of the common people against the depraved elites. We call this relationship an *opportunistic synergy*, a dynamic that includes political alliances, ideological affinities and organizational ties that enable wide-scale elite change in governmental bodies, academia, cultural institutions and civil society. Ultraconservative organizations provide the cadres that right-wing populists need in order to seize control over society: individuals who make their way into key institutions such as the Supreme Court and ministries as well as various bodies controlling civil society, culture and the media (e.g. Mierzyńska 2020a). The values promoted by these groups constitute the ideological basis of the new elites, and hence of society.

The vilification of "gender" serves to fuel polarization and to delegitimize political opponents, liberal pundits and civil society leaders as corrupt elites. In some contexts, this vilification is primarily moral and religious, in others– e.g. in Sweden – it is based on the argument that gender theory is unscientific and defies the rules of critical thinking. The alliance is part and parcel of a broader project of elite change in all spheres of political and social life.

While mutually beneficial, the ties between these two groups are by no means stable, nor do they lead to the same consequences in different contexts. Right-wing populists appear to strengthen their ultraconservative affiliations during electoral campaigns. Conversely, ultraconservatives gain visibility and political influence when right-wing populist parties ascend to power. While right-wing populists themselves may not be necessarily gender conservative, as the examples of the Scandinavian context aptly show, they appear to benefit from the vilification of "gender" initiated by their ultraconservative allies. Poland is a spectacular example of how opportunistic synergy works to the advantage of both sides: anti-gender activism has

helped populists into power, and once Law and Justice had won elections, anti-gender actors gained substantial access to money, political institutions and decision-making processes.

Positionality and methods

The insights presented in this book are the outcome of our engagements as feminist scholars and activists working at the intersection of academia and civil society in Poland and Sweden. The analysis results from participation in several collaborative projects, which emerged in response to anti-gender campaigns in the European context. We have participated in events organized as part of several international groups, including the networks "Anti-Gender Crusades in Europe: Mobilizations against Equality" initiated and coordinated by the Ebert Foundation in Budapest, and "Anti-Gender Movements on the Rise" organized by the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Berlin. As activists, we are affiliated with initiatives, bodies and organizations, some of which have been targeted by the anti-gender campaign.[2] Since the outbreak of the "war on gender" in the Polish context around 2012 (Desperak 2016; Graff 2014a; Graff and Korolczuk 2017; Morska 2014), we have participated in a number of public debates and confrontations concerning "gender ideology" in Polish media and public institutions, realizing over time that we are witnessing a coordinated effort aimed at delegitimizing gender research and ultimately gender equality policies and projects. Occasionally, the subject of our analysis became part of our embodied experience: when we participated as observers in a demonstration against sex education in schools in September 2015 in Warsaw, or when facing the smoke bomb deployed by radical right-wing activists during a public debate on gender. In short, we are what anti-genderists call "gender ideologues." Our aim, however, is not to debunk and ridicule but to understand (cf. Avanza 2018). Committed to grasping the internal logic of our opponents' worldview and the sources of its mass appeal, we examine anti-genderism as an ideology and moral sensibility deeply at odds with our own, but nonetheless one deserving of scholarly attention. At times we quote anti-genderists at length, giving them a chance to speak in their own voices.

This study builds on two sets of data. The first consists of anti-gender literature: official statements by, and interviews with, various popes and bishops, pastoral letters, articles and statements published on the webpages of specific groups and organizations, media reports, as well as interviews with some of the representatives of the anti-gender movement.[3] We also examined the genre of anti-gender books, many of them written by women, striving to understand the ideological tenets of anti-genderism. For this purpose, we conducted textual analyses of books and articles by key authorities in the European anti-gender circuit, including Gabriele Kuby (2015) and Marguerite Peeters (2007), as well as their Polish counterparts such as Father Oko (2014) and Marzena Nykiel (2014) and collected volumes such

as *Dyktatura gender* (Chrostowski et al. 2014). We examined interviews with, and public statements by, key proponents of anti-genderism worldwide, media coverage of anti-gender events, and various materials published on the websites of specific movements and organizations in Poland (Ordo Iuris Institute, Mother and Father Foundation, No to Gender!), as well as globally (the World Congress of Families, Agenda Europe, CitizenGo, Tradition, Family and Property). We followed Polish online initiatives, such as www.stopgender.pl as well as international platforms such as www.lifesitenews.com.

Finally, we participated in anti-gender rallies in Warsaw in 2015 and studied media reports and research on related mobilizations in other countries, which included the anti-LGBT and antifeminist backlash in Putin's Russia, Ukraine and Georgia; demonstrations against marriage equality in France (La Manif Pour Tous), the rise of anti-gay violence and legislation in other regions, including some African countries (e.g. Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act of 2014), the role that controversies on gender equality played in the protests against Judith Butler's visit to Brazil in 2017. Finally, in March 2019 we participated in the World Congress of Families in Verona, Italy and took part in a feminist counter-event organized under the banner "Verona, city of freedom!"

What interests us is not only the ideological framework linking these phenomena, but also the emotional dynamics and action repertoires. While our analysis focuses mostly on the Polish case, we strive to reconstruct the key tenets of anti-genderism as an ideology and strategy for social mobilization far beyond our local context. Finally, we refer to events which we have experienced firsthand, as participant observers of numerous demonstrations and public debates. The most recent campaign examined in this book was initiated by the Law and Justice party in the summer of 2019 – at this stage, our sources include speeches by politicians and clergymen, who revived the anti-gender rhetoric in a massive attack on what was now called "LGBT ideology" as well as texts and images employed by the LGBT movement and its allies in response to this campaign. Our sources also include existing research on the anti-gender movements in Europe and the United States, including both academic analyses and institutional reports that we refer to throughout the book (e.g. Alonso and Lombardo 2018; Case 2016; Datta 2018; Garbagnoli 2016; Grzebalska 2016; Grzebalska, Kováts and Pető 2017; Hennig 2018; Kováts and Põim 2015; Krizsán and Roggeband 2019; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017; Meyer and Sauer 2017; Rivera 2019; Verloo 2018a; Villa 2017).

The second set of data includes documents from, and scholarly studies of, mass mobilization against the abortion ban in Poland in 2016 and 2017 (Black Protests and Polish Women's Strike). Our own analysis is based on examination of media coverage of women's protests as well as texts and materials produced by the activists, e.g. speeches, essays, interviews, materials on Facebook pages of specific groups and so on. The latter include social

networking sites, blogs, websites of emerging or existing organizations, such as the Facebook groups of Gals4Gals (*Dziewuchy Dziewuchom*) and the Polish Women's Strike (*Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet*, OSK) constituting a wide array of densely interconnected virtual communities. We also studied media reports on related mobilizations in other countries (including Argentina, Brazil, Croatia, Italy, Spain, South Korea). Our data consist also of notes made during participatory observations of the protests, both online and offline, as well as interviews conducted with activists. Since late March 2016, when plans to change the abortion law in Poland were announced, we have participated in a number of public debates and events concerning reproductive rights organized by activist groups, public institutions and Polish media. Finally, we engage in a dialogue with existing research on the protests, both academic and activist (e.g. Chmielewska et al. 2017; Murawska and Włodarczyk 2016; Gunnarsson Payne 2020a, 2020b; Kubisa and Rakowska 2018; Majewska 2016, 2018; Ramme and Snochowska Gonzalez 2018; Suchanow 2020).

In the course of the events examined in this book, we repeatedly switched between the roles of observers (as in the case of the anti-gender demonstrations) and participant observers (during feminist protests, Equality Marches and at the World Congress of Families in Verona). As feminist scholars and activists we helped organize and took part in some protests against the abortion ban as invited speakers, e.g. during the rally in front of the parliament on 3 April 2016. We experienced directly what other participants were experiencing, we took detailed notes, made pictures and collected materials, e.g. leaflets. Unlike most participants of the Black Protests, we were also aware of some of the internal dynamics of discussions and communication inside the groups initiating and organizing the events. While some researchers strive for the position of a disengaged observer to ensure "objectivity" and "distance" toward the subjects of the study, we agree with Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln who claim that "there are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of – and between – the observer and the observed" (2011: 12). This is why we deploy a range of interconnected interpretive methods to better understand the dynamic of the events in question.

The aims and contents of the book

This is not a book about feminism and anti-feminism. Rather, it aims to demonstrate the significance of struggles over gender issues to broader political struggles. We write for those who want to understand the ongoing wave of right-wing populism and are not satisfied with the answers currently provided by political science and sociology. We believe that what is missing in the growing literature on populism is awareness of the centrality of gender issues within this new political culture.

We also hope to reach a feminist public: activists and scholars interested in women's rights and gender studies, who are intrigued and perhaps

troubled by the scale and intensity of opposition to gender and sexual equality. We aim to move beyond the concept of backlash (Faludi 2006), which has framed these debates for three decades now. We invite readers to consider how anti-feminism feeds on and contributes to broader political developments. Our analysis of the anti-gender movement is embedded in important recent debates on the links between feminism and neoliberalism (Fraser 2009; Eisenstein 2012; Rottenberg 2018): we claim that the opposition to gender as a concept and political practice has become an important part of the resistance toward neoliberalism – a trend which feminists tend to ignore at their own hazard.

We show that anti-gender mobilization seeks to establish discursive and political hegemony of an ultraconservative agenda under the guise of defense of an oppressed majority against a corrupt elite. The grassroots feminist mass mobilization which emerged as a response to this trend – including Poland's Black Protests, Ni Una Menos movements in Argentina, Women's March in the United States, the Repeal the 8th Campaign in Ireland – can be viewed as a left-populist reaction to right-wing populism (Gunnarsson Payne 2019, 2020; Korolczuk et al. 2019). In other words, contemporary struggles over gender and specifically sexual and reproductive rights can only be properly understood as part of the populist shift in politics.

Chapter 1 provides theoretical grounding for the entire book. We present the core categories of this study: gender and gender ideology, populism, neoliberalism, and affect, explaining in what ways they relate to each other. We discuss how the term "gender" is used in anti-gender discourse, and why it has become so central for the collaboration between ultraconservative movements and right-wing populists. We also challenge the view that the current wave of anti-feminism is the result of a symbiosis between neoliberalism and conservatism on the right. One of the core arguments of this book is that the anti-gender movement is so effective in attracting massive support because it is structured and legitimized as a conservative response to the excesses of neoliberalism.

In Chapter 2 we discuss the intellectual sources of anti-genderism and map out the transnational anti-gender movement, providing a basic sketch of our argument. We discuss the key role of the Vatican in developing the claims used in anti-gender campaigns and the subsequent development of a religious movement into a political one, stressing the importance of the East-West divide for the moral and political geography of this movement. We then explain how ultraconservative actors moralize the socio-economic crisis in their campaigns in order to mobilize large groups of citizens, including parents of young children. Finally, we discuss briefly the rise of the new wave of feminist activism as a countermovement to anti-gender campaigns.

Chapter 3 tells the story of Poland's anti-gender campaigns and seeks to explain how they connect to both the rise of the populist right to power and their subsequent assaults on reproductive rights and LGBT people. We examine three stages of the campaign, showing how the focus changed over time and how strategies of resistance evolved. This chapter discusses the

political uses and abuses of "gender" analyzing how anti-gender campaigns changed people's views on specific issues, and which social groups turned to be most susceptible to these arguments. Differences between Poland and Western countries are addressed: whereas in the latter references to gender equality have been employed in a femonationalistic fashion by right-wing actors to vilify refugees as "barbarians," in Poland anti-feminist ethno-nationalist rhetoric has been much more pronounced. Our main concern is to capture the dynamic of collaboration between right-wing populists and ultraconservatives which we call *opportunistic synergy*: to pinpoint the common discursive tropes and the interlocking (but by no means identical) interests and aims.

In Chapter 4 we look closely at anti-genderism as an ideological construct and a cohesive discourse, focusing on its affinity to right-wing populism, i.e. the way it constructs a division between "pure people" and "corrupt elites." We examine closely the massive discursive appropriation at the heart of anti-gender discourse: the conservative version of anti-colonial rhetoric, which we claim is prominent especially in Eastern Europe and Global South. Through its use of the anti-colonial frame, anti-gender discourse manages to combine ultraconservatism with a critique of neoliberalism: it vilifies both global and local elites accusing them of "ideological colonization." Feminism is thus presented as an integral part of neoliberalism, while "traditional family" becomes the last frontier of resistance, a source of hope and a reservoir of solidarity. We show how the use of the anti-colonial frame allowed the populist right to undermine the left-wing monopoly on voicing critique toward capitalism. Anti-colonialism is a populist meta-discourse that trumps many particularisms and conflicts by stressing the need to defend ordinary people, the poor, the helpless, the abused against a network of corrupt global elites. Today, anti-genderism has become the new language of anti-capitalist mobilization, which has profound consequences for the left.

Chapter 5 examines the cultural imaginary of anti-genderism and the ways it appeals to the emotions of parents: the stories it tells about identity, desire, family and sources of personal happiness. This chapter analyzes parental mobilizations against "gender" and examines specific images and arguments to show how emotions are triggered. We also show how these imageries are linked to material realities and social politics. At the heart of anti-genderism is the image of the child in danger: "genderism" is said to cause loneliness and unhappiness. Parents of young children are mobilized by anti-gender groups and networks through campaigns against the "sexualization" of children allegedly caused by sex education. Men are promised the restoration of paternal authority, while women are addressed by presenting gender and feminism as antithetical to motherhood and the source of a demographic catastrophe. Anti-genderism conflates "gender" with those aspects of capitalism that are most distressing to members of the lower-middle class, especially to parents: the crisis of care, precarity and growing inequality.

In Chapter 6 we shift our attention to feminist efforts to counteract assaults on gender and sexual equality. We focus mostly on Poland's Black

Protests: the mass movement of 2016–2018 against the total ban on abortion proposed by the Ordo Iuris Institute, a leader of the anti-gender movement in the region. The chapter explains how mass resistance emerged and developed over time, successfully counteracting the plan to further restrict women's reproductive rights in the country. We conceptualize the Black Protests as a movement responding to the triumphs of right-wing populism. Whereas the ruling Law and Justice party claims to represent the majority of the population, allegedly oppressed by the liberal elites (including "genderists" and feminists), in reality it promotes a highly exclusionary and narrow definition of "the people." This political construct has been challenged by the mass mobilization of the Polish women, who constituted a new political subject: angry women opposing patriarchy, state violence and social injustice. The rhetoric of righteous anger, resistance to cruelty, disrespect and injustice, is marked by high level of emotions, forging a new type of affective solidarity among previously unengaged women. Similar feminist mobilizations have emerged in Argentina, Spain, Ireland and the United States. Thus, we propose to interpret these developments as a part of a broader trend of women's leadership in resistance against right-wing populism. The new feminist articulation of "the people" – *a populist feminism* – is inclusive and pluralistic, effectively challenging the ethno-nationalistic and patriarchal imagery promulgated by the right (Arruzza et al. 2019; Gunnarsson Payne 2020a; Snochowska-Gonzalez and Ramme 2019).

Finally, in our Conclusion we revisit the core findings of the book and our central conceptual proposition: the opportunistic synergy between the anti-gender campaigns and right-wing populism. We discuss the ways in which the collusion between these two trends in Central and Eastern Europe differs from the American contexts, where neoliberalism is deeply intertwined with neoconservative ideology, and highlight the consequences of these developments for feminist movements.

Notes

1 This argument can perhaps best be illustrated by two different texts, both by influential anti-gender pundits: one by German sociologist Gabriele Kuby (2015: 18–20), the other by Polish journalist Marzena Nykiel (2014: 27–50).

2 These organizations include the Polish Women's Congress, Political Critique, Polish Gender Society, Action Democracy, the informal Women's 8 March Alliance as well as Warsaw Women's Strike. We also collaborate with "For Our Children" [*Dla Naszych Dzieci*], a single-mothers' association demanding child-support reform, and we have both written extensively on motherhood from a feminist perspective.

3 We examined articles and reports published on websites which are key to anti-gender organizing (www.stop-seksualizacji.pl, www.stopgender.pl), Catholic and right-wing media outlets, such as PCh24 and Fronda (www.fronda.pl, www.niedziela.pl, www.naszdziennik.pl, http://gosc.pl, www.wsieci.pl,www.ekai.pl, www.poloniachristiana.pl), as well as publications and debates on gender

ideology in mainstream media outlets, such as dailies such as *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*, popular weeklies, e.g. *Polityka*, *Newsweek Polska*, *Wprost*, *wSieci*, internet portals, including Onet and WP. Another set of sources included the main Polish TV stations, such as TVP, TVN and Polsat, and occasionally videos posted on YouTube. We focused on materials featuring "gender," "genderism" and "gender ideology" as key words, aiming at comprehensive analysis of key actors, arguments and developments, as well as the frames of interpretation used.

1 Gender, anti-gender and right-wing populism

Recasting the debate

Anti-gender mobilization plays a part in a broader cultural conflict over modernity: "gender" is a stretchy category that serves as a screen for collective fears about change, loss of national identity, excessive influence of the West and its cultural hegemony. A crucial source of anxiety is the rampant individualism of contemporary culture, the erosion of community and growing instability of everyday life. Opponents of "gender ideology" attribute these trends to the influence of feminism and the sexual revolution. Even though anti-genderist leaders often refer to community, family and motherhood only strategically, e.g. when mobilizing parents' groups, many people engaged in the movement genuinely cherish these values as central to their worldview. The traditional family is often seen as the last bastion to be defended against the onslaught of modernity (Fábián and Korolczuk 2017; Höjdestrand 2017). The movement's rhetoric is characterized by pathos, a Manichean vision of the world and a sense of urgency, exemplified by the speech made by Jacopo Coghe, vice-president of the Italian organization Pro Vita e Famiglia, at the World Congress of Families in Verona in 2019. Coghe proclaimed that the movement is engaged in a struggle against:

> ideologies of death that destroy man and human reality. If the mother is no longer the one who gives birth and the father is no longer the one who begets, children can be bought and gender is decided within the mind, and if every desire becomes a right, this means that at stake is not only a new model of society but a new paradigm of humanity.[1]

Our aim is to understand how such rhetorical devices are linked to existing anxieties and claims shared by many people on the ground. Such an analysis helps to explain what makes an apocalyptic image of collapsing differences and impending doom – a vision that is religious and fundamentally anti-modern – capable of bringing thousands of people into the streets and what makes it so useful to right-wing populist parties.

In this chapter we develop a theoretical framework for our analysis by mapping out the core categories and explaining how they relate to each other. First, we elaborate on the meaning of the term "gender" as it is

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used in anti-gender discourse, explaining why this particular concept has proved useful as a rallying cry in a broader cultural conflict about modernity. Next, we provide an overview of existing conceptualizations of populism, focusing on what they all share: a juxtaposition between innocent people living ordinary lives and powerful, corrupt and cunning elites. We propose to define populism as a dynamic process, tracing how different actors frame their positions according to the populist structure, and how varying ideologies are employed to saturate this frame. This is followed by an overview of the scholarly literature on the role of affects and emotions in politics – a theoretical framework that is of crucial importance to our analysis in Chapters 5 and 6. Finally, we challenge the assumption, common to many feminist debates on anti-feminism, that a necessary symbiosis exists between neoliberalism and conservatism on the right. There is plenty of factual counterevidence to this assumption: right-wing populist welfare chauvinism informs policies that are already in place in many countries. More importantly, the unexamined view that the broadly defined right is always pro-market blinds us to how right-wing populists actually gain massive support today: by mobilizing resentment against neoliberalism, both as an economic paradigm and as a cultural project based on economization and individualism.

Gender, anti-genderism and anti-gender mobilization

What is the meaning of the term "gender" as it is used in anti-gender discourse? Some scholars have argued that it is an "empty signifier," a flexible synonym for individualism, abortion, non-normative sexuality and sex confusion (e.g. Mayer and Sauer 2017). Others challenge the notion of "gender" as an empty signifier; e.g. Anja Hennig argues that it obscures the ideological coherence of different strands of anti-genderism, which she calls genderphobia. She claims that:

> Religious and political opponents of gender-sensitive reforms reject "gender" as social category because it clashes with a naturalist hierarchical understanding of gender relations and with the anti-pluralist conception of a homogeneous society and/or nation.
>
> (Hennig 2018: 7)

We show that conservatives oppose "gender" on three levels: as a concept, as an ideology/theory and as a social practice and political project (e.g. Case 2011; Favier 2015). In today's ultraconservative discourses "gender" is enmeshed in a deeply pessimistic vision of recent history: it stands for the social and cultural evils brought about by the Sexual Revolution – here the term includes modern feminism and the struggles for the rights of sexual minorities. "Gender" is indeed an empty signifier in Laclau's (2005) sense of the term, as it has become the right's rallying cry, the term that allows for

collective identification by linking issues concerning family, kinship, sexuality and nation within a single chain of equivalence. Thus, "gender" is the right's name for what the left calls sexual emancipation, modernization and equality, except that, of course, conservatives view the resulting freedom as a form of enslavement. In their version of the story, the 1960s brought about a dissolution of the "natural order." "Gender," as the core element of this tectonic shift as viewed by ultraconservatives, epitomizes the collapse of the fundamental God-given difference that makes society function properly: that between men and women. One could easily put together a list of components of "gender" and wonder at its internal diversity: divorce, gay marriage, social acceptance of promiscuity, abortion, the demise of the traditional family. Yet, the multiplicity of evils should not lead us to the mistaken belief that the term is empty in a literal sense. Quite the opposite, "gender" is the general principle that makes descent into chaos possible; it is the dissolution of boundaries, the opposite of "natural order."

We have identified three elements that constitute the core of anti-genderism as an ideological perspective. These include:

1 A set of convictions about the nature of man, "natural law" and human dignity that is consistent with Christian dogma and radically antithetical to social constructionism. Although the base is theological, much care is taken to provide scientific grounding for anti-gender views on sex differences (neuropsychology, brain sex, etc.) and to argue that gender studies are a scientific hoax. The anti-gender movement claims to defend common sense against "the suicidal manias of the EU" – as Nicolas Bay, one of the leaders of Front National, put it in his speech at the World Congress of Families in Verona in 2019.

2 A deeply pessimistic and consistently anti-modernist narrative of Western intellectual, cultural and social history. The West is said to have degenerated under the influence of Marx, Engels, Freud, the Frankfurt School, feminism and postmodernism; specific thinkers and activists (especially Margaret Sanger, Margaret Mead and Alfred Kinsey) are presented as degenerates and semi-criminals, guilty of innumerable lies. In a speech delivered in September 2014 in Moscow, at the International Forum on Large Families and the Future of Humanity, Gabriele Kuby, one of the intellectual leaders of the movement, warned that genderism is:

> fuelled by Marxist philosophers, particularly of the Frankfurt School in Germany. In their view, sexuality was to be liberated from restrictive morality – even from the taboo of incest. Sex between children, as well as sex *with* children, was to be allowed in order to create a "society without oppression."
>
> (Kuby 2014)

A strong connection is traced between 1968 movements, the "ideology of gender" and Malthusianism. The core idea of anti-genderism, in the words of Kuby, is that "the deregulation of sexual norms leads to the destruction of culture" (Fantini 2013). Post-socialist countries and the Global South are said to be somewhat resistant to this cultural change. Today, anti-genderists claim, they can save the West from spiritual and demographic suicide by defending what are presented as the original, universal Western values, referred to as Christian values and Christian civilization.

3 An alarmist and conspiratorial vision of the current global distribution of power: Neo-Marxist globalists are said to have taken over the world by means of blackmail and manipulation masked by benevolent talk about public health and human rights (Marchlewska et al. 2019). As expressed by Ignatio Arsuaga, the founder of HazteOir and CitizenGo, in his Verona 2019 speech, the enemies of the family include "Gramscians, leftists, cultural Marxists, radical feminists [and] LGBT totalitarians who want to control our sons and daughters, who want to shut us up." These sinister global forces, allegedly funded by transnational corporations such as Amazon and Google, are described as a new form of colonialism, whose most vulnerable targets are the developing nations of Africa. Eastern Europe is accorded a special place in this geography of gender, as a part of the world that was largely untouched by the sexual revolution.

Scholarly interest in anti-gender campaigns dates back to 2014; the academic literature on the topic has by now grown quite rich and diverse both in terms of theoretical approaches and the research questions asked. Some studies have stressed the breadth of the phenomenon, using terms such as "anti-gender mobilization" (Kováts and Põim 2015) or "anti-gender campaigns" (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017). From the beginning, many scholars, especially those located in Eastern and Central Europe, have viewed anti-genderism primarily as a political strategy, a way to oppose "laws and policies concerning sexual and reproductive health and rights in the European Union" (Hodžic and Bijelic 2014). One concept that has enjoyed worldwide recognition is that of gender as a "symbolic glue" bringing together various actors and ideas on the right (Kováts and Põim 2015; Grzebalska, Kováts and Pető 2017).

Anti-genderism has been viewed mainly as a religious trend within Roman Catholicism (e.g. Bracke and Paternotte 2016; Case 2011, 2016, 2019; Garbagnoli 2016). On the other hand, some scholars have downplayed the religious aspect, approaching resistance to gender as a transnational countermovement to feminism (Corredor 2019), or – in the case of Eastern and Central Europe – a grassroots reaction to the undemocratic ways in which gender equality measures were introduced in the first place (Rawłuszko 2019). A number of studies have focused on campaigns in specific countries (see the studies collected in Aghdgomelashvili et al. 2014; Kováts and Põim

2015; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017; Alonso and Lombardo 2018; Darakchi 2019; Hark and Villa 2015; Morán Faúndes 2019; Wierzcholska 2019). Focus on the specific targets of anti-gender campaigns in various contexts has resulted in scholarship that views anti-genderism as "anti-feminism" (e.g. Gilloz et al. 2017; Szelewa 2014), as an attack on gender studies and public education (Grabowska 2013; Kuhar and Zobec 2017; Paternotte 2019; Redden 2018), or as an effort to oppose marriage equality and LGBT rights (Fassin 2014; Schmincke 2020). There are also those who propose to examine this trend as a form of conspiratorial thinking (Marchlewska et al. 2019), or propose that it should be interpreted as a new form of antisemitism (Chetcuti-Osorovitz and Teicher 2018). Finally, scholars in various locations have been tracing the complex links between anti-gender campaigns and the rise of the right (e.g. Dietze and Roth 2020b; Grzebalska and Pető 2018; Gunnarsson Payne 2019; Köttig, Bitzan and Pető 2016), and there is a growing agreement that anti-genderism can in fact be interpreted as a neoconservative response to neoliberal globalization (e.g. Grzebalska, Kováts and Pető 2017; Korolczuk and Graff 2018; Zacharenko 2019). As Weronika Grzebalska, Eszter Kováts and Andrea Pető observed in their 2017 article published in *Krytyka Polityczna*, "gender" has become a symbolic glue, binding together disparate actors and agendas:

> "Gender ideology" has come to signify the failure of democratic representation, and opposition to this ideology has become a means of rejecting different facets of the current socioeconomic order, from the prioritization of identity politics over material issues, and the weakening of people's social, cultural and political security, to the detachment of social and political elites and the influence of transnational institutions and the global economy on nation states.
>
> (Grzebalska, Kováts and Pető 2017)

Throughout this book, we remain in dialogue with this growing body of scholarship, striving to shed more light on the relationship between anti-gender campaigns and right-wing populism, both of which we interpret as a reaction to the crisis of the neoliberal model. We focus on what we call the *opportunistic synergy* between the two trends and the role of the anti-colonial frame, as well as the affective dimension of anti-gender mobilization.

The conflict over gender has two dimensions, which we define as anti-genderism on the one hand and anti-gender mobilization/campaigns on the other. It is useful to keep this distinction in mind in order to understand the sources of social mobilization as well as the commonalities and differences between mobilizations in various contexts.

First, anti-genderism is an ideology, a worldview, a body of knowledge whose proponents aspire to legitimacy in academia and transnational institutions. The set of ideas we call anti-genderism is marked by internal coherence and remarkable flexibility, and it is crucial that we acknowledge

these two features. Certain elements remain constant: the central claim that "gender" is about collapsing natural differences; the notion that it is a danger to children, family and reproduction; insistence that it is an imposition of global elites. This common core enables cooperation between ultraconservative groups and right-wing populist parties lending some ideological coherence to otherwise disparate political endeavors (Kováts and Põim 2015; Dietze and Roth 2020a). However, anti-genderism is also remarkably malleable and varied. Some versions are conspiracy theories (Byford 2011) featuring former communist secret agents, bloodthirsty capitalists and even the Illuminati; others steer clear of such claims, sticking to vague generalizations about forces behind the dissolution of values. More problematic and potentially incriminating elements of anti-gender discourse, such as antisemitism or open homophobia, appear from time to time in specific locations but are neither constant nor present everywhere. Anti-gender mobilization has its roots in the Vatican's efforts to counter UN policies on population (Buss and Herman 2003; Butler 2004; Case 2011; Favier 2015), but some of the Holy See's aims, such as banning abortion, are by no means explicit in every context. Thus, we agree with David Paternotte that the new wave of resistance displays "new discourses and forms of organization, attempts by established conservative actors to reach beyond their traditional circles and connect with a wider audience" (2014).

The actual campaigns against genderism, in turn – that is, the anti-gender mobilization – are not simply enactments of the core tenets of anti-gender ideology. Locally, anti-gender campaigns have pursued such aims as introducing a total ban on abortion in Poland, changing the core of the sex education curriculum in German schools, discrediting gender studies in Sweden and preventing the introduction of marriage equality in France. Transnationally, ultraconservative actors oppose the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, the use of the term "gender" in UN documents and demonize the WHO standards of sex education. The conflict around gender has been playing out in international institutions such as the UN and the EU since the 1990s, but today it engages people on the grassroots level, such as concerned parents taking to the streets of Paris or Warsaw (see Figure 1.1), often on a mass scale (Höjdestrand 2017; Fábián and Korolczuk 2017; Strelnyk 2017). While keeping track of the many specific campaigns and the actors involved, we should not lose sight of the overarching meaning of "gender" as a category used by these forces. To the right, "gender" signifies the chaos of modern life, the ultimate danger. The term collects various anxieties and frustrations about modernity, hence its usefulness to different actors. Right-wing populist parties use anti-gender ideology selectively and instrumentally in order to moralize political conflict and demonize political opponents. In many parts of the world, the introduction of "gender" has led to the transforming of the political dispute into a struggle between good and evil. Anti-gender campaigns owe their success to the skillful mobilization of social affect and validation of common sense and ordinary people's knowledge.

Figure 1.1 Demonstration "Stop Depravation in Education," Warsaw, Poland, 2015. Photo by Elżbieta Korolczuk

Conceptualizing contemporary right-wing populism

Our analysis draws on and supplements contemporary discussions on populism (Gagnon et al. 2018; Kaltwasser et al. 2017; Laclau 2005; Mouffe 2018; Mudde 2004; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017; Mueller 2016; Wodak 2015). Conceptualizations of this phenomenon follow two distinctive traditions, although both camps agree that anti-elitism is a distinctive feature of populism and that the division between the elite and the people is central for populist parties. One tradition of thought defines populism as a particular form rather than content of politics, stressing that it is mainly a counter-hegemonic logic of articulation: one based on a political divide between the elites and the people (e.g. Laclau 2005; Mouffe 2018). According to Laclau, "populism is quite simply a way of constructing the political" (2005: 6). "The people" achieve unity not through adhering to a coherent ideology, but rather though opposing a common enemy and producing what Laclau calls "empty signifiers" (a set of ideals and concepts embedded in language). Within this tradition, scholars tend to see populism as a corrective to representative democracy and often focus on left populism, rather than the right-wing variety. This may explain why Laclau's conceptualization is not widely

used in Europe, where debates focus mostly on the threat that right-wing populism poses to liberal democracy (Mueller 2016). Laclau's (2005) theory is particularly useful in explaining how political identities are forged, as he insists that "the people" is not an already existing constituency, but a construct emerging in the political process. His definition of populism has, however, been critiqued as too broad, leading to an equation of populism with politics in general or to the dubious conclusion that all oppositional radical politics are necessarily populist in nature (Dean and Maiguashca 2020: 18).

The second, and today perhaps the most influential conceptualization, is the *ideational one* which defines populism as a "thin-centered ideology" dividing society into two antagonistic camps – "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite" – while drawing on other ideologies, such as nationalism (Mudde 2004; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017: 8; Stanley 2008). This definition highlights the content of populism, which – while context dependent – is usually based on specific concepts of belonging, race, community and social order. Scholars working in this tradition tend to focus on right-wing populism, agreeing that it is an inherently anti-elitist and anti-pluralist political position, one that is hostile to individualism and minority rights, which are seen as the core tenants of liberal democracy (Mueller 2016; Wodak 2015). In the words of Ruth Wodak:

> right-wing populism does not only relate to the *form* of rhetoric but to its specific *contents*: such parties successfully construct fear and – related to the various real or imagined dangers – propose scapegoats that are blamed for threatening or actually damaging our societies in Europe and beyond.
>
> (Wodak 2015: 1)

Right-wing populism relies on the demonization of its enemies though fear-mongering and scapegoating, and simultaneous idealization of "the people" (e.g. Stanley 2008). In contrast to left-wing populism which – in the Laclauian tradition – is interpreted as a necessary correction to the crisis of democracy, the right-wing version is "characterized by emotionally-charged political appeals to addressing crises through neonationalism, masculinism, Othering, bordering, xenophobia, sexism, racism, phantasmatic ethnic golden-ageism [and] a disregard for liberal democratic norms" (Gagnon et al. 2018: v). This conceptualization has also been challenged, partly on the grounds that it is difficult to empirically distinguish the thin-centered ideology of right-wing populism from its accompanying thick-centered ideologies such as conservatism or racism. As Jonathan Dean and Bice Maiguashca argue, there are both conceptual and methodological problems with this approach because "in order to quantify and measure the depth and scope of populism, scholars have preferred to shift their gaze from ideology to the discursive content of a leader's 'political talk' which can be more easily traced, coded and quantified" (2020: 18).

Responding to what they see as gaps and internal contradictions in contemporary populist studies, Dean and Maiguashca (2020) call for a renewal and reorientation of the field. They propose to embrace an inductive approach to studying populism, one that recognizes the context-specificity of this trend and which starts on the ground, instead of departing from firm theoretical assumptions. This is a strategy that we have found useful in our own research, as our focus is on what the representatives of right-wing populist parties and ultraconservative movements actually do and say.[2] Theories of populism have served us as conceptual frameworks for understanding what we found on the ground, and – contrary to Dean and Maiguashca (2020) – we do not see Mudde's and Laclau's conceptualizations as mutually exclusive. Rather, they are helpful in analyzing different manifestations of the phenomenon known as populism: the former highlighting the ideological dimension of populism and the latter emphasizing the structure of populist logic. For our purposes we neither limit the understanding of populism to pure form nor see it is as a coherent ideological project. Instead, we analyze populism as "a series of collective enactments that, while mobilizing ideologies, discourses, and forms of rhetoric, cannot be reduced to them" (Dean and Maiguashca 2020: 18). In other words, we interpret populism as a dynamic process, tracing how different actors frame their positions according to the populist structure – one that polarizes society by juxtaposing the elites and the people as two coherent and morally opposing camps – and how varying ideologies are employed to saturate this frame.

From our perspective, what is disappointing about both Mudde- and Laclau-inspired research is that both traditions have demonstrated very limited interest in the role that gender issues have played in the rise of right-wing populism. In many countries – and Poland is certainly one of them – patriarchal gender norms and ideologies are clearly an integral part of the exclusionary, nationalistic worldview that right-wing populist parties endorse, even though they may be manifested in various ways, depending on the context and time. Scholars are increasingly aware of this fact, and pioneering studies have begun to appear (e.g. Dietze and Roth 2020a, 2020b; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2015, 2017; Scrinzi 2017; Spierings and Zaslove 2015, 2017). Most studies on voting behaviors show a significant gender gap when it comes to voting for right-wing populist parties (Spierings and Zaslove 2017), but recent data suggest that in some countries this gap may be closing (Mayer 2015). When it comes to the content of populist politics, studies are also inconclusive. Research by Mudde and Kaltwasser (2015) shows that the specific goals and discourses of both left- and right-wing populist parties do not have much in common, depending mostly on the national context and the ways in which hegemonic norms and ideals of gender are constructed. More recent analyses, however, highlight a tendency on the part of various right-wing populist parties in countries such as Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary or France to use strongly gender-conservative rhetoric (Svatonova 2019; Sayan-Cengiz and Tekin 2019).

Julia Roth enumerates five "patterns of engendering" characteristic of right-wing populism: the gendering of scandals and of ethnic others, the appropriation of women's politics (femonationalism), white re-masculinization, radical religious and femo-global alliances (gender as ideological colonization), and the gendering of social inequalities (ethno-sexism) (2020: 253–256). While this systematization links various discursive patterns into a common logic, it does not explain the social and political dynamics that make these patterns effective. What is still lacking is a robust conceptualization of the relation between populism and gender, one that would help us understand the rising wave of socially conservative right-wing populism worldwide. This book is an effort to lay the foundations for such an endeavor.

Scholars studying anti-gender mobilizations warn against conflating anti-gender movements and right-wing populism and call for a framework disentangling the two (e.g. Paternotte and Kuhar 2018). While we agree that these are two distinct phenomena, we insist that the collusion between them is a powerful factor in today's global political struggles. Thus, we propose to conceptualize this relationship as an *opportunistic synergy*: a dynamic cooperation between religious fundamentalists and right-wing populist parties, with both sides benefitting. While there is a clear ideational kinship between the two, their ideological investments and political interests are not necessary the same. Right-wing populists draw on anti-gender rhetoric to increase their moral legitimacy in the eyes of traditionalist voters, and to moralize the conflict between the elites and the people. Meanwhile, ultraconservative organizations seek openings in the political opportunity structure; they treat right-wing parties as powerful allies thanks to whom they can introduce legal changes, gain access to funding and participate in policy-making processes. Both forces join in an effort to foster elite change in all spheres of political, social and cultural life, replacing liberal actors and institutions with those who answer to the ruling party only. At the core of de-democratization lies a tendency for previously autonomous entities to be controlled by a small group of people, the new elite. Ideology often plays a merely instrumental role in this process.

For the mainstream populist right, the anti-gender discourse offers a frame with which to moralize the divide between innocent people living ordinary lives and corrupt elites. Representatives of the anti-gender movements tend to self-identify as victims of, and as forces of resistance against, various forms of global exploitation, both economic and cultural (Grzebalska, Kováts and Pető 2016; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017). In effect, opponents of "gender" view themselves as both victims and heroes, protectors of the world's colonized peoples, whose livelihoods and authentic local cultures and value systems are endangered by globalism. The alleged colonizers include not only feminists, liberal NGOs and international bodies such as the UN and EU, but also the power of global markets driven by what the Pope refers to as the "idolatry of money." We view the populist claim that

gender is a form of "colonialism" as a core idea of anti-gender ideology and an important source of the movement's success (see Chapter 4).

A question might arise at this juncture as to whether the political players involved in anti-gender campaigns are in fact extreme right parties, radical populists or right-wing populists. Existing scholarship on illiberal tendencies in the contemporary world distinguishes carefully between the right, the extreme right, the populist radical right and the populist right (or right-wing populists) (e.g. Bustikova 2019; Mudde 2002; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017; Caiani, della Porta and Wagemann 2012; Wodak 2015; Verloo 2018b). Our focus is on the broadly defined populist right, as this term best describes the phenomenon we study (e.g. Kaltwasser et al. 2017). To put it briefly, a collusion between the radical right and anti-gender movements does indeed exist, and we provide some evidence for it (especially when looking at specific anti-gender organizations such as the World Congress of Families). However, our primary aim is to show how anti-gender rhetoric is used by mainstream populist right parties, providing them with a mechanism of social polarization and in some cases helping them into power.

What exactly is the difference between the populist right and the extreme or radical right parties? Manuela Caiani, Donatella della Porta and Claudius Wagemann observe that "the term extreme (or radical) right has multiple facets, with the common ideological core being hierarchy and order; a state-centered economy; and the importance of authority," but two elements are deemed central to the sociological concept of the extreme right: "ideologies of inequality" (such as racism, totalitarianism and ethnic chauvinism) and acceptance of violence toward any group defined as the Other (Caiani, della Porta and Wagemann 2012: 5). In short, radical or extreme parties openly engage in challenging democratic values or socio-political order more broadly. When analyzing contemporary Polish politics – which is marked by extreme polarization and radicalization on the right – it is often tempting to employ the category "populist radical right." However, this terminology does not fully correspond to our case. For example, Mudde (2002) did not classify the Law and Justice party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* – PiS) as a populist radical right party, but listed the League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin* – LPR) – in this category instead. Although the two parties were in coalition between 2005 and 2007, the LPR was much more radical than its coalition partner when it came to gender equality, sex education and LGBT rights. More importantly, in recent years a major shift has occurred in many countries, one that calls for a re-assessment of existing conceptualizations: a realignment on the right as well as a marginalization of parties on the left (e.g. Stanley 2017). Despite its recent radicalization, PiS has maintained the position of a mainstream party – or as Ben Stanley put it "a borderline populist party" (2017) – not an extremist one, which is a testament to the process of the entire political scene shifting massively to the right. A similar dynamic can be observed in other contexts, e.g. in Sweden where the Sweden Democrats party managed to secure the support of a quarter

of the population, or France, where Marine Le Pen advanced to the second round of the presidential elections in 2017, receiving 33.9% of the vote.

Right-wing populism is not a new phenomenon in Eastern Europe (Havlík and Pinková 2015; Kaltwasser et al. 2017; Stanley 2008). It is only in recent years, however, that we have witnessed the ascent to power of right-wing populist parties gradually incorporating radical right-wing ideologies into their programs in order to attract a hard-core electorate and to marginalize their rivals on the right. As of 2020, the Law and Justice party in Poland and Fidesz in Hungary are no longer "borderline populists" (Stanley 2017) but rather full-blown right-wing populist parties with strong inclinations toward authoritarianism. In Western Europe, on the other hand, the shift occurring on the right has consisted in radical right parties, such as the Front National and Lega, changing leadership and softening their political message with the aim of gaining more mainstream appeal: moving from a radical position to more mainstream populist one. To this end, they have sanitized their rhetoric and often included references to gender-equality in the process, strategically juxtaposing the gender-equal, civilized West against ultraconservative and barbaric Islam. One example is Marine Le Pen, who relaxed the Front National's conservative position on such issues as same-sex unions or abortion, while calling for a French referendum on migration policy on the grounds that women's rights are being compromised by an influx of refugees (Le Pen 2016).

While many of the parties included in earlier analyses of the populist radical right (e.g. Mudde 2002) are no longer in existence (as in the case of the League of Polish Families in Poland or MIÉP in Hungary) or remain on the fringes of mainstream politics (such as the National Revival of Poland or the Republicans in Germany), it is their powerful successors – the populist right – that threaten to dismantle liberal democracy. Such parties include Poland's Law and Justice, Italy's Lega, the rebranded Front National in France, the Sweden Democrats and new political actors such as Alternative for Germany. Of course, these parties do not position themselves as radical, ultraconservative or anti-democratic, but as saviors and rejuvenators of democracy, the voice of the common people, allegedly underrepresented, marginalized and abandoned by socialists and liberals. In his widely discussed text "The Populist Zeitgeist," Cas Mudde observed that "today populist discourse has become mainstream in the politics of western democracies" (2004), and a similar trend is also visible in Eastern Europe. It is precisely this mainstreaming of right-wing populist ideology that interests us, rather than the radicalism itself. Consequently, we employ the concept of *right-wing populism* rather than the *extreme* or *radical right* (Mudde 2004; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012; Mueller 2016; Wodak 2015), focusing predominantly on the cooperation (what we call *opportunistic synergy*) between them and the ultraconservative organizations and networks.

Gender plays an important role in this new trend. For former right-wing extremists in western democracies it serves a modernizing and mainstreaming

role: by focusing on the "natural family" and combining it with welfare-chauvinist positions, the extreme right attracts mainstream audiences, while side-stepping explicit racism and ethno-nationalism (Roth and Dietze 2020; Verloo 2018a). In former socialist countries, anti-genderism takes on a distinctly nationalist form: resistance to Western ideologies of gender equality is presented as a mark of national sovereignty and a chance to regain a rightful place in the moral geography of Europe. As Julia Roth and Gabriele Dietze observe, gender has become a "meta-language" and an "affective bridge" giving order to populist movements' political objectives (2020: 14–15). By invoking the concept of "gender," right-wing populists can popularize their worldview, presenting themselves as defenders of the "freedom of speech," the family and commonsense, a necessary corrective to the excesses of the cultural left and radical feminism.

The role of affects and emotions in right-wing politics

Our thinking owes much to the growing literature on the cultural politics of emotions, the affective roots and dynamics of political engagement (Ahmed 2014; Gould 2013; Hochschild 2016; Salmela and Scheve 2017). For more than a decade, social-movement scholarship and political sociology have been re-examining the role of affects (understood as somatic reactions to a stimulus or object) and emotions (defined as more complex and culturally mediated structures of feeling) in political mobilization (e.g. Clarke, Hoggett and Thompson 2006; Flam and King 2005; Jasper 2018; Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2001; Protevi 2009). In the words of Deborah Gould, activist contexts are "sites where the world-making occurs," which is why such contexts:

> generate strong feelings among participants – for example, marvel at being part of a collectivity, euphoria and camaraderie from being in an action together, feelings of fulfillment that derive from taking part in something larger than oneself, a sense of freedom to become the self you want to be. Once experienced, the desire to feel those feelings again may be strong, helping to sustain participation.
>
> (Gould 2013: 3)

Social movements are also spaces where meaning-production occurs in the realm of emotion. Thus, movements not only construct a language of emotions but also provide "an emotional pedagogy of sorts, a guide for what and how to feel and for what to do in light of those feelings" (Gould 2013: 3). Anger and fear play an important part in politics, as do positive emotions such as hope, loyalty and desire for justice. In an important contribution to the discussion on emotions in Polish politics, David Ost suggested that we adopt a "conflict theory of politics" and think about the way emotions (especially anger) are "mobilized" by political actors (2004: 239).

Clearly it takes emotions – and not just ideas – to build collective political identity: "Creating and evoking moral empathy is part of what makes a movement. It is part of demarcating We and marking off Them" (Eyerman 2001: 50).

What successful social movements appear to have in common, regardless of their ideologies and aims, is the capacity to convert shame into pride, to provide activists with a positive collective identity and a sense of agency, the ability to cause change. Feminist and queer theorists have long explored political uses of shame and anger by the political left, notably in the transformative use of negative affects in mobilizing those marked as deviant. As Deborah Gould has documented, feelings were central to the provocative activist style of ACT UP – a movement that managed to convert shame and humiliation into pride and dignity under the banner of "gay pride" (Gould 2009). More recently feminist history has been re-examined in terms of emotional attachments, rather than ideological affiliations, developments and conflicts (e.g. Chemaly 2018).

While most studies of emotions in social movements tend to focus on progressive movements (e.g. Civil Rights, anti-war, women's and LGBT movements), there is a growing interest in the emotional appeal of conservative and right-wing groups (Busher, Giurlando and Sullivan 2018; Hochschild 2016). More recently, scholars have also been focusing on the uses of emotions or affects specifically in right-wing populism (e.g. Kinnvall 2018; Salmela and von Scheve 2017). Social psychologists Agnieszka Golec de Zavala and Oliver Keenan (2020) highlight the importance of national collective narcissism – the belief in the exceptionality of one's nation and a sense of resentment that the exceptionality is not sufficiently recognized by others – for understanding the motivations of people who support right-wing populists. Exploring the differences in affective politics between various strands of populism, Mikko Salmela and Christian von Scheve (2017) argue that left- and right-wing populism are driven by dissimilar emotional dynamics regarding shame; whereas the former relies on acknowledged shame, which may be easily mobilized in struggles for social justice, the latter is characterized by repressed shame and transforms fear and insecurity into anger and resentment. Polish cultural critic Janusz Czapliński has argued that today's Poland is in the midst of a "war of shames" caused by excessive use of shaming in the process of modernization during the transition era (2017). During the 1990s, he claims, shaming was used against those unable to adapt to the new capitalist system; instead of devising paths of advancement and inclusion, the elites dismissed such people as lazy, inflexible and routinely referred to them as *Homo sovieticus*. In the 2010s, shame was intercepted by the nationalist right, so that:

> Polish culture is now involved in a war of two sanctioned forms of shame. The first – fragmented, internally inconsistent – emerges from a foundation of ethical concern for the rights of minorities; the second

> – narrow-minded and hostile towards differences of any kind – appeals to the ethics of majority rights; the former was unable to satisfy the popular need for respect, while the latter exclusively dispenses approval to "its own." The former proposed the Christian principle "Be proud if you're able to feel shame," while the latter hypes the tribal dictum "Shame on you for not being proud!"
>
> (Czapliński 2017: 90)

While we concur with scholars who emphasize the role of shame in right-wing affective political strategies, our own research suggests that positive emotions are equally important for ultraconservative mobilization. Anti-gender movements have been remarkably successful in converting culturally undervalued identities, such as the identity of a parent, into a source of righteous anger and collective pride (Fabian and Korolczuk 2017). Grassroots anti-gender groups function in the public sphere primarily as "concerned parents" who take pride in defending their children, while feeling abandoned or betrayed by the state. As we show in Chapter 5, the mobilization of parental identities is an important source of the movement's success in recruiting supporters, as well as earning credibility in public discourse.

Dean and Maiguashca (2020) suggest that focus on emotions might be the solution to the theoretical impasse in populism studies. They propose developing a new approach, one that pays particular attention to two distinctive features of populism: the affective investments (both horizontal and vertical) of the people and political leaders and the epistemic dimension of populist politics – the affirmation of everyday knowledge of citizens. This is an analytical strategy we apply both in our chapters on anti-gender mobilizations and in our examination of feminist mass mobilization. We show that anti-gender actors share a distinctive emotional repertoire: common tropes and narratives, focused mostly on dangers awaiting children and families, which trigger negative emotions such as shame, anxiety and fear, but also positive ones, such as pride and solidarity. In a somewhat similar fashion, feminist actors mobilize solidarity and righteous anger by evoking fear and anxiety in response to ultraconservative forces' assault on women's rights.

The way the anti-gender movement mobilizes emotions, we argue, is an important aspect of its affinity with right-wing populism. The victim-perpetrator reversal that anti-gender actors employ mirrors a broader trend of right-wing populists presenting themselves as victims of the liberal establishment and defenders of free speech stifled by political correctness (Wodak 2015: 64–66). "Proud victimhood" today serves as political legitimation on both the right and the left, but the right appears to have become more successful in using this currency in political play (Campbell and Manning 2018; Lilla 2017; Wendling 2018). In his provocative book *Dream* (2007), Stephen Duncombe argued that, for several decades, U.S. conservatives have been able to tap into collective emotions far more effectively than

progressives. This, he claims, is thanks to their capacity to "create reality," rather than merely present it and argue about it. The right speaks to passions, the left offers rational arguments that may be true but fail to result in political mobilization. This pattern has been evident in the U.S. in the aftermath of Donald Trump's electoral victory; it is also visible in Europe today, as illiberal forces grow in country after country. For progressives, reliance mostly on empiricism and rational argumentation appears to have been a costly miscalculation. Employing the sociology-of-emotions perspective can help us understand the appeal of anti-gender movements, to grasp how they manage to "mobilize anger," tapping into people's economic anxiety and growing sense of ontological insecurity, as well as the disillusionment with the political elite and existing civil society. Our analysis of recent feminist mobilizations suggests that politics of emotions are also possible on the left. In order to mobilize populations increasingly disenchanted with the political status quo, progressive forces need to tap into passions, desires and hopes.

Questioning the symbiosis between neoliberalism and right-wing politics

This book may be seen as a contribution to the rapidly developing body of work that examines the relationship between gender-conservatism and neoliberalism, one that offers an important corrective to the paradigm that links the right with pro-market views. We argue that anti-gender mobilization is a reaction to, and partly a form of resistance against, neoliberalism. Following such scholars as Harvey (2007), Read (2009), Brown (2015, 2019), Cabanas and Illouz (2019), Illouz (2007), Gregor and Grzebalska (2016), Jacyno (2007) and Ong (2006), we conceptualize neoliberalism not just as an economic doctrine and governance regime, but also as a cultural paradigm, a rationality permeating all realms of life and social strata. The core of neoliberalism is that economic rationality permeates all spheres of human activity, including cultural production, practices of citizenship and intimacy, identity and emotions. Profit-maximization and efficiency become unquestioned values overruling cooperation, democratic politics, social solidarity and the pursuit of justice.

As an economic practice, neoliberalism operates at the intersection of global and local trends, and entails privatization and erosion of welfare accompanied by austerity policies, an unregulated flow of money and goods as well as an imperial politics of economic domination. As a social and cultural trend, it includes extreme forms of commodification and individualism. Thus, it entails "specific alignments of market rationality, sovereignty and citizenship" (Ong 2006) and deeply transforms social relations and value systems. In the words of Cabanas and Illouz (2019):

> …neoliberalism should be understood not only in terms of its structural features and consequences, but also in terms of its infrastructural assumptions; that is, in terms of its ethical and moral maxims according

> to which all individuals are (and should be) free, strategic, responsible and autonomous beings who are able to govern their psychological states at will, fulfill their interest and pursue what is understood to be their inherent objective in life: the achievement of their own happiness. (2019: 51)

This individualistic paradigm was developed in close alliance with neoconservatism, whose emphasis on family responsibility and moralization of social inequalities made neoliberal policies appear inevitable and "natural." In the U.S., as shown by Melinda Cooper (2017), the entire history of neoliberal transformation was made possible by the neoconservative ethos of self-sufficiency, responsibility and the return of carework to the home. The private space of the family and women's unpaid work within it served to absorb the social impact of cuts in health and child care, as well as other social programs addressed to marginalized populations and the working poor. While the re-traditionalization of gender roles was the goal of neoconservatives, in practice it happened almost by default as an effect of neoliberal policies in the Reagan era. "Traditional values" and the "traditional family" model were in fact a conscious reinvention of neoconservatives, a project of re-imagining the social world in a way that would fit the new form of capitalism. Cooper cites neoconservative sociologist Nathan Glazer, who stated that the "creation and building of new traditions, or new versions of old traditions, must be taken more seriously as a requirement of social policy itself" (2019: 313). Neoconservatives believed that "traditional values" are an essential supplement to free markets, a way to ensure social stability and moral meaning in a consumerist society. As Wendy Brown (2019) documents, key figures of the neoconservative movement, e.g. Irving Kristol and Friedrich Hayek, made this goal explicit in their writings. It was, they argued, the government's role to promote "traditional values" in schools, families and civic spaces in order to counteract the intrinsic nihilism and moral degradation that comes with consumerism (Brown 2019: 90–91).

The hegemony of "neoliberal political rationality" (McRobbie 2009) has made struggles for gender and social justice even more challenging, as it resulted in the rise of neoliberal feminism, which reduces feminist struggles to individual efforts to achieve work-life balance and personal success (Eisenstein 2012; Fraser 2009; Rottenberg 2019). Nancy Fraser (2009) claims that feminism was not simply "framed" or "co-opted" but rather succumbed to the general of neoliberalism as cultural formation. However, there was also something about the movement itself that made it possible for neoliberalism to "resignify" feminist ideals. Fraser locates the source of this problem in feminism's cultural turn, its transformation into a critique of culture. The evolution of academic feminism is, of course, central to this tendency:

> In practice, the tendency was to subordinate social-economic struggles to struggles for recognition, while in the academy, feminist cultural theory began to eclipse feminist social theory. […] The timing, moreover, could

> not have been worse. The turn to recognition dovetailed all too neatly with a rising neoliberalism that wanted nothing more than to repress all memory of social egalitarianism. Thus, feminists absolutized the critique of culture at precisely the moment when circumstances required redoubled attention to the critique of political economy.
>
> (Fraser 2009: 109)

It has become increasingly clear in recent years that Fraser's diagnosis has serious consequences for feminist movements and not only for academic feminist theory. Mobilizations for women's rights are most effective when they abandon the neoliberal framework and turn to radical egalitarianism (Arruzza et al. 2019; Gunnarsson Payne 2019; Korolczuk et al. 2019; Roth 2020), thus challenging the right-wing monopoly on being the voice of the common people. In Chapter 6 we elaborate on this argument, conceptualizing this phenomenon as *populist feminism* and claiming that it may become a serious counterforce to right-wing populism.

For such a change to become possible we need to reconsider the assumption that ultraconservative mobilizations are inevitably neoliberal in orientation (e.g. Brown 2006; Eisenstein 2012; Fraser 2009). We argue that this view is grounded in an unacknowledged U.S.-centric bias, i.e. the universalization of assumptions based on specifically American cultural and political patterns: the alliance between neoliberalism and neoconservatism. Based on our research on anti-gender campaigns, we argue that this alleged symbiosis may not be quite as strong in contexts outside the U.S. In fact, ultraconservative actors' position regarding neoliberalism has varied from country to country and over time. While the right in the U.S. has been neoliberal by default, the new right-wing populist parties in Western Europe often employ welfare chauvinist positions (Andersen and Bjørklund 1990; Finnsdottir and Hallgrimsdottir 2019; Eger and Valdez 2015; Mudde 2002; Norocel 2016). As observed by Herbert Kitschelt and Anthony J. McGann (1995) right-wing parties in Western Europe have long built their popularity on promises of general safety-net programs available only to legal residents. These spending regimes would be both generous and highly restrictive, eliminating immigrants' rights to state-sponsored health care, housing or child care. Such actors employed a "racist-authoritarian strategy" while

> studiously stay[ing] away from an admiration of market-liberal capitalism. The main point is the mobilization of resentment on the authoritarian/libertarian axis. The attack on foreigners, the vilification of feminist and environmentalist movements […] and the stress on national symbols and historical reminiscences are critical for racist-authoritarian strategy.
>
> (Kitschelt and McGann 1995: 22)

This position evolved over the last two decades into the right-wing populist welfare chauvinism promulgated by parties such as the Front National in France, Law and Justice in Poland and Fidesz in Hungary. Recent scholarship shows a similar dynamic at play in Scandinavian countries, including Denmark, Norway and Sweden, pointing to the key role of gendered dynamics in the context of right-wing politics and claimsmaking. Parties such as the Sweden Democrats "position the Scandinavian welfare state as a zero-sum social good that cannot be shared with outsiders, while at the same time framing outsiders as risks to the social contract that has created the welfare state" (Finnsdottir and Hallgrimsdottir 2019: 2).

In Eastern and Central Europe the neoliberal revolution – the dismantling of the socialist welfare state with its generous universal health care system, job security and state support for families – took place as part of the systemic transformation in the 1990s and was accompanied by a re-traditionalization of gender roles (e.g. Desperak 2013; Dunn 2004). The important difference between the post-socialist and the American contexts is that whereas in the U.S. the return to "family values" was conceived of mostly in terms of strengthening individual responsibility and was thus fully compatible with the neoliberal ethos, in post-socialist countries the neoliberal revolution was experienced by many as a destruction of community and tradition. This dynamic was diagnosed by anthropologist Elizabeth Dunn (2004), who examined the effect of privatization on women workers' self-concepts in a pioneering study of women employed at the Alima Gerber factory in Rzeszów, which was being privatized by an American company in the 1990s. Dunn's respondents identified individualist discourses as oppressive: a force pushing them into a mold which they associated with the exploitative regime of the factory that employed them. Domesticity, motherhood and focus on childcare, which today are promoted by ultraconservatives as paramount to "traditional values," were to these women a respite and refuge from the alienating world of capitalism. It is such sentiments and identifications that were eventually harnessed by the populist right. Dunn (2004) shows that resistance to feminism and neoliberalism were interconnected, reflecting not so much ideological choices but resistance to rapid socio-economic change.

The U.S.-centered paradigm fails to account for the central dynamic of right-wing populism in Europe and other parts of the world, namely its ability to mobilize resentment against neoliberalism, both as unbridled dominance of the market and a cultural project based on values and social patterns associated with modernity: individualism, self-sufficiency and effectiveness. In post-socialist states populists often challenge the collusion between liberal democracy and market liberalism, even though they may continue with neoliberal policies, combining them with generous state support for "our families" in order to attract voters. As we will discuss in the following chapters, such parties have not only promoted re-traditionalization but have also supported increased social spending on family-oriented policies, which can

explain, at least partly, wide public support for the populist right in recent years. Thus, the collaboration between ultraconservatives and right-wing populists in Europe should be carefully distinguished from "the American nightmare" discussed by Wendy Brown (2006).

Today's anti-gender movement – a powerful ally of right-wing populism – can thus be viewed as reactionary opposition to neoliberalism, rather than a continuation of neoconservative movements of the 1980s and 1990s (Grzebalska 2016; Kováts 2018; Zacharenko 2019). In the words of Weronika Grzebalska:

> conservative protest movements create a space for [marginalized] people to vent their fears and insecurities, voice their anger and dissatisfaction with politics and claim a sense of agency and empowerment that European liberals and social democrats once promised – but failed to deliver.
>
> (2016)

Similar insights can be found in the writings of Elena Zacharenko (2019), who urges liberals to break with neoliberalism in order to effectively oppose the ultraconservative movements. She points out that clashes over "gender" result from a broader trend clearly visible in European mainstream politics in recent decades: the tendency to employ the discourse of human rights and focus on minority issues, while simultaneously cutting social provisions and dismantling the welfare state in general. Zacharenko claims that the anti-gender movement is a reaction against this trend which equates gender progressivism with neoliberal governance, ignoring distinctions and divisions on the progressive side, especially the existence of left feminism.

The collusion between liberal democracy and neoliberalism has been especially pronounced in Eastern Europe, where market democracy and gender equality policies were introduced simultaneously and often by the same actors, under the pressure of Western institutions and later, as part of the EU integration process (see also Rawłuszko 2019). As a result, in Central and Eastern Europe "'gender ideology' has become a means of expressing a rejection of the European East-West hierarchy and the failed promises of capitalist transformation" (Zacharenko 2019). While we agree that raising inequalities and the politics of austerity have been an important factor in paving the way for right-wing populism, we view it as problematic to reduce conflicts around values to the effects of economic inequality. Our analysis acknowledges the importance of economic factors, but it also highlights the particularity of conflicts over values, identities, beliefs and lifestyles.

Gender traditionalism as a form of resistance against the onslaught of "Western individualism" is a staple of public debate in Eastern and Central Europe, feminism being presented as part and parcel of this new and dangerous regime. As documented by Joanna Regulska and Magdalena Grabowska (2013), this view had been typical of older religious women from

rural areas in Poland long before the beginning of anti-gender campaigns. These women were "rarely in favor of the free-market economy and equally rarely identify with feminist values. In Poland, some of these older, conservative women have been rising voices against neocapitalism and the European Union" (2013: 165). The women in question – conservative mothers' groups which emerged in the Czech Republic in the 1990s, supporters of Radio Maryja or parental activists engaged in opposition to school reform in 2009 in Poland – would eventually join the anti-gender movement, whose rhetoric corresponds to their own worldview: at once skeptical of capitalism and feminism, as well as inclined to view them as interconnected.

There is a tendency on the left and within feminism to assume that progressive movements own resistance to neoliberalism as a social project and cultural formation. In reality, however, there is significant opposition to neoliberalism on the other end of the political spectrum. While left-wing Western feminists were discussing the problem of feminism's "elective affinity" to neoliberalism (Fraser 2009) or the rise of "neoliberal feminism" (Rottenberg 2018), what took hold in the imagination of many women was a sweeping equation between feminism and individualism, a view which was promoted by traditionalist circles over the last decades. We claim that this equivalence may have stronger resonance in Eastern Europe than in most Western contexts and that anti-genderism capitalizes on this fact.

Populist revolt or elite change?

In their important study *Cultural Backlash* Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart (2019) show that conflicts over values have in recent years become the decisive factor explaining popular support for right-wing populist parties. While such parties tend to receive significantly greater support among low-income groups and people suffering from social deprivation, the support is often strongest among the petty bourgeoisie rather than unskilled manual workers, whereas it is significantly lower among welfare recipients (Norris and Inglehart 2019: 132–169, for Poland see Gdula 2019). Cultural factors, such as anti-immigrant attitudes, mistrust of global and national governance, support for authoritarian values and left-right ideological self-placement are decisive for political choices.

We claim that the economic cleavages should be seen as intertwined with cultural ones in a complex pattern; they are mutually reinforcing, but neither can be reduced to the other. Economic grievances affect the demand for right-wing populism, but often in an indirect way, e.g. through exacerbating anxieties about migration, cultural marginalization and disruption of traditional values and moral hierarchies (Hochschild 2016; Norris and Inglehart 2019). Norris and Inglehart argue that in recent years traditional divisions between left and right have become obsolete; today political parties should be divided into liberal cosmopolitans and conservative populists. The former support pluralistic democracy, tolerance, multiculturalism and

progressive values, whereas the latter opt for traditional values and nationalism, using anti-establishment rhetoric to voice "the popular will." David Goodhart (2017) describes the same division among voters as one between "Anywheres" vs "Somewheres;" that is those who are mobile, flexible and capable of adapting to new circumstances, and those whose identity is rooted in a particular place, and whose sense of security requires stable conditions. He describes the shift in global politics – a populist revolt – as the rise of the Somewheres against the decades-long hegemony of the Anywheres. These conceptualizations can be usefully combined with the concept of the populist moment proposed by Mudde (2004), Krastev (2007) and Mouffe (2018), aiming to capture the profound shift in politics that we are witnessing today and the logic of the on-going struggles for hegemony.

One needs to be skeptical, however, of the populist leaders' claim to be of the people. Politicians such as Orbán, Kaczyński or Le Pen are themselves members of their society's elites, and many of their efforts are oriented toward gaining and monopolizing power, rather than redistributing resources and including marginalized populations. By successfully claiming the identity of those who speak for the poor and disempowered, right-wing populists have put in motion a process of elite change. While elites – small, well-connected groups with disproportionate economic, political and cultural power – are usually seen as stable, they are also subject to change (Putnam 1976; Best and Higley 2018). Existing scholarship focuses predominantly on political elites, which include

> the familiar "power elite" triumvirate of top business, government executive, and military leaders (Mills 1956) along with persons and groups holding strategic positions in political parties and parliaments, major interest organizations and professional associations, important media enterprises and trade unions, and religious and other hierarchically structured institutions powerful enough to affect political decisions.
> (Best and Higley 2018: 3)

However, a civil society elite also exists; it includes heads of most influential organizations and think-tanks, widely recognized social movement leaders or norm entrepreneurs and public intellectuals engaged in social campaigns. Interconnected with influential politicians and business leaders, the liberal civil society elite is often vilified in populist rhetoric as privileged and corrupt. In fact, the very word "elite" is used in such discourse as an insult. In its 2014 electoral program the Law and Justice party promised to re-organize state–civil society relations toward a more participatory model based on partnership, the strengthening of direct democracy and supporting the have-nots of the third sector, especially small organizations from rural areas. The reality proved different. Under the banner of anti-elitism, the populist right established itself as a new elite in politics, judiciary, culture and civil society. Rather than empowering the Somewheres or the "common

people" and giving them access to political and cultural power, right-wing populist actors aim to monopolize power for themselves and their allies, including representatives of the anti-gender movement. Over the last five years in Poland we have observed key positions of power and influence in all areas of life being taken over by people connected and loyal to the Law and Justice party (Bill 2020). Each time such a change occurred it was justified by a need to "give power back to the people" while in reality this process can be seen as a state-wide power grab. Andrea Pető and Weronika Grzebalska (2016) describe this process as the creation of a polypore state: a system in which all vital resources, concepts and institutions of the liberal democratic state are appropriated by the party in power and transformed into an illiberal state.

Neither the authors of *Cultural Backlash* nor Goodhart focus specifically on gender as a key polarizing factor, delegating this role to conflicts involving national identity and migration. Our analysis, however, shows that broadly defined gender issues are of key importance for the processes of political polarization. Right-wing populists strategically accuse "cosmopolitan elites" of blurring gender differences and hierarchies, and this charge is no less important than the one concerning open borders and multiculturalism. In fact, it is discourse around gender that allows today's conservatives to bridge the two dimensions: economic and cultural. Anti-gender discourse persistently sets a culturally marginalized and economically disadvantaged majority (Goodhart's Somewheres) against global liberal elites (cosmopolitan Anywheres). This discursive pattern could be observed in post-communist countries long before the anti-gender campaigns began, but it was the combination of the anti-gender critique of liberal elites as morally corrupt and the right-wing discourse of regaining sovereignty that made it politically effective.

Notes

1 This and other quotes from speeches given at WCF in Verona were transcribed and translated from Italian to English by Cecilia Santilli, a member of the research team "Civil Society Elites?". We are grateful for her generous support.

2 In our earlier article on this topic (Korolczuk and Graff 2018) we employed the term "illiberal populism" to underscore the fact that the right-wing actors openly challenge liberalism understood as individual freedoms, minority rights and pluralism. We now abandon this term, opting for the more precise concept of right-wing populism, recognizing the significance of the opposition between corrupt elites and innocent people as the key structuring principle of the phenomenon at hand.

2 Mapping the anti-gender campaigns as a global movement

From religious trend to political struggle

In September 1995, an American Catholic journalist named Dale O'Leary traveled to Beijing to attend the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. She returned convinced that "the Gender Establishment firmly controls the UN" and made it her mission to reveal to the public the full scope of their plan to "remake the world" (1997: 26). The story she eventually told is that of a hostile takeover of international bodies such as the UN by International Planned Parenthood Federation and a group of aggressive U.S. feminists – a relentless effort to push a radical sexual agenda upon developing nations. In a rhetorical move we view as paradigmatic of the anti-gender imaginary, O'Leary presents herself as a champion of ordinary people's right to lead traditional lives and to defend their families against the forces of the global Sexual Revolution. She also insists that the gender agenda is in fact a hoax, an outrage against common sense. Her 1997 book *The Gender Agenda* concludes with a vivid metaphor:

> The Gender Agenda reminds me of a giant balloon in a small room. So long as everyone treats the balloon with respect, it continues to expand, and, eventually, it will suffocate the people in the room. But, all that is needed to stop the balloon is one sharp pin.
>
> (O'Leary 1997: 213)

O'Leary is one of many conservative Catholics who prepared the ground for what would eventually become an international movement against "gender ideology." This chapter maps out the intellectual sources and global connections of the anti-gender movement. We discuss (1) the origins of anti-gender campaigns and the key role of the Vatican; (2) the subsequent development of what started as a religious movement into a political one; (3) the importance of the East-West divide for moral and political geography of the movement; (4) the role played by the socio-economic crisis in these developments and (5) the rise of a new wave of feminist activism, which we view as a countermovement to anti-gender campaigns.

There is no doubt that the Vatican and Christian religious institutions played a key role in initiating resistance to "gender ideology" (Buss and

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Herman 2003; Case 2011, 2016 and 2019; Garbagnoli 2016; Kuhar 2014). Yet, throughout this book we argue that anti-genderism is political at heart and cannot be reduced to a religious phenomenon. We agree with Paternotte and Kuhar, who claim that the invention of "gender ideology" is not only a religious issue. "These campaigns intersect with raising right-wing populism in Europe and, to a lesser extent, with political homophobia designed as a political project to increase state power" (2017a: 9).

Religious origins of anti-gender campaigns

The trend originates in the 1990s with the Vatican's opposition to the inclusion of the term "gender" in documents produced during two UN conferences: the 1994 Cairo Conference on Population and Development and the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women (Buss 2004; Case 2011, 2016; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017; Corredor 2019). Interestingly, this was not simply a case of the center – the Vatican – influencing the peripheries. Morán Faúndes (2019: 410) has traced the genealogy of the "gender ideology" syntagma to the works of several Argentinean neoconservatives produced in 1995 and almost immediately picked up by U.S.-based Catholic journalist Dale O'Leary. According to many scholars, it was O'Leary who became a key early inspiration for the Holy See in introducing the phrase "gender ideology" into its discourse. Her pamphlet "Gender: the Deconstruction of Women" (1995) – later developed into *The Gender Agenda* – was widely read by Vatican officials, including Joseph Ratzinger, and conservative Catholics (Case 2016: 165; Paternotte and Kuhar 2017a: 9–10). Since then, "gender" has gradually replaced "civilization of death," as well as the opposition between "good" and "bad" feminisms within Catholic teaching, a shift that facilitated alliances that were both international and interfaith (Garbagnoli 2016).

To conservative Catholics, it was unacceptable that key transnational institutions, such as the WHO and UN, had opted for a conceptualization of gender relations rooted in social constructionism and feminism, as opposed to complementarity and "natural law" promoted by the Church. In the words of O'Leary:

> The Gender Agenda begins with a false premise – the differences between men and women are social constructs – and then goes on to demand that this premise be "mainstreamed" in every program and policy. According to the "gender perspective," since all the differences between men's and women's activities and achievements are artificial, they can and should be eliminated.
>
> (1997: 161)

Since O'Leary's book, a whole library of anti-gender works has been published, many of them translated into numerous languages. The core ideas

of the religious anti-gender agenda can be found in documents issued by the Vatican, most comprehensively the 1000-page long *Lexicon: Ambiguous and Debatable Terms Regarding Family Life and Ethical Questions*, published in 2003 by the Pontifical Council for the Family. Subsequently, Catholics around the world were informed about the dangers of "gender" by numerous exhortations and public documents produced by the Vatican as well as by national Catholic Churches (e.g. Congregation for Catholic Education 2019; Benedict XVI 2008, 2012; Bishops' Conference of Poland 2013; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2004).

The most influential figures of Catholic intellectual circles that have spoken against "genderism" include Michel Schooyans, a Belgian priest positioned in the Vatican, who authored one of the founding books of anti-genderism in 1997; the Guinean Cardinal Robert Sarah appointed a prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments by Pope Francis in 2014; the Colombian Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo, the president of the Pontifical Council for the Family; as well as the French Lacanian psychoanalyst priest Tony Anatrella, who was eventually banned from exercising the priestly ministry in 2018 following an investigation into allegations of his having molested patients whom he claimed to have cured of homosexuality (Shine 2018). There are also several women among widely recognized authorities on the evils of gender, including activists and authors such as the German sociologist Gabriele Kuby (2015) and Belgian American theologian Marguerite Peeters (2007), whose work has been translated into many languages and circulated widely in Europe.

What role has the war on gender played within the Catholic Church? Demonization of gender is sometimes seen as a strategy of the Church to discipline liberal Catholics, whose calls for reform in the aftermath of the pedophile scandals are viewed as a threat to the Church as an institution (e.g. Radzik 2013). On this interpretation, genderism has become the new enemy of the anti-modern wing of the Church, a generalized evil that to some extent replaces Jews in their role of scapegoat associated with modernity and moral degeneracy. Indeed, the similarities between the two mindsets are striking. Like Jews in 19th century European antisemitism, gender is associated with cosmopolitanism and more generally with change, rootlessness and modernity (Volkov 1978) as well as perversion and the dissolution of boundaries (Mosse 1997, Gilman 1991). Like Jews in the conspiratorial antisemitism promoted by ultra-Catholic nationalists in 1930s France (Sanos 2013), gender is claimed to be a global power engaged in scheming against ordinary people, a tool of social engineering, part of a plot of global elites whose ultimate aim is the subjugation of local populations. Finally, like Jews in medieval Christian anti-Judaism, gender is occasionally portrayed as a demonic force, in need of being exorcised (Trachtenberg 1943). When confronting LGBT demonstrations, protesters often bear crosses and rosaries, as if facing a demonic force in need of being exorcised. The numbers 666 can be seen on banners in anti-gender rallies, as can images

of the snail, associated in Christian iconography with sin and especially with lust. A closer look at the Sao Paolo Judith Butler incident reveals repeated references to "hell" (as in: "take your ideologies back to hell"), banners with Butler's face adorned with horns, as well as references to witchcraft (Jaschik 2017; Brazil 2017).

These are not isolated similarities but elements of a certain pattern, a cultural continuity linking anti-gender discourse and traditions of religiously motivated conspiratorial antisemitism (Graff 2021). The belief that the Jews killed Christ and are enemies of Christianity allied with the devil played an important role in conservative Catholicism until the Second Vatican Council rejected these ideas in the 1960s. In 1988 another effort to purge Catholicism of antisemitism was made by John Paul II, who excommunicated Cardinal Joseph Lefebvre. While these decisions eradicated open antisemitism from Catholic doctrine, the ultraconservative anti-modernist strand of Catholicism survived in the form of Radical Traditionalism – a movement on the margins of the Church, active mostly in the U.S. (Weitzman 2015). The mainstreaming of a conspiratorial narrative about human sexuality can be interpreted as a symptom of a broad shift within the Church; gender has partly replaced Jews as the Church's enemy and the embodiment of despised modernity. This hypothesis is corroborated by the fact that anti-genderism's birth during the papacy of Benedict XVI roughly coincides with this pope's efforts to bring Radical Traditionalism back into the fold. In 2007 Benedict XVI re-introduced the Tridentine Mass and in 2009 he lifted the excommunication of the bishops of the Society of Pius X, a group that had been the center of controversies concerning Holocaust denial (Weitzman 2015). Two months before his abdication, the same pope also issued the Vatican's first extended exhortation against "gender ideology" (Benedict XVI 2012). Thus, a compromise appears to have been reached between two wings of the Catholic Church: one conspiracy theory replaced another, a change both parties found beneficial. Many anti-gender texts fit the definition of a conspiracy theory as outlined by Jovan Byford (2011). Conspiracism as an explanatory style is centered on intentionality and collusion, while rejecting all official sources of knowledge. Such theories set out to explain complex social processes as sinister plots. The narrative is Manichean in nature; it involves an innocent misled majority that is manipulated by a powerful devious minority group. The conspiratorial imaginary demonizes the enemy, thus precluding any possibility of compromise. Its logic is irrefutable as disconfirming evidence is transformed into further proof of conspiracy, while doubt is dismissed as distraction or worse – a sign of collusion with conspirators.

In short, the rise of anti-genderism appears as a reaction to tensions within contemporary Catholicism and works as the new source of cohesiveness among lay Catholics. As shown in a study conducted in Italy, this is a novel strategy "to combine religious coherence, political representation and consensus for Catholic activists in different arenas […] an important trigger

for the renewal and refocusing of Catholic political action" (Lavizzari and Prearo 2019: 424–425). Thus, a conservative definition of the family becomes a new frontier and a cause to rally around, while dissenters are now positioned as those who have abandoned the faith. In the Polish context, the rise of anti-gender rhetoric within Catholic teaching is part of a broader process described by the theologian and philosopher Stanisław Obirek as a gradual drift of Polish Catholicism away from religion and toward politics (2015). Politicized religiosity in Poland is xenophobic, anti-intellectual, hostile toward the West and implicitly antisemitic, thus it easily enters into alliances with the extreme right forces and right-wing populists. One example of this trend is the rise and spectacular success of the Redemptorist priest Tadeusz Rydzyk, founder of Radio Maryja and TV Trwam, who has fueled nationalistic sentiments in Poland since the early 1990s and – as we will discuss later – become an important actor in anti-gender campaigns.

The Vatican's opposition towards "genderism" is a continuation of the Church's war against the "civilization of death" and the 1990s resistance to what was then called the "gender agenda" (Butler 2004; Omang 2013; Favier 2015), but it is worth noting what is new about the current phase of struggle, which dates back to around 2010. One key difference is that while representatives of the clergy and Catholic commentators oppose women's reproductive rights and stress the connection between family planning and LGBT rights, they also link both to the flaws of global capitalism. Feminism, LGBT and global corporations are said to be part of the same agenda, which supposedly leads to the destruction of family and ultimately to the destruction of Christian civilization. Another new trend is "the inclusiveness of this axis, which is no longer divided along confessions, but rather along reactionary and progressive Christians, be they Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, or Orthodox" (Rivera 2018: 7). Unlike the Vatican's earlier efforts to defend traditional "family values," this is now part and parcel of a global struggle. The Catholic origins are undeniable, but examining them should not blind us to the importance of transnational and interfaith connections, or to the presence of fundamentalist Christians of various denominations at key anti-gender events such as World Congress of Families or Agenda Europe meetings, which we discuss below.

From the Vatican to Verona: how a religious movement became a political one

Tracing the Vatican's influence and grasping the theological grounds of anti-genderism does not account for the movement's current cultural and political significance. The key question for us is how the religious trend spread beyond the Catholic circles and moved from the realm of religion into that of politics. In our view, three sets of factors contributed to this process: socio-economic, political and technological, all converging in the first decades of the 21st century.

First, the 2008 financial crisis and its aftermath strengthened the tendency toward the dismantling of welfare provisions in many states, resulting in increased precarity and a crisis of care (e.g. Piketty 2018; Theiss et al. 2017; Walby 2015). As Sylvia Walby argued in her 2015 book entitled *Crisis*, the global financial downturn had a powerful gender dimension: both the crisis itself (e.g. rising costs of living, stagnant or falling wages and growing job instability) and the austerity measures introduced in response to it, such as budget cuts and social services being turned over to the market, had a disproportional impact on women. Ultraconservative actors redefined these collective experiences in moral terms, as a "crisis of the family." This was not a mere discursive strategy, but a full-fledged political one. Budget cuts and austerity measures mobilized many citizens to demand better social policies, and some of these mobilizations were subsequently co-opted by ultraconservatives.

The contributing political factor is, of course, the crisis of the left and the rise of right-wing populism, the latter tightly related to the so-called "refugee crisis" and increased attention to Islam as a potential threat to Europeans (Dietze 2019, Norris and Inglehart 2019). These developments facilitated the rise to power of new actors such as Lega in Italy or Law and Justice in Poland and strengthened the position of radical parties such as AfD in Germany, which were willing to cooperate with ultraconservative groups and take on their ideological agenda as their own, merging fear toward "gender ideology" with Islamophobia.

Finally, technological advances, such as social media and online petition platforms, enabled unprecedented collaboration between groups and networks across national borders and provided the means for spreading the ultraconservative worldview in a modern or even hip format (Bennett and Segerberg 2013; Castells 2000). It is at the intersection of these trends that a rather marginal religious project – Dale O'Leary's dream of destroying "the Gender Agenda" by means of "one sharp pin" – evolved into a vibrant transnational movement capable of influencing political developments and even reaching for political power.

Paternotte and Kuhar describe the various national anti-gender movements as "a complex constellation of global actors" (2017b: 271). Available research suggests that, indeed, there is quite a bit of cooperation, some of it institutionalized since the mid-1990s (e.g. Bob 2012; Buss and Herman 2001). For example, Polish activists cooperate closely both regionally and transnationally. During the September 2015 rally "Stop Depravation in Education," which we attended as participant observers, many international guests were present. The list of speakers included renowned European anti-choice activists such as Antonia Tully (Society for the Protection of Unborn Children, Great Britain), Antoine Renard (La Manif Pour Tous, France and the head of the European Federation of Catholic Family Associations) and Christoph Scharnweber (Demo für alle, Germany).

There is growing evidence of ideational and organizational links between recent mobilizations, including the Vatican's statements targeting gender,

mass protests of concerned parents such as La Manif Pour Tous in France, recent attacks on "the gender agenda" in the U.S. and the anti-LGBT and antifeminist backlash in Putin's Russia, Ukraine and Georgia, as well as anti-gender mobilizations in other regions, including Africa (Datta 2018; Gradskova 2020; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017; Rivera 2019; Spallaccia 2019; Suchanow 2018, 2020). However, some national movements are closer to each other than to others. The Ordo Iuris Institute in Poland and its funding body, the Father Piotr Skarga Association for Christian Culture, have been established by ultraconservative network named TFP – Tradition, Family and Property – which originated in Brazil in 1960 and eventually expanded in other parts of the world, including Eastern Europe. Neil Datta argues that the organization is not so much a Catholic movement as "an insurrection movement within Catholicism, with a distinct way of working by fusing social conservatism with economic hyper-liberalism and a legacy of complicity with far-right movements" (2020: 1). In some countries, including France, TFP was labeled a sect and was accused of indoctrinating school children in its facilities (Suchanow 2020), but this did not stop the organization from expanding. In the beginning of the 21st century its main operation centers became France and Poland, and the main strategies include mobilizing people on the ground, entering decision-making spaces, such as European Union (EU) bodies and local governments, as well as promoting ultraconservative views on sexual and reproductive rights via traditional channels and social media (Datta 2020; Dauksza et al. 2020). TFP is behind some of the most dynamic anti-gender initiatives in Eastern Europe: Ordo Iuris is becoming a hub for the entire region. For example, it was behind the establishment of a "sister organization" – the Vigilare Foundation – in Croatia. According to Croatian journalist Ana Brakus, "the Father Piotr Skarga Association paid 5,400 Euros in founding capital, on top of 100 Euros from [original funder John Vice] Batarelo's original Vigilare NGO" (2018). Representatives of Ordo Iuris have served as advisers to the Vigilare Foundation, which has followed some of the strategies employed in Poland, including collecting signatures in favor of banning abortion or sending donation slips to thousands of people in a fundraising and propaganda effort.

Close cooperation between Italian and French groups, in turn, has been documented in great detail by Sara Garbagnoli, who writes that:

> The success of French anti-gender mobilizations encouraged [Italian] Catholic associations to fully adopt the anti-gender rhetoric. The Italian anti-gender movement, in other words, was created by copying and pasting the logos, the names, and the style of the main anti-gender French protests. New groups were created as the equivalent of French ones: *La Manif Pour Tous* – Italia (LMPT-I), the *Sentinelle in Piedi* (Standing Sentinels) and Hommen-Italy.
>
> (2016: 198)

Cooperation takes place across the Atlantic, as well. In 2014 Ignacio Arsuaga and La Manif Pour Tous's Ludovine de La Rochère publicly supported the March for Marriage in Washington DC (Brunet 2014; Feder 2014). In 2019 at the World Congress of Families in Verona, Americans such as Brian Brown, CEO of International Organization for the Family, and ultraconservative evangelical pastor Jim Garlow, the chairman of Renewing American Leadership, shook hands with European political leaders including Italy's Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini, Alexey Komov, who was a regional representative of WCF in Russia and Teresa Okafor, the Director of Foundation for African Cultural Heritage in Nigeria (Korolczuk 2019). These examples show that anti-gender ideas, strategies and images travel across borders, and while some remain the same, others are adapted to local needs.

When looking at different national cases of anti-gender mobilizations, common themes and preoccupations become obvious; it is also clear that the movements share common intellectual sources and authorities. Whereas the strategies include demonstrations, publications, workshops and conferences as well as political initiatives in parliaments, it is remarkable how well anti-gender activists have made use of the internet, building a sense of common identity among "defenders of the traditional family and values." There are growing numbers of ultraconservative websites, social media outlets and open platforms disseminating information and mobilizing people to sign online petitions, take part in protests and engage on the local and national level. Sometimes these digital communities are linked to a specific local organization, such as stopgender.pl and stop-seksualizacji.pl in Poland, but there are also multi-language online platforms, such as CitizenGO founded in Spain in 2013, which mobilizes people through online petitions in 17 countries. In spring 2020 the site boasted over 12,000,000 registered users, poised to defend "life, family, and liberty." Campaigns have included an effort to stop the Netflix animated series *Super Drags*, mobilizing people in Ireland to keep abortion illegal, and opposing the depenalization of homosexuality in Kenya. A recent mobilization in Warsaw has opposed the introduction of sex education, based on claims that WHO standards include masturbation lessons for preschoolers (CitizenGo 2019).

The global dimension of the current wave of ultraconservative strategizing consists not only in the building of transnational networks but also in these networks' choice of targets, with an ear for the local culture but an eye for the larger goals ahead. Hence, on the one hand, focus on "conscientious objection" laws, as a way to limit access to abortion in even such liberal contexts as Sweden, and, on the other hand, the relentless vilification of the Istanbul Convention and other EU efforts to promote equality and non-discrimination (e.g. Niemi et al. 2020).

The global anti-gender movement believes itself to be the rightful heir to the values of Western civilization, and increasingly functions as a rival of the progressive forces in the UN and the EU. This long-term strategy is reflected

by both intervening at the level of transnational organizations and specific initiatives undertaken by ultraconservative organizations. For example, the Novae Terrae Foundation in Italy, closely linked to Agenda Europe and Lege party, has published a report titled Human Dignity Global Index. The title imitates a well-known UN report, the Universal Human Rights Index, which provides information on human rights violations in specific countries. Here, a "dignity rating" is introduced where dignity implies "the universal right to be born" (entailing limitations on access to contraception and abortion) (Rivera 2019: 18). Thus, efforts to ban abortion are strategically reframed as the pursuit of universal human rights. In the fall of 2020, a similarly structured initiative was launched by Poland's Ordo Iuris. Following the government's call to reject the Istanbul Convention, ultraconservative organizations proposed to replace it with the Convention on the Rights of the Family, a document drafted by Ordo Iuris lawyers, which had been circulated in the region for two years and had been endorsed by activists from around Europe, including representatives of HazteOir and CitizenGo, as well as the European Center for Law and Justice (Ciobanu 2020b). Romanian journalist Claudia Ciobanu quotes an Ordo Iuris head lawyer Karolina Pawłowska, who explains this move in terms of the region's self-defense against the imposition of Western norms:

> That's the whole reason why this initiative started, because we saw that the European Court of Human Rights is, step by step, trying to violate the definition of family and marriage in countries like Poland, Romania, Bulgaria […] We also have this new project of an EU LGBT strategy, in which the EU would like to impose the recognition of marriage contracted in countries that do recognise gay marriage, on other countries which don't. […] The idea of our convention is to defend those countries which try to preserve the natural social order based on the "natural family" from this ideological dictate.
>
> (Ciobanu 2020b)

Much of this ultraconservative strategy consists in repeating the steps by which feminism went international (and institutional) in the seventies, eighties and beyond, building transnational networks and introducing the movement's vocabulary into the language of international institutions and treaties. What is at stake here is an uneasy balance between transnationalism and national embeddedness. What binds these actors together is ultraconservative universalism, the desire to build a world order that would displace what they perceive as the moral degradation and relativism of the contemporary "modern godless states" (Benedict XVI 2012). When anti-gender actors join forces with right-wing populists, this goal is framed in nationalistic discourse; the struggles for a new moral world seamlessly merge with goals related to national sovereignty and democracy, understood as the power of the people.

Today, cooperation between ultraconservatives and political actors is facilitated by transnational networks and organizations, such as the World Congress of Families (WCF). A global network of pro-life – or rather anti-choice and anti-LGBT – groups, the Congress positions itself as a global pro-family movement. The WCF originated in the U.S. as a project of the Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society, founded in 1997 by conservative historian Allan Carlson. Renamed as the International Organization for the Family (IOF) in 2016, it is now led by Brian Brown, who is also president of the National Organization for Marriage, formed in 2007 specifically to oppose the legalization of gay marriage in California. Today, the IOF has more than 40 official partner organizations around the world, including Russia. The IOF's main goal, as stated in the mission section on their website, is "to unite and equip leaders, organizations, and families to affirm, celebrate, and defend the natural family as the only fundamental and sustainable unit of society" (IOF webpage). The efforts to protect what the leaders call "the natural family" include a range of activities described as "efforts to protect the unborn, encourage marriage, reduce poverty, improve the health of children and adults, help orphans find homes, and eliminate human trafficking and prostitution" (IOF webpage). In practice, the main activities of the organization overlap with the goals of the U.S. Christian Right; they include opposing marriage equality and reproductive rights. Due to its vicious rhetoric and vilification of sexual minorities, the Southern Poverty Law Center lists the IOF as a hate group.

The IOF and its flagship project, the World Congress of Families, have facilitated an ideological alliance between the U.S. Christian Right and European nationalists, right-wing populists and autocrats, perhaps most significantly also including Putin's Russia along with the Russian Orthodox Church. Tracing the links between various figures and groups connected to the WCF may seem like a conspiracy theory, but the connections are well documented (e.g. Bob 2012: 42–43; Datta 2018; Mierzyńska 2020a; Moss 2017; Rivera 2018; Suchanow 2018, 2020). For over a decade, American founders have cooperated closely with local groups in other countries – for instance they took part in organizing the first and the second World Demographic Summits, both of which took place in Russia (at the Russian State Social University in 2011 and in Ulyanovsk in 2012). In 2012 the U.S.-based organization helped Russia launch FamilyPolicy.ru, a powerful advocacy group whose objective is to influence key decision makers and opinion leaders in the field of family policy in Russia.

Not only do the American and Russian ultraconservative organizations cooperate, but Russian oligarchs, notably the ultra-Orthodox billionaire Konstantin Malofeev, are said to sponsor the activities and meetings of the network in an effort to advance Russian political interests in Europe (Barthélemy 2018; Rivera 2019; Suchanow 2020). Another notable figure facilitating transnational cooperation is Alexey Komov, a WCF board member and its representative in Russia, who allegedly worked for Malofeev.

Komov cooperated closely with Matteo Salvini, the leader of Italy's populist right party Lega. He was also on the board of CitizenGo, a petition platform started in Spain, as a daughter organization of ultraconservative advocacy group named HazteOir. Both Spanish organizations were initiated by Ignatio Arsuaga, who took part in the World Congress of Families in Verona in 2019, along with Brown, Komov, Salvini and others. It is figures like Komov that best epitomize the effective networking on the global right, which often occurs with the help of Russian money and Orthodox religious authorities (Moss 2017; Datta 2018).

The World Congress of Families is not the only global networking site facilitating cooperation among ultraconservatives and right-wing populists. Another platform for transatlantic cooperation, one that links civil society representatives with political actors, is the Political Network for Values. Established in 2014, it focuses on promoting the traditional family, marriage and religious freedom. According to its website, it is:

> a global platform and a resource for legislators and political representatives rooted in a Trans-Atlantic dialogue on shared values and aimed at collaborating as a network on a local and global level by actively defending and promoting the values we share.
>
> (Political Network for Values website)

What differentiates the Network from organizations such as the World Congress of Families is the prominent role of politicians, who are not guests but key figures in this group. The advisory board includes the Hungarian Minister of State for Family and Youth Affairs Katalin Novák as well as parliamentarians from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Kenya, Lithuania, Peru, Spain and Slovakia. Representatives of non-governmental organizations outnumber politicians on the Board of Directors, which includes Sharon Slater (president of Family Watch International), Benjamin Bull (Executive Director of Advocacy at First Liberty) and Brian Brown (listed here as President of the National Organization for Marriage). Three other members represent European countries: two politicians (Katalin Novák and Jaime Mayor Oreja, listed as Former Minister of Home Affairs in Spain) and Ignacio Arsuaga, President of CitizenGo.

The Network organizes annual meetings – Regional, Transatlantic and International – called Summits, as if to signal its ambition to become a rival to the United Nations. In recent years such Summits have taken place in Brussels, Washington, Madrid and Bogota, gathering together politicians and civil society representatives from various countries, including Poland and Sweden. An important initiative of the group is called the Values Observatory, whose website features maps of the world assigning various countries specific ratings (marked in green, red or yellow) depending on national legislation and policies concerning abortion, LGBT rights, access to assisted reproduction and euthanasia. Much like the Novae Terrae Foundation's report,

this ranking both echoes and inverts the United Nations' Universal Human Rights Index; countries which allow for homosexual marriage or abortion are marked in an alarming red, whereas contexts where access to termination of pregnancy or assisted reproduction is banned appear in a hopeful green. Poland and other East European countries are presented in yellow, as a frontier between the rival civilizations: the civilization of death prevailing on the West and the Global South together with most of Asia, which are seen as regions committed to "Human Dignity and the Common Good." The very act of drawing such a map can be viewed as ultraconservatives' claiming of moral authority in the international arena and sketching out the boundaries of conflict.

The moral geography of anti-genderism is vividly expressed by visual means in a poster announcing a conference entitled "Culture War in Europe: Does Poland Stand a Chance?", held in Warsaw in October 2020 (see Figure 2.1). The event's main organizer was Patryk Jaki, a European MP associated with the right-wing party United Poland (*Solidarna Polska*). He is known for public statements about "gender ideology," which he routinely equates with Marxism. The image is worth a closer look, due to the remarkable literalism with which it presents this claim. A contour map of Poland is split in two by a closed fist, a symbol of the revolutionary spirit. On the right are Marx, Lenin and a male gay couple in a close embrace. On the left, we see John Paul II, a heterosexual couple with two children (both boys) and Robert Schuman. The latter is perhaps the most interesting figure in this otherwise predictable scenario; Schuman has long been an icon of Europe's liberal forces, a founding father of the EU associated with the ideals of pluralism, individual freedom and transnational cooperation. Recently, however, he is being recruited for the cause of pan-European conservatism and religiosity. While the Vatican initiated the process of his beatification already in the nineties, in recent years Polish ultraconservatives have been presenting him as patron of a Christian Europe of sovereign nations, an antidote to neomarxism and "gender ideology." In Poland, this effort is being carried out by the Institute of Schuman's Thought (*Instytut Myśli Schumana*), formed in 2016, and working in close collaboration with Radio Maryja, TV Trwam and Ordo Iuris. The Institute's website makes it clear that its ambitions are not limited to Poland; the aim is to "shape Europe under the banner of Schuman" building a counterforce to the liberal left secular forces. These ambitions are clearly shared by various groups in Europe. The conference announced in the poster is apparently sponsored by the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Party, which claims to be Europe's leading Conservative movement united by "centre-right values," but in fact brings together predominantly extreme-right and populist right parties including Vox (Spain), Fratelli di Italia (Italy), Sweden Democrats, Law and Justice (Poland), as well as a number of conservative and far-right parties in both North and South America.

Figure 2.1 Poster for the conference "Culture War in Europe: Does Poland Stand a Chance?" organized by Patryk Jaki, Warsaw, Poland, 2020.

Neil Datta's 2018 report on "Restoring the Natural Order" helps one understand how coordination between different national organizations works globally. According to his findings, 20 U.S.-based and European ultraconservative campaigners met in 2013 and began pulling together an agenda of "achievable goals" (Datta 2018). Agenda Europe, as this group calls itself, has since grown to include over 100 organizations from 30 European countries. The network's ideas, aims and ambitions are those of religious extremists, but explicitly religious language is strategically displaced by talk of "rights" and seemingly neutral Natural Law discourse (Datta 2018: 10). "Natural Law," the anonymous authors of the group's manifesto claim, has been undermined by the "Cultural Revolution" (equated by them with "sexual revolution"), which is destroying humanity. Western civilization is on the verge of collapse, and Agenda Europe's urgent rescue plan includes not only overturning existing laws related to sexuality (LGBT rights) and reproduction (contraception, abortion, all assisted reproduction technologies), but also divorce, use of embryonic stem cells, euthanasia and organ transplantation. Their strategy is to reframe the conflict, using the strategies of their opponents. This involves positioning themselves as victims of the Cultural Revolution, "defenders of faith [struggling against] cultural revolutionaries […] and intolerance against Christians, or 'Christianophobia'" (Datta 2018: 15). Among its strategic recommendations, Agenda Europe's manifesto explicitly mentions the "colonization of human rights" – that is, the reframing of ultraconservative religious positions on sex and reproduction to sound like human rights language. It is worth quoting Agenda Europe's own description of how they intend to oppose what they see as "the contamination of language" by feminist and LGBT activists. The plan is to reclaim the terms used by progressive forces and "contaminate" them back to their own advantage:

> It therefore seems to be a much better strategy to use all those words, including neologisms such as "reproductive rights", but at the same time making clear what meaning those words have for us. If that is done consistently, we might even succeed in "contaminating" (or in, fact, rectifying) the vocabulary that our opponents have crafted, so that they cannot use them anymore. If, for example, a sufficient number of governments clearly state that "reproductive rights" means that anybody has the right to reproduce, but that they do not imply any right to have access to abortion or artificial contraception, then all existing references to this term could be used in our favor.
>
> (Agenda Europe 2019a: 127)

It is clear that the ultraconservatives aim to reframe the debate by taking over key terms introduced by the human rights discourse. Also recommended is infiltration of institutions and becoming "a respected interlocutor at the international level"; the aim is to get recognized as a UN player and be

included in Treaty Monitoring Bodies, as Special Rapporteurs and judges on the ECJ and ECHR as well as in the EU institutions (Datta 2018: 18).

Agenda Europe shares many supporters and participants with the World Congress of Families. For example, the 2017 WCF annual meeting organized in Budapest brought together, among others, Brian Brown, Alexey Komov and Ignacio Arsuaga, who are all listed as involved in Agenda Europe meetings and strategizing (Datta 2018: 39). Politicians representing populist right-wing parties were also present at Budapest events, including the Polish Minister for Family, Work and Social Policy, Elżbieta Rafalska, and Hungary's Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, who delivered the opening speech at the summit (Rivera 2018: 16; Suchanow 2019).

Two years later, the World Congress of Families was organized in Verona, an Italian city with a long history of fascist traditions, whose mayor had declared it "pro-life" already in October 2018. Verona proved to be the site of even closer cooperation between political actors and the religious fundamentalists; the summit was supported by both local and national Lega branches, and the then Italian Prime Minister Matteo Salvini was welcomed enthusiastically as the event's star speaker. Salvini's opening speech exemplifies how right-wing populism and anti-genderism converge in the vilification of feminism and Islam, linking the anti-gender struggle with anti-Muslim sentiments:

> The feminists that speak of women's rights are the first to pretend to not see what is the first, only and major, real danger in 2019 for rights, social achievements, freedom to work, study, speak, study, dress as you like – and it's not the World Family Congress – it's Islamic extremism, a culture where the woman's value is less than zero […] The woman gets covered with a burka, the woman doesn't have the right to leave the house, the woman shouldn't wear a mini-skirt, and if she dresses too western, thinks too western or becomes too western, (they) beat her up. Not from the "dangerous extremists" of the Family Congress.
>
> (Fox 2019)

Thus, an Italian right-wing populist leader positions himself as a champion of women's rights and protector of individual freedoms, the core of Western civilization. Similar rhetoric was used by other speakers of the Congress, and, as we will show later, by many anti-gender actors in other locations. Gender-progressive forces are thus vilified as allies of radical Islam and positioned either as cynical enemies of the Western civilization or as naïve dupes, still believing in the peaceful coexistence of different religions and races.

Right-wing populists' ascent to power in countries such as Italy and Poland opened up political opportunities for ultraconservative organizations. The ideological and organizational affinity between ultraconservatives and populist right-wing parties has led to the institutionalization of the anti-gender movement within state structures (Donà and Bellè 2019; Mierzyńska 2020a). This, in turn, has resulted in the intensification of the culture war rhetoric

and the emergence of new anti-gender initiatives. One drastic example is the anti-LGBT campaign in Poland; as of April 2020 more than 80 Polish local governments or municipalities (covering one-third of the country) have proclaimed themselves to be "LGBT-free zones" under the pretense that "LGBT-ideology" is a threat to children and families. This development triggered strong criticism from the European Parliament, which issued a statement linking Poland's "zones" to a more general rise of homophobia in Europe, including Romania, Estonia, Spain, the UK and Hungary (European Parliament 2019).With the controversy over the "zones," the struggle over "gender" has become an important cleavage in international relations. At the time of writing (spring 2020), the anti-gender campaigns are entering a new stage, one in which Poland's very membership in the EU may be at stake.

The moral and political geography of the anti-gender movement: does the East-West divide matter?

Anti-gender alliances are part and parcel of global power struggles and are affected (and often disrupted) by tensions and realignments in international politics such as the changing relations between the U.S., Russia and EU. The key to understanding the present phase of the culture wars is the post-1989 geopolitical landscape; Eastern Europe and the Global South are seen as the key battlegrounds by the ultraconservative forces, whereas Russia plays the role of the poster child of retrotopic political imagination. As Zygmunt Bauman argued in his book *Retrotopia* (2017), utopian aspirations today tend to be directed toward an ideal past rather than a better future. This tendency, he claimed, is a reaction to late modernity experienced by many as a "Hobbesian" world of insecurity, fragmentation, individualism and violence. The anxiety produced by the complexity and liquidity of the modern world results in fantasies about the return of an ideal past. Within retrotopic imagination, both the return of tribal attitudes and indifference toward inequality are viewed not only as rational but also desirable. Not surprisingly, the country that is often idealized in ultraconservative discourse is Putin's Russia. According to Kuby, "Russia is today the only country where there may be the possibility for church and state to rebuild the foundations of the family" (2014). While core documents of the movement include exhortations from the pope (e.g. Benedict XVI 2012), and while the key proponents of anti-genderism tend to be West Europeans (e.g. Anatrella, Kuby and Peeters), the present interests of the Vatican, Christian fundamentalists in the U.S. and European nationalists appear eerily convergent with those of Putin's Russia, which is perceived as a moral rejuvenator of the West.

Some scholars posit that "the East-West divide does not offer a particularly useful analytical lens" in the study of anti-gender campaigns (Paternotte and Kuhar 2018: 8). We challenge this view by showing how the East-West divide has been moralized by the anti-gender movement and elaborating on the consequences that this trend has for anti-gender political strategies

and coalitions. We argue that the key to understanding the present phase of contemporary culture wars is the post-Cold War geopolitical landscape, in which Eastern Europe and Russia are the key battlegrounds in the struggle against gender and increasingly also influential actors in global struggles.

Former socialist countries play a special role within the anti-gender declension narrative about the fall of Western civilization. Russia is an important source of anti-gender argumentation and resources (Bluhm and Varga 2019; Moss 2017; Suchanow 2020), while Poland and other post-socialist countries constitute a testing ground for the global right on how to implement their political agenda in a favorable political context. In the words of the German sociologist and anti-gender authority Gabriele Kuby:

> A new totalitarianism is developing under the cloak of freedom […] now the East European countries are becoming aware of this trend, and my book seems to be helping awaken people. The destruction has not gone as far here and people are motivated to resist it. My great hope is that these East European countries will become a stronghold of resistance in the European Union.
>
> (as cited in Vail 2014: 1)

In contrast to the 1990s, when the West was aiding the East to establish liberal democracy, today the anti-gender actors claim that it is time for the East to save the West from rampant individualism and secularization. It is increasingly evident that the operation is not just spiritual in nature – huge amounts of money are involved and Eastern European organizations are not just recipients of Western know-how and financial support but also newly emerged leaders. These developments are connected to geopolitical shifts and the role of the Kremlin as a patron of ultraconservative groups worldwide (Bluhm 2016, Datta 2018, Moss 2015, 2017). A recent investigative report tracing how money travels within the TFP network reveals that Poland has become not only a space where the aims of global ultraconservative organizations can be effectively implemented but also a player in its own right and a source of funding for transnational operations. A group of journalists from Poland, France and Brasil revealed that between 2009 and 2019 the Piotr Skarga Association – the Polish organization that founded Ordo Iuris – transferred 6.8 million euro to ultraconservative groups associated with TFP around the world (Dauksza et al. 2020). The Polish group perfected a business model originally developed by TFP in conjunction with the American Leadership Institute: mass mailings asking people for donations for religious purposes and offering devotional items such as rosaries in return. The reported income of the Piotr Skarga Association from such a scheme amounted to 6.3 million euro in 2019 alone. What explains the spectacular success of this strategy in Poland is that the donors believe that the money is transferred to the Catholic Church, which is why many Catholic institutions in France and in Poland have dissociated themselves

from the financial dealings of TFP network, even though they often support their political agenda. Clearly, the East has become not only just an imagined center of Christian civilization but also an important hub for the global anti-gender movement.

Another vivid example of how anti-genderism is contingent on global politics is the development of the World Congress of Families. On their website the American founders take pride in the accomplishments of their Russian partners; in the eyes of the WCF leaders Russia epitomizes the last frontier of true "family values" because "at a time when Western governments are moving backward to a pagan worldview, Russia has taken a leadership role to advance the natural family" (WCF 2014). However, close collaboration between neoconservatives from Russia and the U.S. in 2012 was put to the test by changes in the global geo-political landscape: tensions between Russia and the U.S./EU due to the crisis in Crimea in 2014 (Moss 2017) and then the developments in Syria. Consequently, American leaders decided to officially withdraw from organizing the biennial conference, which was to take place in 2014 in Moscow. Similarly, Poland was repeatedly mentioned by speakers at the World Congress of Families conference in Verona in 2019 as a great example of pro-family policy making and resistance to gender ideology, but no Polish representatives were present, most probably because the Russian influence in WCF would not go down well with Polish voters. Asked directly by one of the authors why there were no Poles at the Verona conference, Brian Brown stated evasively that they had all been invited but "chose not to come." Polish investigative journalists and activists working on the issue suggested that open collaboration with Russian-sponsored groups would be potentially incriminating for groups such as Ordo Iuris that work closely with the ruling party (Mierzyńska 2020a; Suchanow 2020).

Like the Vatican, the WCF strives to become a counterweight to the UN at least regarding population policies, but in the context of serious political tensions it has difficulty maintaining its identity as a global institution. The crisis in Eastern Ukraine significantly reduced the political opportunities of some local anti-EU, pro-Russian groups such as the Parents' Committee of Ukraine (Strelnyk 2017). At the same time, new possibilities for transnational cooperation opened up with the rise of right-wing populist leaders such as Donald Trump or Javier Bolsonaro, whose positions on Russia's autocratic regime are highly ambiguous.

We interpret anti-genderism as a political movement whose agenda is obfuscated by appeals to human dignity, references to Natural Law and endless talk of moral values. Examined from a political perspective, the anti-gender campaigns reflect the nature of global civil society, which is ideologically diverse and conflict-oriented, with differences cutting across institutions and borders, and specific battles resulting in policy outcomes (Bob 2012; Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017). This conceptual framework allows us to see transnational and local ideological and institutional

connections. Locally, the movement often has a grassroots character and builds on context-specific concerns; the key themes, however, such as the recurrent image of the child in danger and the critique of cosmopolitan elites, are commonly used by anti-genderists around the globe. The movement's activists and ideologues portray politics as evil and corrupt, while local populations are seen as innocent, authentic and oppressed. By appealing to nostalgia for "natural" modes of living, anti-gender campaigns tap into the anti-political resentment observed on both sides of the Atlantic (Bennett et al. 2013), which in turn fuels electoral victories of right-wing populist actors and political successes of extreme right-wing parties (Köttig, Bitzan and Petö 2016; Krizsán and Roggeband 2019). Thus, as we will show in the following chapters, anti-genderism is best seen as a brand of populist discourse.

While ultraconservative organizations seek respectability and legitimacy through the use of the language of human rights and engagement in transnational institutions, they sometimes struggle to manage their public image as legitimate actors within liberal democracy. A vivid example of such a public relations crisis can be found in the publication of Agenda Europe's secret documents by the secretary of the European Parliamentary Forum on Sexual and Reproductive Rights, Neil Datta, in 2018 (Datta 2018; Agenda Europe 2019a). While Agenda is focused on Europe and many of its leaders have direct links to the Vatican, its Summits have hosted Americans luminaries from groups such as the (Rivera 2019). These special guests were there to share experiences gained in many decades of activism in the U.S., which many European activists seems to view as far ahead of Western Europe. An important guest speaker was Alexey Komov, a well-known Russian ultraconservative representing the Russian Orthodox Church and, no doubt, Russia itself, as a beacon of the new ultraconservative civilization. Donors to the program include a Mexican billionaire, members of the European aristocracy, a UK climate-change denier, a far-right Russian oligarch and a corrupt Italian politician (Datta 2018: 24; Rivera 2019). While these connections are clearly profitable to the network, they are also less than attractive to the general public in Europe. As Datta comments:

> Vatican surrogates catalysed the Christian, anti-SRR community in Europe and leveraged Catholic institutions to create a space where Agenda Europe members could discreetly convene and strategize, away from public scrutiny, but under the helpful gaze of the Holy See.
>
> (2018: 19)

Thus, a problem arose when the strategic document produced at an Agenda Europe meeting was leaked to the public and publicized. Agenda representatives responded with a venomously sarcastic post on their blog dated 6 May 2018. The post is worth quoting at length as it shows, perhaps

unintentionally, a profound ambivalence and anxiety regarding the issue of transparency:

> Neil Datta, the chief lobbyist of the international baby-slaughtering industry on the Brussels scene, has made a sensational discovery that is making headlines all over Europe: he has found out that defenders of the Right to Life from all over Europe know each other, connect to each other, support each other, and … actually … meet each other!!!! Now, this comes as a total surprise. A really shocking revelation. Until just some weeks ago, Datta must have thought that meeting each other, discussing strategies, or influencing politics was the exclusive privilege of the baby-killing industry (which, thanks to its enormous profits, can afford a host of well-paid professional lobbyists like himself), and perhaps of some other protagonists of the Culture of Death (such as the sodomy-promoting fake-NGO ILGA Europe, which, thanks to lavish donations from George Soros and the European Commission, is equally able to afford a highly efficient lobbying activity all over Europe), but he never expected that his opponents – the defenders of the Human Rights and Human Dignity he so viscerally rejects – were doing *the same*.
>
> (Agenda Europe 2019b)

Despite the fact that Agenda Europe representatives vehemently denied the secret status of the network and claimed full transparency, in fact it took them over a year to fulfill the promise and publish the document itself. They did so in a blog entry dated 21 May 2019, explaining that the document had needed "a bit of proof-reading before [they] put it online" and adding that in the process they "somehow forgot about" it. Interestingly, the published document bears no signatures or names, thus belying claims to full transparency, while in the blog post the anonymous authors ironically dismiss any transnational connections between their network and Russian oligarchs, European aristocrats or Steve Bannon.

The authors call Datta "a gangster-lobbyist" and a representative of "a multi-billion industry that kills babies and sells their body parts," which makes the text an example of hate speech, a discourse that dehumanizes its opponents, thus implicitly justifying potential violence. It is a rhetorical structure commonly used by anti-gender groups: another example we discuss further on is the Polish "documentary" entitled "Invasion" aired in 2019 (see Chapter 4). What caused this outburst of anger and hatred? In our view, the network aims to mainstream its radical ultraconservative agenda in what is a largely liberal Europe. Hence, it tends to highlight its identity as the voice of the people (e.g. by including links to many conservative NGOs), while concealing its alliances with radical political parties such as Vox, and perhaps even more importantly, its affiliations with Russian actors such as Komov. By publishing what the network calls an "entirely private document destined to animate a private discussion in a private meeting"

(Agenda Europe 2019b), Datta upset this strategy, revealing the ways in which Agenda Europe really functions: as a network of elite groups allied with radical and populist right-wing parties and the Kremlin, and supported by shadowy business moguls whose ultimate aim is to reach for power.

Protecting children and families: moralizing the socio-economic crisis

In many countries, anti-gender campaigns erupted in response to specific legislative initiatives seen as a danger to families and children. The triggers have included reproductive rights, gay marriage and the prevention of gender-based violence, but also sex education in schools and gender studies in general. The campaigns' central motif – both rhetorical and visual – has almost invariably been the child in danger and the traditional family in need of protection: the logos of various campaigns featuring silhouettes of "traditional" families are strikingly similar (Paternotte and Kuhar 2017b: 269). As early as 2004, "gender" was demonized during the conservative mobilization against Zapatero's government same-sex marriage bill in Spain (Cornejo and Galan 2017). The peak of European mass mobilization against "gender ideology" occurred in France in the fall of 2012 when hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets of Paris and Lyon to oppose marriage equality for non-heterosexual couples under the banner of La Manif Pour Tous (Chetcuti-Osorovitz and Teichner 2018; Fassin 2016). In Italy, a political party named The People of the Family (*Il Popolo della Famiglia*) was formed in 2016 by one of the leaders of anti-LGBT networks, with the slogan "No gender in schools," and the anti-gender agenda was eventually taken over by mainstream parties such as Lega, as part of the effort to build their political image as defenders of the family and tradition (Garbagnoli 2017; Lavizzari and Prearo 2019). Anti-gender campaigns focused on "protecting" children have also spread beyond the European context; in August 2017 the Supreme Court of Justice in Peru ruled that including "gender ideology" in school curricula is illegal as it violates parents' rights to decide about their children's upbringing; in Brazil opposition to gender studies and equality policies became one of the core political goals of the newly elected President Bolsonaro (Correa, Paternotte and Kuhar 2018; Redden 2018). In roughly the same period (2017–2018) thousands of Polish schools submitted themselves for certification as "Family Friendly," a program led by a Catholic anti-choice foundation determined to protect children from "gender indoctrination."

While the focus on children has been a staple of many conservative campaigns in the past, the current attack on "gender" would not be such a success if right-wing populism did not address the real needs and grievances of many families in Europe and beyond. Ultraconservative actors – both religious and secular – have skillfully harnessed people's anxieties, resentment and anger by claiming to defend the natural family against a morally

corrupt and wealthy elite. This claim alone may sound somewhat vague; what makes it robust and convincing is the accompanying promise of more generous social policies focused on parents and children. Such proposals are often purely strategic, but they should not be dismissed. Promises of generous welfare provisions are an effective way to recruit supporters who do not necessarily share an ultraconservative worldview.

In many countries, "defending the family" and promoting public policies with a family perspective became an important platform of cooperation between anti-gender organizations and right-wing populist parties. The latter often combine conservative positions on gender equality with promoting generous state support for "our children" and "our families." Already in the 1990s, radical right parties began to shift their economic orientation from pro-market to welfare chauvinism (Andersen and Bjørklund 1990; Eger and Valdez 2015; Mudde 2002; Norocel 2016). Maureen A. Eger and Sarah Valdez (2015), who analyzed the political ideology of European radical right parties and their voters' attitudes, conclude that this shift can help explain the rise of popular support for such parties. They conclude that while radical right politicians increasingly invest in nationalist ideology, including a preference for anti-immigrant and anti-multicultural policies, they also tend to embrace welfare chauvinism, supporting the increase in social spending for in-groups, while cutting benefits to out-groups:

> During the 1970s and early 1980s, parties articulated support for free enterprise and economic orthodoxy; yet, in the most recent period, platforms indicate a decline in support for liberal economics. Instead, these parties increasingly favour social expenditure and welfare state redistribution. Results from our voting analysis confirm that welfare chauvinism – not rightist economic preferences – affects voting behaviour.
>
> (Eger and Valedez 2015: 124–125)

Poland and Hungary are vivid examples of how contemporary right-wing populist parties employ a similar strategy, positioning themselves as champions of generous social policies. They claim to support hard-working families with children – families that liberals allegedly never cared for. In Chapter 5 we show in detail that they have also introduced a number of policies aimed at boosting fertility rates, and that the issue of welfare and the mobilization of parents have been of paramount importance for the popular appeal of the anti-gender movement. The 2019 World Congress of Families in Verona was emblematic in this regard: even the American leaders publicly agreed that state support in the form of cash transfers, cheap credit and affordable child care is an important element of defending "the natural family" (Korolczuk 2019).

We claim that anti-genderism is the contemporary populist right's response to the failures of the neoliberal paradigm, on both the ideological

and economic levels. The obvious effects of neoliberalism include the privatization of social services, the dismantling of welfare provisions and the precarization of the working and living conditions of both women and men (Brown 2015; Charkiewicz and Zachorowska-Mazurkiewicz 2009; Zacharenko 2019, Walby 2015). But there are also social and cultural effects: neoliberalism economizes all spheres of life and introduces extreme forms of individualism, deeply transforming gender relations and value systems (Brown 2015 and 2019; Cabanas and Illouz 2019; Fraser 2009; Gregor and Grzebalska 2016; Ong 2006). While in reality right-wing populist governments have continued neoliberal policies in some areas, e.g. forging close alliances with the business elite and continuing the process of privatizing the state's assets (e.g. Pawłowski 2020), simultaneously, they have introduced some pro-welfare changes and stressed the importance of state support for families. Thus, they have been successful in presenting themselves as guardians of social cohesion and as generous supporters of the common people. Anti-gender rhetoric has helped them to link the economic, the social and the cultural dimensions, and to promulgate the view that only traditional forms of community – the family and the nation – offer protection against the evils of late capitalism.

In contemporary ultraconservative discourse "gender" is strongly linked to "individualism" and antithetical to "natural family." "Gender" stands for confusion, instability, erosion of community, in short, the chaos of modern life. This is why the anti-gender rhetoric is so readily adopted by right-wing populists. As Ruth Wodak elaborates in her seminal book *The Politics of Fear* (2015), right-wing populism thrives on collective anxieties related to both real and imagined threats such as economic hardships, the refugee crisis and moral panics. "Gender" – a word that sounds ominous and alien in most cultural contexts – has replaced feminism in ultraconservative rhetoric, epitomizing both the erosion of family and social bonds, as well as economic exploitation of the people by the corrupt global elites.

Knowledge production and expertise: academia as a site of struggle

Anti-genderists do not just undermine the scholarly legitimacy of gender studies scholars, whom they portray as ideology-driven activists blinded by "cultural Marxism" (Jamin 2018; Busbridge et al. 2020); they also aim to build academic credentials for their own claims. Gender is deemed ideological and unscientific, whereas a commonsense view of sex differences as being self-evident and biologically grounded is said to be scientific. This tendency is shared by the contemporary populist right, which is profoundly suspicious of experts, academic institutions and intellectual authorities in general. This trend is not limited to gender issues; history is also an important battleground, especially the history of migration, antisemitism, slavery, colonialism and nationalism. Right-wing intellectuals have long claimed

that academia is dominated by liberals and leftists, thus must be purged of "ideology": this view has been an important theme of the culture wars at least since the 1970s (e.g. Engeli 2019; Hartman 2015). Attacks against gender studies have evolved into an emblematic element of this process, which consists of attacking gender scholars as well as building up alternative sources of legitimacy, a body of knowledge and a new pantheon of intellectual celebrities with academic titles (Korolczuk 2020). A close reading of texts by exponents of transnational anti-genderism, including Gabriele Kuby and Marguerite Peeters – or their local versions such as Polish anti-genderists Father Oko or Marzena Nykiel – reveals an ambitious intellectual project, one that strives to present itself as rational and rooted in science (Kuhar 2014). Books are published and translated, lectures are given and academic conferences are organized at institutions of higher learning, online courses and workshops are offered.

Anti-genderism is thus a vast project of knowledge production and education, which employs various channels, both religious and secular. Just like second wave feminism established itself in the academic world in the form of gender studies, the present wave of anti-feminist activism seeks to legitimize itself by establishing *anti-gender studies* (Korolczuk 2020). The scale of this educational effort is remarkable. For example, in Poland during 2015 alone the Association of Catholic Families organized over 120 meetings for parents concerned about the "sexualization of children" through gender education in parishes all over Poland (Duda 2016: 37). In 2017 Polish gender scholars were targeted by the Ordo Iuris Institute, demanding that rectors of public universities provide a list – it seems appropriate to call it a "blacklist" – of gender studies scholars, whom they accused of promoting pedophilia. Interestingly, by 2020 the Ordo Iuris strategy had changed; the foundation proposed to amend the law of higher education as to "strengthen the freedom of opinion." In practice, this proposal would have opened the doors of academic institutions to religious fundamentalists of no academic standing, including "experts" promoted by Ordo Iuris, such as Mark Regnerus, whose research on children brought up in homosexual families has been discredited by the American Sociological Association. The future of this legislative change remains uncertain, but the ultraconservatives' efforts have in the meantime focused on silencing students at Silesian University, following a complaint against one of the professors, who had expressed ultraconservative views during lectures (Morgan 2020; Śmieja and Borysławski 2020).

Anti-genderism, as a body of knowledge and worldview, claims to be scientific, even though the movement's proclaimed aims are moral and its highest authorities tend to be religious figures. It reflects an ambitious plan to establish a new paradigm in social sciences, based on a religiously grounded set of fundamental truths about human nature, sexuality, family and society. In their texts and lectures, the key experts featured by the movement – some local, some international, often endowed with academic titles – engage in endless mutual citation, a vicious circle of self-legitimation

as is characteristic of conspiracy theories (Byford 2011). Anti-genderists have established an intellectual circuit alternative not just to gender studies or feminism but to contemporary social sciences and cultural studies. As Kuhar has observed, "the Church's discourse (and its public appearance) seems to be 'secularizing': the Bible is substituted by science and the Church itself by civil society proxies" (2014: 7).

Sometimes this struggle turns violent. An emblematic event took place in October 2017 when an effigy of Judith Butler was burnt by protesters opposed to her visiting Brazil (Brazil 2017; Jashik 2017). Over 370,000 people signed a petition calling for the cancellation of her lecture and the conference she co-organized in Sao Paulo, and claiming that gender equals pedophilia. In 2018 a fake bomb was left on the doorstep of the National Secretariat for Gender Research in Gothenburg, and even though no one was hurt, the message was clear: opponents of gender studies and gender mainstreaming mean business. Media reports and recent studies have shown that even in gender-egalitarian Sweden many scholars interested in gender and queer theory are trolled online and receive hateful emails, as well as rape and death threats (e.g. Ericson 2020; Lilja and Johansson 2018, de los Reyes et al. 2017). While some of those attacks have been waged by alt-right trolls, Sweden being a hotbed of alt-right activity in Europe, more mainstream critiques of gender studies significantly add to the hostile atmosphere. Even before the bomb threat, gender studies scholars in Sweden were concerned for their safety enough to publish an open letter in the popular Swedish newspaper *Aftonbladet*, where they claimed that such attacks "often lead academics to change their research focus. They do not have the strength to live with the threats directed at them. A milieu that wants to limit the space for open and critical research is expanding" (de los Reyes et al. 2017, our translation).

In many countries attacks on gender studies have been justified as being in defense of true science, objectivity and freedom of speech, but references to insufficient academic productivity are also sometimes made. In August 2018, the right-wing populist government in Hungary announced its plan to ban gender studies in both public and private universities, claiming that it no longer wishes to finance such educational programs, as their graduates have no jobs anyway. Apparently, the neoliberal logic of today's academia seamlessly coexists with ultraconservative bias against gender studies. In June 2020 the Romanian parliament voted to pass a law that makes it illegal to use the concept of "gender" in higher education and to question the difference between sex and gender, thus effectively outlawing gender studies as a discipline (Bucur 2020; Tidey 2020). Subsequently, the proposal was rejected, thanks to an appeal to the country's Constitutional Court made by Romanian president, but this initiative attests to the broader tendency in the region.

Sweden is an interesting example, where gender studies are delegitimized through their comparison to religion (Korolczuk and Gunnarsson Payne 2018). One of the most vocal critics of gender studies and gender mainstreaming in the Swedish media is the freelance journalist and conservative pundit Ivar Arpi, who regularly publishes on such issues in major newspapers, such as

Svenska Dagbladet (SD). In four long articles published in SD in Autumn 2017, Arpi described the alleged hegemony of gender studies at Swedish universities. He claimed that gender studies have become a "higher church" (*upper kyrkan*) in today's academia: a set of scientifically unfounded claims is used to indoctrinate young people at institutions of higher learning, while ideological radicalism of feminist and queer scholars leads to stifling public debate and freedom of speech (Arpi 2017a). Arpi has not postulated the banning of gender studies in the Swedish educational system; in fact, he positions himself as a defender of academic freedom, which is allegedly under threat from an overzealous and radical elite group (2017b, 2017c).

Despite its secular framing, Arpi's critique of gender studies and gender mainstreaming is strikingly similar to attacks waged by religious anti-gender pundits such as Kuby or Peeters. Arpi's 2020 book *Genusdoktrinen* (Gender Doctrine), written together with Anna-Karin Wyndham, who holds a doctorate in pedagogy from the University of Gothenburg, presents a world where a silent revolution is underway, the pursuit of knowledge is endangered, and truth is distorted. Ironically enough, the book is listed in the Gender Studies section on the website of Bokus, one of the biggest online booksellers in the country. It is advertised by an alarmist passage telling the prospective buyer to brace for an upcoming catastrophe:

> A revolution is sweeping through our universities. It is called gender mainstreaming and it is used as a cover for a radical and in-depth process. Quotas for women are established behind closed doors. Researchers fall silent for fear of reprisal. Knowledge is distorted when research funding is conditional on the need to create a gender perspective, even if it is glaciers, Moomin trolls or bridge supports that are being studied. What is now happening at the universities will soon affect the whole of society.
>
> (Bokus 2020, our translation)

Arpi is not the only Swedish journalist critiquing gender studies as an unscientific, ideology-driven and dangerous. A similar vision of a gender apocalypse has appeared in opinion pieces published by various authors in Christian media, local newspapers and right-wing extremist online magazines, such as *Samtiden* (e.g. Hyltén-Cavallius 2017).

The anti-gender activists focus on educational institutions and universities not only because they see them as a breeding ground of "gender ideologues" and sex educators, but also because they attempt to delegitimize and eventually replace current intellectual elites. The movement's promise to its constituency is a world in which ordinary people thrive supported by the state, free from the pressures and demoralizing influence of liberal elites. As in the case of Hungary and Sweden, the critique of gender studies and anti-discriminatory education does not have to be rooted in religious discourse, but can also be derived from a neoliberal rhetoric of productivity and "objective science."

Anti-gender campaigns and feminist mobilization: the dynamics of political struggle

We believe it is necessary to examine anti-gender campaigns in dialectic with the emergence of a new wave of feminist activism. Too often are the two phenomena analyzed separately: the former as a new stage in the decades-old opposition to gender and sexual equality among religious fundamentalists, the latter as a response to the rise of misogyny epitomized by the alt-right in the U.S. and masculinist movements around the world. Rather, we view anti-genderism and the new feminism as rival responses to the challenges of the populist moment. While most actors on the right have always viewed gender issues as central to their cultural and political project, the liberal mainstream and parts of the left seemed for a long time to be oblivious of the significance of women's and LGBT rights. In Chapter 3 we will show how gender-related battles were central to the victory of the populist right in Poland, and how the defense of women's rights became an important nexus of resistance against the Kaczyński regime.

On 3 October 2016, many commentators were astonished to see tens of thousands of angry women in the streets of 140 Polish cities and villages. That same year, mass-scale protests erupted in Argentina under the slogan #NiUnaMenos as women revolted against femicide and sexual violence. The movement grew and radicalized quickly, "expanding the ambit of 'violence' as an analytical category to include the multifarious assaults of capitalism on the lives of poor and working women and gender non-conforming people" (Arruzza and Bhattacharya 2018). A few months later, the Women's March on Washington took place, in response to the inauguration of Donald Trump as U.S. president, turning into one of the biggest grassroots mobilizations in the country's history. Perhaps the most vivid example of the new wave of women's activism is the International Women's Strike – also known under the Spanish name Paro International de Mujeres – a global mobilization coordinated across different countries, bringing women into the streets on 8 March 2017 and 2018. Initiated by activists from the Polish Women's Strike, the network operated under the banner "Solidarity is our weapon" in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the U.S. In late October 2016, the IWS made a call to strike translated into several languages:

> We, the women of the world, had enough of physical, economic, verbal or moral violence directed against us. We will not tolerate it passively. […] As conscious citizens, us women know that the world is going through a phase of crisis but we do not accept being victims of it. [...] We, the women of the world, announce that if we do not take effective measures to stop this violence urgently and immediately, we will make a strike, caring and united, all over the world to defend our human rights. We constitute more than half of the world's population and we know that power is in our hands.
>
> (International Women's Strike 2017)

Women's rights – a set of issues that had been dismissed for decades as mere distractions from real political struggle, as "cultural" or "identity" politics – proved to be the biggest mobilizing factors at a time of political crisis. In terms of sheer attendance, feminist protests attracted incomparably more people than "pro-family" marches ever had. For example, the March for the Family organized by the World Congress of Families in Verona in March 2019 (Figure 2.2) was attended by a thousand participants at most, whereas a feminist protest against the WCF (Figure 2.3) gathered at least

Figure 2.2 March for the Family in Verona, Italy, 2019, organized by the World Congress of Families.
Photo by Elżbieta Korolczuk

Figure 2.3 Feminist March in Verona, Italy, 2019, held under the banner "Verona Transfeminist Parade."
Photo by Elżbieta Korolczuk

30,000 people from all over Italy and abroad. The political dynamic, however, makes it much more difficult for the progressive groups to influence politics. In countries where the populist right is in power, such as Poland, Brazil or Italy under Salvini, the structure of political opportunities is more or less closed to feminist actors.

3 "Worse than communism and Nazism put together"

Poland's anti-gender campaigns in a comparative perspective

In March 2019, a Law and Justice politician notorious for her rhetorical bravado, Krystyna Pawłowicz, announced on Twitter:

> This is war! On Polish children and families. On Polish villages and cities. ON POLAND AND EUROPE, which AWAITS our HELP! On Polish identity and culture. […] We HAVE to win this culture WAR! Proponents of Soros and leftist pathological ways – HANDS OFF POLAND AND EU!
>
> (Gersz 2019, our translation, upper case used as in original)

The tweet was a reaction to the Warsaw mayor's signing of the so-called LGBT+ Charter. Thus, most commentators viewed it as an outburst of hate speech and scapegoating of sexual minorities. At the time, hardly anyone noticed connections between the ruling party's opposition against the LGBT+ Charter and the "war on gender," which had unfolded in Poland a few years prior. The link was not immediately visible, because the word "gender" was not used. However, many of the core elements of the earlier phase of the anti-gender campaign were present: the children and family in danger, the liberal political elite as a source of threat, Europe awaiting Poland's help and references to George Soros as a sinister figure behind it all. Pawłowicz's reaction was illustrative of this moral panic. Opponents of the LGBT+ Charter insisted that the defense of gay rights reflects cultural Marxism and is part of global scheme of manipulation (see also Jamin 2018, Busbridge et al. 2020). The visual materials used by Law and Justice politicians – the image of an umbrella with PiS logo shielding a family with two children against a dripping rainbow – were a recycled and only slightly altered version of the logo used in a 2017 Ordo Iuris campaign "Let us Protect the Children" inciting parents of school children to report any anti-discriminatory classes to this organization (see Figure 3.1). A slightly different version of the same image was also used by radical nationalist Jacek Międlar in the fall of 2017; this time the black umbrella signified nationalism, while the six colors of the dripping rainbow were marked as the European Union (EU), Islam, feminism, the Open Society Foundation, LGBT and communism. One element

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Figure 3.1 Poster from Ordo Iuris campaign "Let's Protect Our Children," 2018.

is always there: a heterosexual heteronormative family with children that needs to be sheltered against the threat signified by the rainbow.

This chapter tells the story of the anti-gender campaign as it unfolded in Poland and its interconnectedness with the rise to power of the populist right. The broader context of these developments has been described by Marta Kotwas and Jan Kubik (2019) as a process of "symbolic thickening" occurring in Poland's public culture. This trend had begun around 2006 with the Polish right-wing actors promoting an ethno-nationalist vision of Poland as a Catholic country, the last frontier of Christianity in Europe: "A gradual symbolic thickening of the Polish public culture through the intensification of Catholic and nationalist discourses resulted in the expansion of the discursive opportunity structure" for right-wing actors (Kotwas and Kubik 2019: 435). The anti-gender campaigns can be viewed as feeding on this dynamic and contributing to it.

We show that the collaboration between ultraconservatives and right-wing populists helped the latter ascend to power in 2015 and then win the presidency in 2020, following the logic of what we call *opportunistic synergy*. The Law and Justice party and its coalition partners have repeatedly employed specific arguments forged by ultraconservative forces, such as the claim that all gay men are pedophiles or that sex education is a form of child abuse. The function of this rhetoric is to strengthen social polarization, scapegoat minority groups and malign political opponents, branding them as supporters of demoralization. Hence, the intensification of anti-gender rhetoric on the part of the ruling party has been more or less synchronized with the political calendar. "Gender" or "LGBT ideology" keeps reappearing as a danger to children and families before the elections, while the face of the enemy continues to change: in 2012 it was an image of proponents of the Istanbul Convention accused of imposing foreign norms and values, in 2015 it was the face of a lustful Syrian refugee, a single man whose arrival was a danger to Polish women, while in 2019 and 2020 it was the face of a gay man wearing make-up as a clear sign

of gender transgression. The collaboration continues in cycles framed by elections: each time ultraconservative forces make demands on the political camp they helped into power, albeit with mixed results due to growing resistance, which we document in Chapter 6.

Saving the children and the nation: actors and goals of anti-gender campaigns in Poland

The main social actors involved in the anti-gender campaign have included priests, ultraconservative activists, journalists and bloggers, quickly joined by conservative politicians from parties such as Law and Justice as well as Poland Together (*Polska Razem*) and the far-right Kukiz15 and its successor Confederation (*Konfederacja*). Self-appointed opponents of "gender ideology" have included Father Dariusz Oko, Archbishops Henryk Hozer and Marek Jędraszewski, right-wing politicians such as Jarosław Gowin, Patryk Jaki, Krystyna Pawłowicz, Zbigniew Ziobro and Michał Woś, as well as representatives of non-governmental organizations, including Jerzy Kwaśniewski from Ordo Iuris and Kaja Godek from the Life and Family Foundation (*Fundacja Życie i Rodzina*). Again and again they have claimed that it is necessary to protect children, the family, and Polish cultural and religious values from feminists, LGBT and human rights activists, allegedly supported by liberal politicians and the West.

A key actor within the Church has been the Redemptorist priest Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, whose media empire includes the Radio Maryja radio station, as well as television station (TV Trwam), a daily newspaper (*Nasz Dziennik)*, a university complex, and a foundation (Lux Veritatis) involved in research, education, cultural production, as well as a number of various large-scale investments. More than just a broadcaster with two million listeners, Radio Maryja is in fact a powerful social movement that enjoys the support of the Polish Episcopate and a popularity estimated at 9% of Poland's population (Pacewicz 2018; Pobłocki 2020). Anti-genderism is a perfect fit with Radio Maryja's politics which are nationalistic, anti-EU and anti-establishment – a combination of the radical traditionalist strand of contemporary Roman Catholicism with a peculiarly Polish brand of politicized religiosity, wherein Catholicism is equated with national belonging, while non-Catholics and liberals are portrayed as enemies of the nation (Stanley 2016). As shown by Ireneusz Krzemiński (2017), the station's national-Catholic ideology is in fact an updated version of the pre-war, National Democracy ideology (known in Poland as "*endecja*"). However, as Kacper Pobłocki convincingly argues, Radio Maryja's brand of radical conservatism should be viewed not necessarily as a "return of the repressed," but a phenomenon that is "very twenty-first century in its post-secular embrace of politics" and its ways of generating a sense of community among otherwise isolated individuals, who are scattered throughout the world and often lonely (Pobłocki 2020: 16).

Since 1991, when the station was founded, Radio Maryja's has given rise to a specific, cultural, social and political identity: "the Radio Maryja listener." Marked by wounded national pride, a strong attachment to "family values," and resentment against Western liberalism, this identity was successfully courted as an electoral base for Law and Justice in 2015 and has remained Kaczyński's most important ally ever since. Rydzyk's loyalty has been generously rewarded by the state. By July 2019 his various initiatives (his "deeds" as he calls them) had been subsidized by the state with the sum of 214 million PLN (approx. 50 million euro), and since then money has continued to flow his way (Mikołajewska 2019, 2020). If Kaczyński's project of "raising Poland from its knees" is fully compatible with Radio Maryja's brand of religious nationalism, the struggle against "gender ideology" has offered an ideal site for collaboration – apparently free of antisemitism, of which Radio Maryja is often accused, and yet fulfilling the same need of vilification of the political enemy. Since 2012 both Radio Maryja and Rydzyk's newspaper *Nasz Dziennik* have been disseminating anti-gender discourse almost on a daily basis, collaborating with key anti-gender pundits (such as Father Dariusz Oko and the Ordo Iuris Foundation). Genderism, an enemy of "the natural family," is framed, depending on the need, either as an enemy of Poland or an enemy of the Catholic Church. For listeners of Radio Maryja, the two are all but synonymous.

An influential player in the Polish context – one focused exclusively on combating gender equality and sexual minority rights – is the ultraconservative foundation Ordo Iuris Institute for Legal Culture (*Instytut Kultury Prawnej Ordo Iuris*), established in 2013, which today employs over 30 persons (not counting external experts and volunteers). The organization produces data and core arguments used by the populist right, as well as engaging in strategic litigation, writing law proposals and publicly attacking progressive NGOs (Ciobanu 2020b; Mierzyńska 2020a; Provost and Milburn 2017; Wielka Koalicja 2020). Several organizations involved in the anti-gender campaign were established well before the anti-gender mobilization began, e.g. the Mother and Father Foundation (*Fundacja Mamy i Taty*), which had been promoting "traditional family values" and opposing gay rights and divorce since 2010.[1] Other groups such as the Stop Sexualizing Our Children Initiative (*Inicjatywa Stop Seksualizacji Naszych Dzieci*) and the Stop Gender network came into being in 2013 and 2014, respectively, with the sole purpose of resisting what they saw as the spread of genderism. Their specific targets were sex and anti-discriminatory education, as well as access to contraception and IVF treatment.

Some of the groups that have joined anti-genderists were grassroots mobilizations, such as the parents' movement Save the Little Ones! (*Ratujmy Maluchy!*), which emerged around 2009 to oppose educational reform, but joined the fight against the Istanbul Convention in 2012 on the grounds that the measures designed to counteract domestic violence posed a threat to parental authority (Korolczuk 2017). Grassroots organizations

and networks helped mobilize large numbers of people, especially concerned parents, worried about the supposed threat to their children posed by "the homosexual lobby" and sex educators. Occasionally mass rallies were also held, e.g. in August 2015 in Warsaw around 2000 people, mostly families with children, gathered under the banner "Stop Depravation in Education." A joint effort of 26 organizations and networks, the event was aimed against the sex education curriculum in Polish schools. The annual Marches for Life and the Family organized in Warsaw by the Center for Life and Family (*Centrum Życia i Rodziny*) gather even larger crowds. According to the organizers, the march in 2019 held under the banner "Stop Sex Education in Schools!" attracted almost 10,000 participants. Compared to the massive scale of France's La Manif Pour Tous these numbers may seem negligible, but they show that anti-gender organizations are able to mobilize street protests even without any threat of specific legislative changes in the pipeline. Over time the strategies have evolved, leaning toward strategic litigation, lobbying, online mobilization and publishing reports and pamphlets about the alleged outrages of the LGBT community.

Our chronology of the campaign in Poland includes three major phases. The early one, 2012–2015, was focused on sex education and opposition to the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, both accused of deceitfully introducing "gender ideology" into Polish culture. Those early attacks on "gender" peaked in 2013 when it was chosen as the word of the year by committee of linguists and cultural studies experts (*Newsweek Polska* 2014). The second phase unfolded in 2016–2018, around the time when Law and Justice came to power. It was focused first on vilifying refugees as rapists and – after PiS won the elections – on abortion rights, although this particular campaign was not a success because of the massive opposition it triggered. The third phase has consisted mainly of attacks on LGBT minorities; it began in the spring of 2019 and is still in progress at the time of writing. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic some right-wing outlets suggested that the virus is a sign of God's wrath, a punishment for homosexuality and gender transgression, while others expressed hope that the pandemic would at last liberate the world from the excesses of gender and political correctness (Steinhagen 2020; Gadowski 2020). As we finish working on this manuscript in September 2020, Poland's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention seems more and more likely and the government is offering generous compensations to municipalities that have declared themselves free from "LGBT ideology" and lost EU funding. The ultimate results of these activities are yet to be seen: many commentators suggest that this is just a prelude to Polexit. In any case, the end of Poland's anti-gender campaigns is nowhere in sight.

It is clear to us that a strong link exists between the first wave of anti-gender activism and the 2015 electoral victory of the right-wing populist Law and Justice party. Its electoral campaign – a classic example of the politics of fear as discussed by Ruth Wodak (2015) – relied on building moral

panic around two interconnected issues: the threat of "genderism" and the danger of mass immigration, the latter often dubbed an "invasion," a word that would eventually also be applied to LGBT people. In many countries, including Poland, Italy and Hungary, right-wing populists resort to the claim that "genderism" makes nation states vulnerable to the "barbarian invasion," as refugees are portrayed by the radical right. Both themes – LGBT rights and migration – were overwhelmingly present in the conservative media and religious discourse spreading into social media and mainstream public debate. Usually viewed in separation from each other, the two themes are indeed strongly linked, as observers in several contexts have noted (e.g. Meret and Siim 2013; Szczygielska 2019; Zaviršek and Rajgelj 2019).

Setting the stage: the first phase of anti-gender campaigns in Poland

While it is difficult to locate the precise starting point of anti-gender mobilization in Poland, one date often mentioned is April 2012, when the then-Minister of Justice, Jarosław Gowin, publicly opposed ratification of the Istanbul Convention, calling it a "carrier of gender ideology" (Graff 2014a; Grzebalska 2016). His statements, puzzling to many people at the time, seem to have initiated Poland's anti-gender campaign.[2] The rationale offered by Gowin was that the Convention is an ideological Trojan Horse; its hidden agenda, he claimed, was undermining the traditional family. The fact that the text of the Convention includes the word "gender" was viewed as proof of its social-constructionist underpinnings.[3] Polish feminists and sex educators as well as the then-ruling party, the liberal-conservative pro-EU Civic Platform, were portrayed as traitors, mere puppets in the hands of an international, or even global conspiracy against the existing traditional gender order. A similar isolationist note could be heard in other related public statements. Bishop Stanisław Stefanek, representative of the Council for Family of the Polish Episcopate, commented on the government's efforts to initiate discussion on civil unions as evidence that the ruling party "implements global directives, dressing them up in trendy words, claiming that this is what progress and freedom are about" (Kowalczyk 2012).While the immediate goal was not achieved – despite the opposition Poland ratified the Istanbul Convention – the campaign shifted the public debate.

Soon, another theme became prominent in anti-gender debates: sex education, which was demonized as the "sexualization of children." The overarching theme of "child in danger" is not a Polish invention, as it has been used also in other countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Germany and France (e.g. Höjdestrand 2017; Kováts and Põim 2015; Strelnyk 2016). However, in Poland the focus on children may be stronger than elsewhere because the initial stage of the anti-gender campaign coincided with the surfacing of the public accusations against pedophile priests (Diduszko 2019; Overbeek 2013). Consequently, attacks on "gender" were viewed by many

as an effort of the Polish Episcopate to divert media attention away from the Church pedophilia scandals. A vivid example of such argumentation is the article published in January 2014 in *The New York Times* by the well-known Polish intellectual and founder of a left-liberal think-thank Political Critique (*Krytyka Polityczna*), Sławomir Sierakowski:

> The reasons behind such an orchestrated action might be found in the Church's recent problems. Poles have been outraged by the large-scale financial fraud carried out by the commission tasked with the reprivatisation of church property that had been seized by the Communist government. Poles also continue to be disturbed by increasingly frequent disclosures of paedophilia within the Church.
>
> (Sierakowski 2014)

Sierakowski was not alone in attributing the anti-gender campaign to local trends (Kuisz and Wigura 2014). Public statements by some Polish bishops corroborate this interpretation: on 8 October 2013 Archbishop Józef Michalik made a public statement depicting child victims of pedophile clergymen as "clinging to priests," seeking out the love they do not receive at home, due to rising divorce rates and the impact of gender ideology (Kim 2013). With this widely discussed statement he attempted to shift responsibility for child abuse from perpetrators to "broken families" and international institutions that "sexualize children" through sex education. While Michalik later retracted his expressions as "unfortunate," the question of sex education remained a key theme of anti-gender mobilization.

In the Polish context, as well as globally, it is the Catholic Church that was the main force behind the anti-gender campaign (Case 2011), even though different religious authorities are active as well. Official religious sanction for this effort was given in the Pastoral Letter of the Bishops' Conference of Poland, which was made public and read in churches on 29 December 2013. This document provides a useful sample of how anti-gender crusaders explain the origins of "gender ideology," showing how in the post-communist context of Poland gender equality is disqualified through a crude parallel with Marxism and communist propaganda. In the view of the Polish Episcopate:

> Gender ideology is the product of many decades of ideological and cultural changes that are deeply rooted in the Marxism and neo-Marxism endorsed by some feminist movements, and also the sexual revolution. [...] It maintains that biological sex is not socially significant and that cultural sex, which humans can freely develop and determine irrespective of biological conditions, is most important. [...] The danger of gender ideology lies in its very destructive character both for mankind, personal contact and social life as a whole. Humans unsure of their

> sexual identity are not capable of discovering and fulfilling tasks that they face in their marital, family, social and professional lives.
>
> (Bishops' Conference of Poland 2013)

Polish bishops stress the danger posed by this alleged "ideology" claiming that, by negating sexual difference and gender complementarity, it erases the existing gender order and constitutes a major threat to mankind. According to this view, "gender ideology" is being implemented worldwide by international institutions (especially the United Nations and the EU) and nation states, inspired by feminists and proponents of gay rights in order to fight religion and the "natural family" (Buss 2004; Paternotte 2014).

Though gay rights were not explicitly mentioned in the Pastoral Letter, it was soon clear that the key danger to Polish children is, indeed, homosexuality, often dubbed as "homosexual propaganda" and in 2019 re-named as "LGBT ideology." Father Oko, the charismatic priest and the most famous representative of the early phases of Poland's anti-gender campaign, was disseminating homophobic hate speech in the public sphere; his public utterances were jeremiads warning against the slippery slope of excessive tolerance. In a typical statement broadcast on Radio Maryja he exposed the alleged homosexual conspiracy:

> Anyone who allows himself to be brainwashed by homosexual ideology will find himself the following day forced to accept incest, polygamy, polyamory – these are the consequences. The homosexual lobby always acts in this way. Such are the stages. They will never stop; they want a total revolution.
>
> (*wobroniewiary* 2015, our translation)

During the early stage of anti-gender campaigns, progressive actors – both observers and targets of the attacks – reacted with confusion and disorientation. One misconception was that the whole thing is based on an unfortunate misunderstanding. Hence the well-meant effort to explain gender to the misinformed undertaken by Minister Agnieszka Kozłowska-Rajewicz, at the time the government's Plenipotentiary for Gender Equality. Assuming (or perhaps pretending to assume) that the Bishops' Letter was the result of ignorance, Rajewicz offered calm explanations and posted a primer in gender studies on the Ministry's website. She explained that gender is not a threat, but a staple category of social sciences and that gender mainstreaming is an EU policy and not an international plot against the family. The Ministry's website also featured a glossary of gender-related terminology aimed to enlighten the misinformed. Yet another example of actions based on the assumption of Poland's exceptionalism was an open letter issued in November 2013 and addressed by the Congress of Polish Women (the nation's largest women's rights organization) to Pope Francis, alerting him to the misdoings of Polish bishops:

> This mad hatred towards "gender ideology" – which is really a hatred of women and egalitarian ideals – has flooded Poland far and wide and is giving rise to fear, which poisons people's souls and destroys the civic debate. As an inevitable result, both the public opinion and state officials in Poland are becoming fearful of speaking not only in terms of "gender," but also in terms of non-discrimination and equality, even though these are Christian ideals at the core.
>
> (Kośmiński 2013)

The underlying assumption of this document and many other responses was that the war on gender was a Polish invention unknown to and unsupported by the Vatican, and especially by Pope Francis, often portrayed as liberal and sympathetic to the pleas of women and sexual minorities. Even today, some commentators, scholars and journalists in Poland continue to interpret the anti-gender mobilization as a local phenomenon, a sign of Poland's intellectual and social provincialism, still believing that the West is free of such aberrations.

Meanwhile, the anti-gender campaigners continued attacks on sexual education programs in kindergartens and schools, focusing mainly on WHO standards for sexuality education being implemented by NGOs such as the Foundation of Pre-School Education (Grabowska 2014; Duda 2016). One key target, consistently demonized and misrepresented as an incitement to sexualization and masturbation, was the handbook *Równościowe przedszkole* (Equality-based Kindergarten) published by feminist educators in 2011. Rumors were spread that sex educators forced little boys to wear dresses. These attacks on "gender" were consistently framed as efforts to protect children who are to be made confused about gender roles at an early age, only to become slaves of the homo/feminist/anti-Church lobby later. The source of demoralization was usually located in the West, colonizing the local population by imposing values and policies that are at odds with the local culture. The problem is not only moral but also political; the process of introducing anti-discriminatory and gender mainstreaming measures was viewed as undemocratic and top-down, a critique that is not entirely unfounded (Duda 2016; Grabowska 2014; Rawłuszko 2019). As we will discuss further in the book, there are, indeed, some interesting convergences between anti-gender critiques of the ways in which equality policies were introduced and critical feminist analyses of gender mainstreaming.

One popular argument was that sex education offered in public schools and kindergartens should be regarded as an unacceptable form of the state's intervention into citizen's private lives. The idea that children need to be protected against exposure to allegedly corrupting sex education programs is central to conservative cultural politics in many contexts. Controversies over sex education in Polish schools bear resemblance to the battle over sex education in the U.S. in the 1980 and 1990s: in both cases, the focus was on protecting children and on parents' rights to decide what is best for their children (e.g.

Irvine 2002; Johnson 2018). Activism of the likes of Father Oko in Poland bear striking resemblance to the efforts of Anita Bryant, an American model and singer, who in 1976 led a campaign against new gay-rights legislation, first in Miami-Dade County and then nationally. The successful campaign warned the parents of school children against gay teachers and homosexuality as a danger to families. Bryant "drew on popular perceptions of gay men as child molesters and popularized the idea that 'since homosexuals cannot reproduce, they must recruit' " (Johnson 2018: 239). The controversy over the textbook *Równościowe przedszkole* (Equality-based Kindergarten) in Poland resembles the struggle over the multicultural *Children of the Rainbow* school curriculum, presenting different types of families, including families with two moms or two dads, which erupted in 1993 in New York City (Irvin 2002). In both cases the main source of controversy was that the authors validated different types of families and sexual orientation and that the textbooks were addressed to children. Consequently, the opponents of gender equality education in both Poland and the U.S. claimed that the main aim of the authors was to teach children how to become homosexuals, and they argued that talking about sex with children was practically the same thing as molesting them. A similar vision is propagated by activists in other countries, such as Russia, as exemplified by the 2013 pronouncements of Anatoly Artiukh, leader of a Saint Petersburg nationalist organization. He claims that liberal groups and politicians:

> […] take children from decent families and give them to pederasts. Or [...] they teach children masturbation instead of embroidery in school, with the help of German or Swedish cartoons.
>
> (Höjdestrand 2017)

While both Polish and Russian campaigns against sex education and gender ideology are fueled by anti-Western sentiment and presented as a local reaction to ideological colonization by the EU, they are clearly inspired by arguments coined by Western experts and activists. Polish scholar Marta Rawłuszko proposes to interpret the opposition to the *Równościowe Przedszkole* textbook as a legitimate grassroots resistance to "the technocratic manner of developing particular gender equality policies" (2019: 18). She argues that:

> Gender wars are manifestations of wider tendencies involving people becoming "strangers in their own land" (Hochschild 2016), whose participation in decision-making or public deliberation is unnecessary or even redundant.
>
> (2019: 18)

While we agree with the contention that gender equality policies were introduced in Eastern Europe in a less than democratic manner, it is also

important to note that local activists opposing "foreign interventions" are often inspired by ultraconservative Western organizations and engage in extensive transnational collaboration. Resistance to gender ideology in education takes very similar form on both sides of the former Iron Curtain. Rawłuszko suggests that it is predominantly a matter of Eastern European resistance to Western influence (see also Kovats 2020). However, as shown by Imke Schmincke (2020) almost identical arguments were used in Germany by Demo für Alle activists in relation to the new handbook *The Sexual Pedagogy of Diversity* in 2014. It was claimed that children would be deprived of their "natural sense of shame," parents would be deprived of control over their children's education and schools would be infiltrated by pedophilic experts (2020: 63–65). What seems crucial is not the East-West divide but the claim that such changes are introduced in a top-down manner by cultural outsiders. Positioning their struggle as a local and authentic opposition to a global assault on traditional lifestyle is a crucial part of the ultraconservative political strategy in the culture wars (see Chapter 4).

The specificity of the Polish variant of these claims is that progressive interventions in the realm of family and children's education were routinely compared to communists' attempts to gain full control over people's private and family life, a form of "social engineering." In other words, sex education was disqualified as an imposition of the liberal West (UN, WHO, EU), but also as a remnant of communist practices. On 31 January 2014 the early phase of Poland's anti-gender campaign reached its most spectacular moment: Father Oko delivered a lecture in Polish parliament at the invitation of the Parliamentary Committee Against the Atheization of Poland and by a group of MPs identifying as "pro-life." The aim was to draw public attention to the dangers of gender mainstreaming and "sexualization" of children. Oko's performance was theatrical to the extreme, a mix of prophecy and lament over the state of society: he presented gender as "a dire threat to civilization," "a great evil that must be spoken about," informing the public that "genderists propagate incest, pedophilia and homosexuality" and "atheists have been the greatest criminals in human history" (Oko 2014). That lecture was a significant event, much discussed in the media, marking the politicization of the anti-gender debate.

That same month another right-wing party, United Poland (*Solidarna Polska*), formed the Parliamentary Committee STOP Gender Ideology headed by Beata Kempa. During the first half of 2014 alone, this body organized a conference that featured Gabriele Kuby – author of *The Global Sexual Revolution*, a key text of the anti-gender movement – as a keynote speaker, as well as meetings and workshops in over a dozen Polish cities. Involvement in the anti-gender campaign paid off for the most engaged MPs: in November 2015, after Law and Justice won the elections, Kempa became the Head of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister in the new government. The war against gender, already inscribed in the Law and Justice electoral program, became part of the governments' official policy known as

"Change for the Better." Jarosław Gowin, the newly appointed Minister of Science and Higher Education, announced his intention to remove unnamed "gay and lesbian studies journals" from the official rankings of academic journals and the new Minister of Education, Anna Zalewska, stated: "School must be free from various ideologies. Children will study normal, classic subjects. We will deal with this problem without causing unnecessarily turmoil and press conferences" (Stelmasiak 2015).

Strengthening the ties: the second and third phases of anti-gender campaigns in Poland

The second phase of Poland's anti-gender mobilization (2016–2018) – which we discuss in more detail below and in Chapter 6 – involved the consolidation of the bonds between ultraconservative anti-gender actors and right-wing populists. On the one hand we witnessed the further politicization of "gender" by Law and Justice, which employed key tropes of the anti-gender campaign during the elections, linking the gender threat with anti-refugee rhetoric. On the other hand, the ultraconservative groups came to rely on political alliances with the populists in their own political strategizing. Simply put, it was pay-back time. Soon after the elections in the fall of 2015 the anti-choice network "STOP abortion" led by the Ordo Iuris Institute Foundation launched a massive campaign in favor of a total ban on abortions. Since many of the Polish organizations and networks involved in the anti-gender mobilization are linked to the national and transnational anti-choice movement, it is hardly surprising that the issue of abortion became an important theme in the war on gender in our country. In the spring of 2016 Stop Abortion Committee started to gather signatures supporting citizen's law proposal. In Poland, civil society actors can introduce a piece of legislation for parliamentary debate under the rubric of a "popular initiative" or "civic initiative," and the law requires that the submitting group register and then gather 100,000 signatures within three months. The Stop Abortion Committee was confident that the new law would be supported by the government. Indeed, Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydło and the leader of the ruling party Jarosław Kaczyński initially declared that as Catholics they would support the total ban on abortion.

The drafted bill included a total ban on abortion and the threat of criminal prosecution for both doctors and women (see Chapter 6 for more details). Polish law already strictly limits access to abortion, which is illegal unless one of the three exceptions occurs: when the pregnancy results from rape or incest, if the woman's life is in danger, or the fetus is "seriously malformed." Despite the severe limitations, anti-choice organizations strive to have a blanket ban imposed on abortion. Hence, this was not the first time such a restrictive law was submitted to the parliament, but never before had the country's leading politicians announced their support for such a proposal. Had the law been passed, it would have affected not only women

seeking to terminate a pregnancy but also patients treated for ectopic pregnancy, cases of severe physical defects present in a fetus such as *spina bifida* and rape survivors forced by law to give birth. In retrospect the link between the anti-gender campaign and this political initiative is clear: putting a total ban on abortion fits well with the overall goal of groups which oppose promiscuity, chaos in gender order and depopulation. However, as we elaborate in Chapter 6, the attack on reproductive rights – to ultraconservatives and religious fundamentalists an obvious exemplification of the evils of "gender" – turned out to be a dead end for right-wing populists, a strategy leading to massive opposition rather than political victory. Due to the mass protests of Polish women throughout 2016 – including the Black Protests and the Polish Women's Strike – the ruling party backed back away from the proposal, burying this and subsequent bills in parliamentary committees (Graff 2019; Korolczuk 2016; Majewska 2017). Thus, in subsequent years the opposition against gender equality was presented mostly as a struggle against comprehensive sex education and sexual minorities' rights.

During the third and most recent phase of anti-gender mobilization, the phrase "gender ideology" has largely been replaced by the equally ominous and foreign-sounding "LGBT ideology" (Ciobanu 2020b; Mierzyńska 2020a; Provost and Milburn 2017; Wielka Koalicja 2020).This development testifies to the growing politicization of homosexuality in Poland, which had been ongoing for several years (Graff 2010; O'Dwyer and Vermeersch 2016). The triggering event was the signing in March 2019 of the so-called LGBT+ Charter by Warsaw Mayor Rafał Trzaskowski. The document included basic legal protections as well as the promise to provide sex and anti-discriminatory education in public schools based on World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines. Trzaskowski's decision met with an immediate hostile response. The tweet by Krystyna Pawłowicz, with which we began this chapter, is just a sample of the heated public debate that followed. Law and Justice representatives and Catholic clergy claimed that sex education would lead to "early sexualization" of youth, that it would violate parents' rights to decide about the upbringing of their children and would ultimately bring about the destruction of the family as a social institution (Mierzyńska 2020b).

Clearly, this campaign capitalized on the earlier phases of the "war against gender" – the theme of children in danger of "sexualization" was still fresh in the public memory. The cultural script, the language and basic claims were already there. No extended arguments about the evils of gender ideology were necessary, it was enough for Kaczyński to use the word gender in connection with the LGBT+ Charter to make it immediately suspect in the public eye. In April 2019 Jarosław Kaczyński went on record claiming that "the LGBT movement and gender pose a threat to our identity, a threat to our nation. They threaten the Polish state" (Chrzczonowicz 2019). While this statement appeared in the context of the May 2019 European parliament elections, the campaign it initiated outlasted this purpose. Attacks

on the LGBT community became one of the dominant themes of political struggles in Poland that year, leading up to October 2019 parliamentary elections. On the eve of the vote, the news channel of public television (TVP Info, by then fully controlled by Law and Justice) released a documentary film about the LGBT community in Poland entitled "Invasion." It pictured Catholics in Poland as an embattled and oppressed community, under siege from an aggressive LGBT lobby funded and controlled by the West. In Chapter 4 we return to this film as well as the complex moral geography, which often escapes the attention of scholars engaged in studies of gender and nationalism.

In the third phase of Polish anti-gender campaign, Law and Justice, the episcopate and ultraconservative groups, as well as the public media dominated by the ruling party, acted in unison, scapegoating gay men and arguably inciting violence. In July 2019 the ultra-conservative magazine *Gazeta Polska* announced they would include "LGBT-free zone" stickers as a free gift for readers in their next issue. The stickers featured vertical stripes in rainbow colors crossed out by a thick black "X." The initiative, obviously reminiscent of Nazi policies of exclusion, prompted a wave of outrage. Poland's largest bookstore chain and major press distributor EMPIK refused to sell the paper; a gay rights activist named Bartosz Staszewski filed a lawsuit on the grounds of infringement of personal rights and succeed in blocking the distribution of the weekly; U.S. Ambassador to Poland Georgette Mosbacher made a public statement on Twitter expressing her "disappointment and worry" that certain groups would use the stickers to promote hatred and intolerance.

Soon after, on 20 July, an equality march in the town of Białystok was violently attacked by football hooligans and neo-Nazis, who descended upon the city from all over Poland. Dubbed by many "Poland's Stonewall," this was a watershed event – the first time that Poland's "culture war" erupted into street violence barely contained by the police. The event gained wide media coverage both in Poland and abroad (Dehnel 2019), and many expected that it would cause a turn in public sentiments in favor of sexual minorities. This seems to be true on the part of the liberal mainstream. The liberal daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*, whose position on the Pride marches had long been ambivalent, issued an official statement entitled "There is no freedom without solidarity," declaring that this conflict is about democracy and defending fellow citizens against fascism (Zespół GW 2019).

On 1 August, the use of a single powerful word – "plague" – signaled that the ultraconservative side had no intention of backing down in the conflict. On the anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising, the Archbishop of Kraków, Marek Jędraszewski warned in his sermon that "the red plague is not gripping our land anymore, which does not mean that there is not a new one that wants to control our souls, hearts and minds. Not red, but rainbow" (PAP 2019). Not surprisingly, the remark was met with harsh criticism from liberal commentators, while the right-wing media commended

the archbishop's bravery. Letters of support and loyalty soon came in from abroad: from the head of Hungary's Episcopal Conference, Bishop András Veres and from the head of the Slovak Episcopate, Stanislav Zvolenský (Pawlicka 2019).

Simultaneously, the anti-LGBT campaign moved to the local level. In March 2019 the county (*powiat*) of Świdnik in the southeastern part of Poland declared itself the first "LGBT-free" zone in the country. The councilmen signed a declaration stating that the local authorities aim to protect children and families from "homosexual propaganda" and moral degeneration. In this non-binding resolution, the local politicians pledged to refrain from taking any action to encourage "tolerance of LGBT people," which includes withdrawing any financial assistance from organizations aiming to promote non-discrimination and equality. Soon, other local governments followed suit, with the support of the ruling party representatives and Catholic priests.

A group of activists has put together *The Atlas of Hate* (Gawron et al. 2020; see also Ciobanu 2020a), which lists the places where similar declarations have been signed. They show that as of March 2020 over 80 Polish local and regional authorities, including four voivodships, have declared the commitment to be free from "LGBT-ideology." This means that local authorities have either adopted declarations similar to the one signed in Świdnik, or have signed the Charter of the Rights of the Family aggressively promoted the Ordo Iuris Institute. Both the declarations and the Charter are efforts to control local governments, preventing them from issuing any type of anti-discriminatory resolutions or measures that would help combat homophobia and discrimination against minorities.

The story of *The Atlas of Hate* is instructive as in illustration of the ultraconservatives' evolving strategies. Since the 2016 proposal to ban abortion in Poland, the Ordo Iuris Institute has become one of the key organizations engaged in the Polish campaign against "LGBT ideology" (Mierzyńska 2020b; Suchanow 2020; Wielka Koalicja 2020). Its main activities included producing core arguments used by local authorities, writing law proposals, such as the Charter, and harassing progressive NGOs and activists on the local level. After *The Atlas of Hate* hit the headlines, Ordo Iuris declared it would help the municipalities listed therein to sue the authors for defamation, on the grounds that the Charter does not discriminate against the LGBT community. In an open letter published on the Institute's website it is claimed that the Charter simply "aims to promote the constitutional principles of protection of the family marriage, parenthood and motherhood" and protect children "against demoralization." Hence, they interpret listing the municipalities which signed the Charter in *The Atlas of Hate* as misinformation and manipulation. Simultaneously, the Polish Commissioner for Human Rights challenged the declarations signed by local governments in Administrative Courts. In December 2019 the European Parliament passed a resolution strongly condemning both the

Polish zones and cases of homophobic violence in other countries, calling for a revoking of all resolutions attacking sexual minorities (European Parliament 2019). The outcomes of these legal proceedings are yet to be seen, but it is clear that the ultraconservative organizations and the Catholic Church aim to continue the campaign against "LGBT ideology" by means of strategic litigation and mobilization of local communities.

The entire sequence of events is neither spontaneous nor accidental. It is best understood as part of the ongoing electoral campaigns preceding the October 2019 parliamentary and 2020 presidential elections. The aim of the populist right is to discredit the opposition party, Civic Platform, as well as its allies and supporters, by branding them with the stigma of homosexuality. A broader aim is to re-direct the public debate: to focus it on the alleged outrages of the LGBT community, while deflecting attention from Kaczyński's successes in dismantling liberal democracy, several recent scandals featuring Law and Justice politicians, and the recently revealed information about the enormous scale of pedophilia in Polish Catholic Church. The 2019 report on cover-ups of the crimes against children by the clergy released by the "Do Not Be Afraid" Foundation (*Fundacja Nie Lękajcie Się*) and the simultaneous release of the documentary *Tell No One* by the Sekielski brothers, watched on YouTube by over 20 million viewers, exposed the staggering level not just of abuse but also of the complicity of the highest figures in the Polish church (Flis 2019).

While the primary target is now the gay community, anti-gender campaigners are continuing their efforts to influence public education and curtail women's reproductive rights. In autumn 2019, ultraconservative organizations submitted to the Polish parliament a law proposal that included an effective ban on comprehensive sex education and anti-discriminatory education in schools (at the time of writing, the proposal had been sent for consideration to a parliamentary committee). In October the same year, a new anti-choice campaign was inaugurated in relation to the release of the American anti-abortion propaganda film *Unplanned*. Polish President Andrzej Duda publicly endorsed the film via social media, claiming that "watching it is a life-changing experience," and teachers were encouraged by Church officials and anti-choice organizations to take pupils to cinemas and discuss the "horrors of abortion" in class. Ultraconservative organizations have also continued to harass academics, artists and progressive organizations. The Ordo Iuris Institute made an official complaint to the prosecutor's office regarding artworks that allegedly "offend religious feelings" and sent requests to a number of progressive NGOs demanding access to all documentation regarding publicly funded projects.

The events in Poland share a common pattern with concurrent developments in other countries: the gender-focused campaigns of AfD in Germany, vicious attacks against feminists by Vox in Spain, the Italian party Lega's explicit support of anti-gender initiatives or the efforts of the Sweden Democrats to discredit gender studies and change abortion legislation. What

we see happening in each of these cases is an opportunistic synergy between anti-genderism and right-wing populism. Our claim is not that they constitute two sides of the same coin, or that they are identical in terms of political genealogies, key actors or strategies. We do argue, however, that more than similarity is at stake. The connection between the two phenomena is powerful and complex. Political actors on the populist right engage in close cooperation with religious organizations and take up the anti-gender narrative and arguments, but only to the extent that these moves are expedient for their political agenda, saturating the anti-gender discourse with nativist and anti-Islam themes. For anti-gender organizations, on the other hand, the rise of right-wing populism presents an opening in the political opportunity structure. Hence, they are eager to collaborate, even though they do not always trust the ideological purity of their allies, and such cooperation does not guarantee the success of specific campaigns.

Political (ab)uses of gender: who is afraid of "gender ideology"?

The anti-gender campaign in Poland provides a vivid example of how an ultraconservative agenda can facilitate the electoral victory of right-wing populist parties, and how it can be used for the continuous mobilization of specific groups, especially parents, young men and older, deeply religious voters. Given the focus on the welfare of children, it is no surprise that the proponents of anti-gender rhetoric have been successful in mobilizing parents. Father Oko stressed in an interview that:

> Nobody has a right to encroach into the sanctuary of the family wearing boots and with a bludgeon. Therefore, we must take part in marches and other forms of protest, write and send letters to the Minister of Education and other members of the government, publicize scandals in the media and look for private help, and we must not be afraid of a judicial fight. We must also closely monitor what is happening at school, we must look carefully at its lessons. The headmaster has no right to do anything in this sphere without parents' agreement.
>
> (Cichobłazińska 2013, our translation)

The seemingly politically neutral agenda of "saving the children" broadens popular appeal and ensures the support of existing parents' groups, previously engaged in other issues such as educational reform or father's rights (Korolczuk and Hryciuk 2016). Thus, it is not a coincidence that two key parents' organizations involved in fighting "gender ideology" in Poland have been the Mother and Father Foundation (*Fundacja Mamy i Taty*) and the "Ombudsman for Parents' Rights" Foundation (*Fundacja Rzecznik Praw Rodziców*). This trend is transnational: in many countries, including France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine, conservative parents' rights organizations are key actors of the anti-gender campaigns (Fábián and Korolczuk 2017;

Höjdestrand 2017; Mayer and Sauer 2017; Paternotte and Kuhar 2017b; Strelnyk 2017). While the motif of a child in danger has often been noted in analyses of the anti-gender mobilizations, it is rarely acknowledged that the movement has given voice to the real challenges and anxieties that many parents face in neoliberal societies (see Chapters 2 and 5).

Research on fathers' rights movements shows how activism against real and perceived injustices experienced in custody cases turns into ideologically motivated activism for the restoration of patriarchal masculinity. These movements routinely critique women's emancipation, stressing the need for solidarity among men and for men to take back "their rightful place" in society (Hryciuk and Korolczuk 2017: 128). This message attracts some divorced fathers, but also makes fathers' rights groups a natural ally of the anti-gender movement – examples range from the Polish organization Brave Dad (*Dzielny Tata*), opposing the Istanbul Convention, to Italian senator Simone Pillon from the Lega party, proposing a new divorce law that would enforce joint custody over children and liquidate child support. An important theme of these mobilizations is that women lie about domestic violence and that the state vilifies men in court proceedings. Hence, they welcome initiatives that aim to limit state intervention and restore "paternal" authority in the family.

The anti-gender discourse is employed to mobilize voters who are anxious about cultural changes and socio-economic marginalization. The main socio-demographic groups that have supported the far-right, openly neofascist actors, as well as the populist parties in Poland in the 2019 parliamentary elections are young men and less affluent older religious voters living outside of big cities (Lipiński 2019). According to recent studies, these two groups have also been the most susceptible recipients of the anti-gender discourse. A 2019 opinion poll published by OKO.Press showed that when asked about the biggest threats for Poland in the 21st century, the majority of young men and older people declared that their biggest fear is the threat of the "gender ideology and LGBT movement" (Pacewicz and Jurszto 2019). Women, especially those of younger age, were far more likely to fear climate change, Polexit, or the rise of nationalist movements in the country, which confirms earlier studies demonstrating that gender does make a difference, both in terms of political choices and the likelihood of supporting a far-right agenda (e.g. Spierings and Zaslove 2015, 2017). This does not mean that all women support a progressive agenda or that women are somehow immune to homophobic propaganda. In fact, some of the best-known public intellectuals supporting the anti-gender movement and its national leaders are women. Rather, such data show that right-wing populist and far-right parties adopt anti-gender rhetoric strategically in order to exploit the anxieties and hopes of groups that are experiencing relative deprivation and precarity, along with those who fear socio-cultural change and losing their power and status (cf. Norris and Inglehart 2019). The anti-gender message appeals not only to "angry men" but also many women, who embrace the ideology of "new maternalism," find themselves drawn to the prospect of

being defended by the right against Muslim men or are simply tired of juggling their many roles and react with a conservative turn to the unfulfilled promises of emancipation (Dietze 2020; Gutshe 2018; Gwiazda 2020; Sauer 2020).

While religious affiliation appears to be an important factor strengthening people's tendency to adopt anti-gender views, the type of religiosity may play a key role in this process. As shown by a group of scholars who studied attitudes of Catholics in Poland, some people tend to perceive "gender ideology" as a secret plot by powerful others aiming to hurt the Catholic Church, family and the nation. "Such convictions function similarly to conspiracy beliefs, which can be defined as beliefs in secret plots by powerful and malevolent groups" (Marchlewska et al. 2019: 2; see also Cichocka et al. 2015). In a nationally representative sample, around 30% of respondents agreed with the claim that "gender studies are involved in a conspiracy." Interestingly, this study shows that such convictions were associated primarily not with demographics, such as age or gender, but with a specific form of religious identity, namely religious narcissism, which describes a defensive identification with one's religious group. Both studies show that "Catholic collective narcissism emerged as a robust predictor of adopting gender conspiracy beliefs" (Marchlewska et al. 2019: 12).

Anti-gender campaigns affect people's views, albeit not always in the ways anticipated by the ultraconservative actors. As a result of the struggle over abortion, attitudes toward this issue became more liberal: in 2016 only 37% of respondents believed that the current law should be liberalized, but in 2018 already 46% declared that abortion should be available "on demand"; when asked "what if your friend needed an abortion," 60% of women and 50% of men were of the opinion that it should be available (Chrzczonowicz 2018). At the same time, homophobia seems to be still firmly entrenched in Polish society. A 2019 report by CBOS shows that 41% of Poles declare hostility toward gays and lesbians, while only 25% declare acceptance. Comparisons of opinion polls from over a longer period of time suggest that this is a negative change in an otherwise stable trend toward increased tolerance observed in recent decades. Whereas between 2007 and 2017 the acceptance rate rose twofold, in the next two years it dropped by 2% in response to the aggressive anti-LGBT rhetoric promulgated by the public media dominated by the Law and Justice party, right-wing groups and the Church (Pacewicz 2019).

However, even if society's views regarding issues such as abortion are becoming more liberal, state discourse and policies are increasingly influenced by the anti-gender agenda. Anti-gender discourse has become increasingly normalized as part of public debate. During the last couple of years we can observe a process of institutionalization of the anti-gender movement within state structures. As of January 2020, the Ordo Iuris Institute has two representatives on the Polish Supreme Court. One of them is Aleksander Stępkowski, Ordo Iuris's co-founder and first President, listed

in Datta's report as involved in Agenda Europe meetings. The organization's associates are also employed or appointed as experts in a number of ministries and parliamentary commissions (Mierzyńska 2020a). With time, the state itself becomes saturated with ultraconservative activists and influences.

Femonationalism vs good old nationalism? Poland in comparative perspective

Polish anti-gender mobilization is part of a boarder transnational trend. Depending on the context, the triggers and core themes of anti-gender campaigns vary. In Russia, claims that homosexuals and promoters of gender equality threaten local traditional values were employed to strengthen popular support for Putin's regime (Bluhm and Varga 2018; Moss 2017); in France, mass mobilization focused on the opposition to marriage equality, whereas in Italy the spotlight was on issues such as sex education, reproductive rights and family law, taken up by the Lega and its charismatic leader Matteo Salvini (Garbagnoli 2017; Lavizarri and Prearo 2019). In the U.S., Donald Trump's open misogyny did not prevent his victory, nor did voters seem mobilized by the possibility of electing the country's first female president (in fact, 53% of white American women voted for Trump), while his attacks on transgender rights helped mobilize the religious right during his first term in office (Norris and Inglehart 2019; Stern 2019). The issue of gendered domestic violence appears to have played a key role in forming political cleavages in Spain, where in the end of 2018 a far-right party named Vox strode into mainstream politics, gaining 12 seats in Spain's most populous region, Andalusia, with an extreme anti-immigration and anti-feminist agenda (Alonso and Lombardo 2018; Rivera 2019). These examples illustrate the strong connection between the rise of anti-genderism and right-wing populism, but the nature of synergy between the two – especially the way nationalism interacts with views on gender – is context-specific.

Poland may appear peculiar or even exceptional to both insiders and outsiders in regard to matters of gender equality and LGBT rights. This is not only a matter of the continuing political and cultural power of the Catholic Church but also of the politicization of gender and sexuality in Poland during the pre-accession period. Since the mid-1990s, governments as well as the media have repeatedly presented gender conservatism as key to Poland's uniqueness in Europe, a matter of national pride and national sovereignty in the process of EU accession (Graff 2009, 2014). Poland's anti-gender campaign can be thus interpreted as a struggle to redefine Poland's relationship to the EU in nationalistic terms. Whereas the groups identified as most dangerous are Polish feminists, LGBT organizations, sex educators, state administrators, the roots of the evil are identified as being "global" and "totalitarian," with anti-gender actors often targeting specific legal changes proposed and promoted by international institutions and organizations such as the EU.

Right-wing opposition to EU policies on gender equality and LGBT rights already played an important role in the anti-European propaganda and mobilization in the early 2000s (Graff 2009, 2010). Eurosceptics often referred to the European "homolobby" and "pro-abortion lobby" as ultimate threats to the Polish national identity. Those campaigns were not fully successful, as the level of support for EU integration in Poland was the highest among the new member states and remains so today: in 2019 public support for EU membership reached a record level of 91% (GUS 2019). However, mass support for modernization brought by EU funding does not necessarily translate to acceptance of cultural and social transformation associated with sexual democracy. Polish Eurosceptics have capitalized on this gap by arguing that Poland has the right to benefit from European integration economically, but must retain its cultural integrity as a Catholic country. Arguably, the anti-gender mobilization marks a new phase of these efforts: the concept of "gender ideology" explicitly links homosexuality, abortion and the alleged threat of arbitrary sex change with the West and the liberal elites within the EU.

Gender and sexuality have long been instrumentalized by nationalism (Yuval Davis 1997; Einhorn 2006), and the new populist right is no exception in this regard. As Ruth Wodak points out, "[v]alues related to traditional patriarchy are part and parcel of the exclusionary and nativist, nationalistic belief systems which most right-wing populist parties endorse. However, they manifest themselves in different images, symbols and domains" (2015: 174). Around 2015 the anti-gender rhetoric in many countries was partly displaced by and partly merged with panic over Europe's refugee crisis. People in Germany, France and the Netherlands were warned about the threat of "our women" being raped by racialized hypermasculine others, a theme that was increasingly present in the media, especially following the events in Cologne. This discourse relies on the juxtaposition of the gender progressive West and barbaric, sexist traditionalist Muslim cultures (Dietze 2019, 2020; Fassin 2016; Farris 2017). Racialized immigrant women are routinely positioned as victims in need of rescue from patriarchal norms (and from their men, who are stigmatized as oppressors).

Sara R. Farris has dubbed this form of thinking and policymaking "femonationalism" (2017), characteristic of Western countries where right-wing groups readily co-opt some elements of the feminist discourse for use in anti-Islam and xenophobic campaigns. Anti-immigrant sentiments are fueled by images of refugees as virile young men, stigmatized as violent and sexist because of their isolation from their countries or origin. Their sexual appetites are portrayed as insatiable and out of control, hence they pose a danger to white Western women. Within this discourse, both the burqa-wearing woman and the oversexed Muslim man function as symbols of the barbaric Orient. A vivid example of this dynamic is the moral panic in the German media in the aftermath of New Year's eve events in Cologne in 2016, when a number of sexual assaults were reported to the police (Dietze

2019). As shown by Gabriele Dietze, the right was remarkably successful in reviving ethno-sexist imagery associating the racial other – the "Arab men" – with sexual violence (2019: 48).

Vis-à-vis foreign racialized "barbarians," right-wing populist and far-right parties position themselves as defenders of gender equality and liberal democracy, which helps to downplay the ways in which these actors endanger democratic principles such as political pluralism, protection of minorities and individual freedom. According to Akkerman, "[the] Janus quality of the parties, showing different faces in different policy domains, suggests that their commitment to liberalism is merely instrumental to an anti-Islam agenda" (2015: 56). In Western Europe gender is often used strategically by right-wing populist actors, who aim to intervene in the field of immigration and integration policies, whereas in countries such as Poland right-wing populists readily subscribe to widespread patriarchal and socially conservative views on gender and sexual equality. The trope of the racialized rapist has also been employed in Poland around 2015 and 2016, but in the absence of actual refugees and minority groups, emphasis was placed on European elites as accomplices in the "rape of Europe."

What are the implications of these differences for anti-gender campaigns? Arguably, both tactics are, in fact, examples of the instrumentalization of gender by right-wing populism. While Eastern Europe is an ideal site for building strong alliances between anti-gender actors and right-wing populists, in countries such as Spain, Germany or France, both types of actors need to carefully calibrate their discourse. For instance, in Poland and Croatia right-wing populists use openly homophobic language, but Germany's AfD employs a careful distinction between homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle and genderism as a dangerous ideology (Wielowiejski 2020; Davidson-Smich 2020). In Sweden, where gender equality and sexual democracy are promoted as a part of the national identity, anti-gender mobilization focuses mostly on undermining the legitimacy of gender studies. The right-wing Sweden Democrats party aims to present itself as women-friendly (Ekman and Engström 2017; Sager and Mulinari 2018), but before the 2018 elections its spokesperson Robert Stenkvist went on record claiming that politicians should tighten control over academia, because some areas of research, such as gender studies, are overtly politicized and unscientific (Gunnarsson Payne 2019). Perhaps the difference is best understood as resulting from political influence or lack thereof. While Sweden Democrats' proposals to limit access to abortion in Sweden appeared bizarre and easily dismissible at the time, it is worth considering what the party's approach would be if it were to form a government in the future. Given that in the beginning of 2020, with 25% popular support, SD was the most popular party in Sweden, such scenario cannot be ruled out.

The femonationalistic tropes employed in Germany or Sweden were present in right-wing discourse also in Poland, but the underlying theme of sexual democracy as a core aspect of Europe's culture was lacking. Similarly

to Western contexts, the 2014–2015 Polish campaign against "genderism" was partly displaced by and partly merged with panic over Europe's refugee crisis. Arguably, it was the ability to combine the two themes that paved the way to the Law and Justice party electoral victory in 2015. However, the logic of this combination is significantly different from the nationalist grammar of sexual democracy vs macho-Islam. In Poland, "genderists" along with refugees (now referred to as "invaders" and "terrorists") were demonized as enemies of the nation, both groups partaking in a conspiracy engineered by Brussels elites aimed against Polish culture and sovereignty. Moral panic around gender combined seamlessly with "enemies at the gates" rhetoric. "Gender ideology" was presented as a plot to soften Polish men and make them unable to defend the country. Looming in the background was the vision of a demographic catastrophe and what nationalists around the globe call "the great replacement": with Polish men going "soft" and Polish women becoming feminists, Poland would soon be depopulated. The ethnically Polish population would then be replaced by hordes of racialized "barbarians." Nowhere was this narrative presented more vividly than in the image of a white woman dressed in an EU flag, screaming and being groped by a number of brown-skinned male hands, which was published in the summer of 2016 on the cover of the right-wing Polish weekly *Sieci*. The image was accompanied by the following headline "Islamic rape of Europe: what are the media and Brussels' elites hiding from EU citizens?". The opening of Europe's borders to refugees was here portrayed as a plot engineered by EU elites against ordinary people, and especially against women. Such a juxtaposition between cynical elites and vulnerable, manipulated citizens is, of course, the essence of populist logic. This openly racist image evokes the tradition of fascist propaganda, e.g. it bears striking resemblance to the American mythology of black rapists pursuing white virgins as depicted in W.D. Griffith's *Birth of the Nation* (1915) or Italian posters of 1943 presenting young white women being accosted by Black African and Jewish rapists.

In contrast to femonationalistic discourse, which strategically assumes that the West is uniformly gender progressive, attachment to equality is interpreted in Poland as a sinister plot of the West against the East. Feminism and LGBT rights are viewed as a source of Western Europe's vulnerability, which blinds it to the dangers of mass migration. Within the radical version of this narrative, we find a classic conspiracy theory, in which the ultimate goal of the liberal Left, including feminists, is the extermination of white populations everywhere (white genocide). The position of countries such as Poland in this discourse is both precarious and ambivalent: gender conservative Eastern Europe is engaged in a heroic struggle against both Western demoralization and Muslim barbarism; it is both victim and potential savior of the West. "Genderists" – along with refugees whose "invasion" they facilitate and welcome – are demonized as part of an international conspiracy threatening Poland's borders, national culture and the safety of Polish

women and children. Thus, in the fall of 2015, Kaczyński's Law and Justice party won the elections as a force offering safety against twin foreign-bred dangers: genderists and refugees.

Conclusions

In the eyes of the Polish Catholic clergy and ultraconservative activists, gender studies are equivalent to totalitarian ideologies such as Stalinism and Nazism, atheists become mass murderers and sex education can be equated with "organized gang rape on the child's soul" (*zorganizowany, zbiorowy gwałt na duszy dziecka*) (Oko 2014). The sense of the region's uniqueness and Poland's special importance as a Catholic country permeates the local version of anti-gender rhetoric, endowing it with a peculiar tone of urgency and drama.

It is clear that the Polish battles against "gender ideology" have had significant political consequences. They have served as a springboard for the political careers of previously lesser-known right-wing politicians and opened up opportunities for ultraconservatives to enter positions of power and influence, to become a new elite. However, it is more than individual careers that is at stake. The discourse of besieged dignity, wounded pride, moral panic and righteous anger has strengthened the polarization of the country's public debate and political scene, paving the way for the right-wing populist regime and helping to consolidate its rule. The cooperation between ultraconservative and political actors has evolved over time, following the logic of *opportunistic synergy*: right-wing populists employ key themes and arguments coined by the anti-gender movement, while the ultraconservative worldview becomes increasingly normalized in public debates, and the movement becomes institutionalized within state structures. Other scholars have conceptualized this phenomenon as a process of state-sponsored elite change. It is along these lines that Stanley Bill (2020) examines the collaboration between the Law and Justice Party and The Polish League against Defamation (*Reduta Dobrego Imienia–Polska Liga Przeciw Zniesławieniom*) – a far-right organization whose mission is to improve the image of Poland abroad.

> In these interactions […] PiS has sought to achieve several mutually reinforcing aims. First, the party has utilized the discourse and policy agenda of the League and other groups in its own political communication and legislative program […]. It has then rewarded the organization and its leader with funding, positions, and policy influence. Finally, the organization and its leader have used these benefits and influence for the direct promotion of PiS's policies and positions.
>
> (2020: 13)

The strategy of the ruling right-wing coalition is the same vis-à-vis Ordo Iuris and other anti-gender actors: PiS aims to "strengthen its own cultural

and political narratives by advancing the ideology and interests of friendly civil society elites" (Bill 2020: 13). In fact, this process can be interpreted as the constructing of new elites by giving previously marginal actors voice, influence and significant recourses.

Such synergy has also been observed in other countries, as exemplified by the Lega party's engagement in the organization of the World Congress of Families in Verona in 2019 (see Chapter 2). However, the ways in which gender is employed by right-wing populists in Western and Eastern Europe differ. In the West, right-wing parties tend to adopt the femonationalistic frame, which juxtaposes gender-equal, tolerant, enlightened Western societies to patriarchal, intolerant and deeply religious migrants from Islamic countries, even if they often do not support gender equality in practice (Dietze 2019, 2020; Meret and Siim 2013; Mulinari 2016). Marine Le Pen's 2016 call for a referendum on migration, which followed the New Year's Eve incidents in Cologne, is a case in point (Le Pen 2016). In Poland, gender equality is seen as part of a broader plan to weaken the nation, in which Muslim refugees are about to finish what Western liberals and feminists have started: the uprooting of local religious and cultural traditions and the creation of a multicultural society, which has lost its moral compass and can be easily manipulated by the global elites. An important component of this imaginary, as we elaborate further in Chapter 4, is the employment of an anti-colonial frame, whereby "genderism" is presented as a sinister global force, a new form of colonial power exercised by the EU, UN and WHO against the worlds' poor. Eastern Europe is accorded a special place in this geography of gender as a part of the world that was left untouched by the sexual revolution and proved resistant to Marxism. The idea is that the East will save the West from its own decadence.

Notes

1 The network of anti-gender actors attracted many anti-choice groups, which emerged already in the 1990s and early 2000s, such as the Association of Large Families (*Stowarzyszenie Rodzin Wielodzietnych*), the Center for Supporting Initiatives for Life and the Family (*Centrum Wspierania Inicjatyw dla Życia i Rodziny*), the Polish Federation of Pro-life Movements (*Polska Federacja Ruchów Obrony Życia*) and the Civic Coalition for the Family (*Koalicja Obywatelska Dla Rodziny*).
2 The ratification process was finalized in March 2015.
3 Struggles over the Istanbul Convention have continued ever since it was signed and the process of ratification by individual states began in May 2011. The Convention is the most comprehensive international policy instrument focusing on the problem of gendered violence and the ways in which violence is linked to discrimination. All members of the EU have signed the document, but eight member states have not ratified it, including Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania and Slovakia.

4 Gender as "Ebola from Brussels"

The uses and abuses of the anti-colonial frame

As we have shown in our analysis of the Polish case, the use of anti-gender discourse by the populist right is largely opportunistic and strategic – a medium or tool for mobilizing collective emotions such as fear, nostalgia and resentment. In this chapter we demonstrate that anti-genderism is well suited for this purpose, in part because it is structurally a populist discourse. It establishes and exploits a powerful binary: an opposition between a corrupt global elite and innocent local populations. The people are imagined as local Christians, allegedly marginalized or even persecuted by the forces of secularism and liberalism. This conceptualization is not inherently nationalistic, but it easily accommodates to local nationalistic frames and sentiments. The urgency of the anti-gender call to action in defense of the traditional family and faith is in tune with the radical-right's tendency to justify violence as self-defense. As Dietze and Roth (2020a) have argued, the turn to gender is a way to sanitize extreme right-wing discourse, making it seem more palatable for the mainstream audience.

This chapter deals with the phenomenon that can be classified as a discursive appropriation: the conservative version of anti-colonial rhetoric, prominent especially in Eastern Europe and the Global South. This discourse equates gender egalitarianism with colonization, and often compares it with 20th century totalitarianisms and global terrorism, or even the deadly Ebola virus. An important aspect of this rhetoric is the link it draws between cultural threats and economic deprivation. Whereas historically conservative movements tended to either ignore economics or support free-market capitalism (especially in the U.S., see Brown 2006, 2019; Cooper 2017), the post-2008 right-wing populist rhetoric in Europe has included a critique of global elites as both cultural colonizers and economic exploiters. Within this narrative, feminism is just a cover-up for rampant individualism and economic exploitation.

This shift is consistent with the change in the ways in which right-wing populist parties in Europe situate themselves vis-à-vis market capitalism. In recent decades many right-wing parties in Europe have refashioned themselves into protectors of the welfare state, abandoning their prior commitment to market liberalism (Eger and Valdez 2015; Mudde 2002).

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As we discuss in more detail in Chapter 5, Poland's Law and Justice and Hungary's Fidesz have both introduced generous "pro-family" programs, combining social policy measures aimed at parents with heightened moral panic around homosexuality and "gender ideology" as a threat to children. Today's ultraconservatives take part in this process as experts and advisers, striving to position themselves as promoters of welfare provisions for families and children, as champions of marginalized people. This makes their discourse all the more conducive to being employed by right-wing populists.

Anti-genderism is a flexible but nonetheless coherent ideological construction that is consciously used by right-wing populists worldwide. This chapter examines its basic tenets, shedding light on how this ideological construct has contributed to the contemporary transnational resurgence of right-wing populism. While selectively borrowing from liberal-left and feminist discourses, including critiques of colonialism and neoliberalism, ultraconservative actors aim to construct a new universalism, which replaces individual rights with family rights and positions religious conservatives as an embattled minority. Just like populist leaders, the movement's key ideologues are self-proclaimed defenders of freedom and democracy, which in their view have been hijacked by liberals and leftists. Anti-gender activists claim to represent the "true" civil society, which aims to replace bureaucratized and alienated elites with their foreign-funded non-governmental organizations and supranational institutions. They mobilize members of existing national and local groups, churches and political parties, and they are increasingly networking on the global level through international anti-choice coalitions.

The arguments promulgated by anti-gender ideologues must be understood as part of a global social conservative "ideoscape" (Appadurai 1996), in which local actors draw heavily on each other's agendas while accommodating their claims and strategies to specific sociopolitical situations. While Kováts and Põim (2015) demonstrate that resistance to gender has become a "symbolic glue" linking the programs and discourses of far-right and conservative parties in Europe, we show that it is the anti-colonial frame that provides ideological coherence to the coalition of religious and political players worldwide.

Social movement scholars identify frames as social schemata of interpretation, which "render events or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organize experience and guide action" (Benford and Snow 2000: 614). Framing theory highlights "the symbolic and meaning work done by movement activists as they articulate grievances, generate consensus … and present rationalities for their actions and proposed solutions to adherents, bystanders, and antagonists" (Williams 2008: 93). Anti-genderists deploy symbols and identities which are key to postcolonial theory, but they do not subscribe to this theoretical strand; in fact, some may not be aware of its existence. However, the wide resonance of the anti-colonial discourse is an important ingredient of today's populist moment. In the context of a broader cultural tendency to valorize "victimhood" (Campbell and Manning 2018;

Sikora 2019), calling oneself a victim of colonization is a powerful way to stake one's claims.

This chapter proposes a new way of theorizing anti-gender campaigns, one that links different cases of mobilization with anti-genderism as an ideological construct. We identify the anti-colonial frame as anti-genderism's key discursive structure, and show that the appropriation of this frame by right-wing forces has serious consequences, both for the right and for the left.

Defenders of the common people: "gender" as colonial imposition

In January 2015 on his way from Manila, Philippines, Pope Francis warned the faithful against "gender ideology" – a dangerous imposition from wealthy Western countries upon developing nations. According to the Pope, foreign aid and education are routinely tied to acceptance of gender equality policies; "this is ideological colonization," he claimed, adding that strong families can overcome this trend (Holdren and Gagliarducci 2015). These ideas have been repeated many times since, e.g. in Naples 2015 and in Kraków 2016, where the Pope stated:

> In Europe, America, Latin America, Africa, and in some countries of Asia, there are genuine forms of ideological colonization taking place. And one of these – I will call it clearly by its name – is [the ideology of] "gender." Today children – children! – are taught in school that everyone can choose his or her sex.
>
> (Quinlan 2016: 1)

Such claims are not entirely new – anti-colonial rhetoric has long been used as a strategy for both resisting and promoting gender equality, e.g. in debates about feminism and women's rights in non-Western countries (e.g. Hoodfar 1997; Narayan 1997). The charge of colonialism has also figured prominently in efforts to delegitimize conservative interventions by the U.S. Christian Right in Malawi, Uganda and Nigeria (e.g. Kaoma 2012). What is remarkable about the present scenario, however, is the extent to which the anti-colonial frame as used by the right is no longer about colonialism. It has evolved into a powerful metaphor for the arrogance of Western liberal elites; a discursive device divorced from actual colonial history, which is why it has worked so well in countries such as Poland.

The following three quotes from plenary speakers at the 2019 World Congress of Families aptly illustrate the movement's self-identity as a defender of ordinary people and the family against the individualistic global order imposed by liberal elites, referred to as a sinister "they":

> They support fragmented individualist "nomadic man", [as] only economic actor who produces and consumes. We support a different vision

> of a man, not consumer but embedded in family. […] We also fight for labor rights and the right to not work on Sundays […] It is family that protects the weakest and old people.
>
> (Nicolas Bay, MEP from Front National)

> They know that if the family is strong, they will be defeated. Multinational global forces will be defeated. Those who want to give our children porn magazines will be stopped.
>
> (Simone Pillon, Italian Senator)

> This cultural war is a global war. They control the mainstream media, the parties, they run NGOs funded by Soros, the enemies of the family have multiple faces.
>
> (Ignatio Arsuaga, CitizenGo)[1]

What we see here is three white, middle-aged, wealthy and influential men presenting themselves as champions of the world's poor. Anti-genderists enter this role with astonishing consistency and self-assurance. They position themselves as challengers of the existing elites (the vaguely defined "they"), protectors of the world's colonized peoples, the disenfranchised and economically disadvantaged, whose livelihoods as well as authentic cultures and traditional value systems are threatened by globalization. An unexamined assumption underlying the anti-gender worldview is not only that local and authentic cultural identity is always "familial," that is socially conservative and heteronormative, but also that gender conservatism constitutes this sovereign identity's essential core. Anti-genderists fashion themselves as defenders of an oppressed, silent majority, as in a 2015 in-flight interview, where Pope Francis stressed that "colonizing empires […] seek to make peoples forget their own identity and make them (all) equal" (Pope Francis 2015). This populist strategy allows anti-gender actor to justify attacks on enemies or even violence by claiming the need for self-defense against all-powerful forces. As Ruth Wodak elaborates: "the discursive strategies of 'victim-perpetrator reversal', 'scapegoating' and the 'construction of conspiracy theories' therefore belong to the necessary 'toolkit' of right-wing populist rhetoric" (2015: 4).

The alleged colonizers include what anti-genderists view as power elites: feminists, left-wing and liberal politicians, transnational NGOs and international bodies. The enemy is by definition powerful, even when specific targets of attacks are members of culturally and socially marginalized groups such as the LGBT community, hence, phrases such as "LGBT ideology" or "homolobby" are employed. The source of demoralization is "the West," while many representatives of anti-gender movements also stress the destructive power of global markets. In the words of Kuby:

> This global sexual revolution is now being carried out by power elites. These include international organizations like the United Nations and

> the European Union, with their web of inscrutable sub-organizations; global corporations like Amazon, Google, and Microsoft; the big foundations like Rockefeller and Guggenheim; extremely rich individuals like Bill and Melinda Gates, Ted Turner, George Soros, and Warren Buffett; and non-governmental organizations like the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the International Lesbian and Gay Association. […] And they all share one interest: to reduce population growth on this planet.
>
> (Fantini 2013)

The list may appear somewhat broad and random, but it has an internal logic: the elites are always global, the people are always local. The key sites of global power are said to be transnational institutions: the UN, UNICEF, UNAIDS, the World Health Organization and the World Bank, along with international foundations and associations, including the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (e.g. Nykiel 2014: 45).

Anti-genderists are also deeply critical of existing civil-society structures, especially in the post-socialist region and in so-called developing countries, where many NGOs were founded by Western donors in the 1990s (Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017). They claim that gender equality policies are imposed by transnational elite organizations, often backing these charges with arguments concerning funding; in recent years George Soros has become the main villain in this discourse. This framing gains considerable traction at the grassroots level. In October 2011 some 80 Russian parental organizations, most of them local groups, issued an open letter (the so-called Saint Petersburg Resolution), which states: "We are seriously concerned about the activities of some relatively small groups proclaiming their ideals in the name of the entire civil society, while in reality their objectives contradict the authentic interests of sovereign peoples" (Hojdestrand 2017: 30). The statement refers to a draft recommendation by the Council of Europe on the rights and legal status of children and parental responsibilities, portraying it as an assault on families, local democracy and Russia's sovereignty.

Such statements reflect the populist tendency to portray political enemies as representing foreign self-elected elites, rather than the popular will. Interestingly, however, this charge can be reversed: while researching anti-gender organizations, one is struck their wide transnational connections and lack of financial transparency (Datta 2018; Rivera 2018; Suchanow 2018, 2020). While these organizations aim to appear as initiatives funded by common people, and claim to be uncorrupted either by state or transnational funding, many of them – as in the case of Poland's Ordo Iuris Institute – carefully avoid presenting detailed financial documentation, reporting their sources of funding. For example, in the 2019 financial statement published on their website, Ordo Iuris acknowledges receiving over 6 million PLN (approx. 1.3 million EUR) in donations, but fails to specify the donors.

In contrast to "foreign global elites," the anti-gender movement presents itself as local, authentic civil society. For example, conservative parental movements

in Russia and Poland strive to re-configure the very notion of civil society along moral and religious coordinates, with patriotism, "traditional" religiosity, and the institution of heterosexual marriage as core values (Höjdestrand 2017; Korolczuk 2017). This conservative, illiberal civil society legitimizes itself by references to the will of the people, as expressed in demonstrations and petitions, with "authentic" values opposed to dangerous abstractions promulgated by the corrupt elites (Duda 2016: 21). The movement's attitude toward democracy is, however, deeply ambiguous. Anti-genderists stress their reverence for democratic methods such as mass mobilization, citizens' initiatives or referenda, but they oppose the very idea of democratic deliberation over the "natural order of things": traditional gender roles, marriage, filiation, reproduction and parental authority. In many countries, the anti-gender campaigns have focused on pushing for constitutional referenda regarding the definition of family, in effect prohibiting marriage equality in Croatia in 2013, but failing to achieve the same in Romania in 2018.

Within this framework, global efforts to promote reproductive health, family planning, gender equality and sexual rights are seen as a cover-up for a Western neo-Malthusian project. Allegedly, global elites strive to prevent population growth in the developing world by spreading homosexuality and "killing the unborn." This is viewed as a legacy of the sexual revolution and the West's self-destructive fixation on sexuality, whose sources include Freud, Marcuse and Kinsey. This message comes across with particular force when uttered by a native of Africa, such as Cardinal Robert Sarah, one of the key proponents of anti-genderism worldwide. Sarah has repeatedly warned against colonization by gender, which he compares to fundamentalist Islamism and ISIS: "To use a slogan, we find ourselves between 'gender ideology and ISIS.' Islamic massacres and libertarian demands regularly contend for the front page of the newspapers" (Catholic News Agency 2015). He has also gone on record claiming that "gender ideology" is "a deadly impulse that is being experienced in the world increasingly cut off from God through ideological colonialism" (Mena 2016). Interestingly, the same discursive construct was heard in Poland in 2019, when ultraconservative journalist Paweł Lisicki explained that, today, we have only two active forces that struggle for the soul of man in the West:

> only Islam and secular radicalism are left on the battlefield; the latter has feminist-homosexual movements as its army. Both Islam and LGBT movements aim for universal conquest of the world, aspiring to change laws, custom and education. Contrary to the popular propaganda, LGBT movements do not want tolerance. Their goal is a brutal conquest of social consciousness […] We can say that the aim of this revolution is a homeland, a state in which homosexual practices are the norm.
>
> (Kolanek 2019, our translation)

In this worldview, ultraconservative ideology constitutes a moderate and inherently peaceful middle ground between two violent extremes. The

anti-gender movement portrays itself as a safe haven from the turbulent and dangerous world, a sort of *Heimat* to use a term popular in Germany.

Genderism is portrayed as a global force, while resistance is always presented as local. Thus, the set of values that anti-genderists aim to defend and preserve includes national sovereignty and economic autonomy. The global liberal forces are said to introduce eugenic depopulation politics especially in poor, underdeveloped countries in Africa and Asia in order to strengthen their own economic and political position (e.g. Peeters 2007). Anti-genderists view family planning as stemming from corporate greed, which drives global capitalism. The UN's population policies (consistently renamed by ultraconservatives as "depopulation policies") are seen as a form of eugenics, bringing profits to the "abortion industry" and pharmaceutical companies that sell contraception and offer IVF. Sometimes, as in the case of Czech conservative groups opposing the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, the idea that the common people are being exploited by wealthy elites takes the form of a conspiracy theory, in which:

> children [are] taken away from their parents by social services [and they] do not end up with adoptive or foster parents, but function as blood and organ resources for rich people.
>
> (Svatonova 2019)

Just as in the case of right-wing populist parties, it is debatable whether the critique of globalism and neoliberalism is an authentic part of new ultraconservative ideological stance or just a rhetorical strategy of anti-genderists. What is beyond doubt is that critique of capitalism has become an integral part of this way of thinking, one that facilitates close cooperation between right-wing populist parties and ultraconservative movements.

While this narrative is not new, the anti-colonial frame has been dissociated from discussions of actual colonialism. The metaphor reveals remarkable fluidity and adaptability. Depending on the context, it may or may not involve explicit antisemitism. Anti-genderists occasionally express thinly veiled antisemitic views, e.g. when attacking George Soros as the embodiment of both global capital and a Jewish conspiracy against Christianity, or when focusing on Judith Butler, the "Jewish lesbian" credited with being genderism's main inventor. Gabriele Kuby (2015) bases her account of the roots of the sexual revolution on a book by Michael E. Jones (2005), a notorious U.S.-based anti-Semite, member of a fringe Catholic movement known as Radical Catholic Traditionalism (see Weitzman 2015). Jones is a proponent of the claim that the sexual revolution is a Jewish conspiracy (in fact, he has written an entire tract about the "Jewish revolutionary spirit"), but Kuby carefully omits references to the Jewish origins of the alleged global plot when citing him as her source. At the same time, she repeatedly accuses "genderist elites" of racism, claiming that UN population policies are aimed against the people of Africa.

Though Jews as such are almost never mentioned in attacks on "gender ideology," genderists, and especially sexual minorities, are consistently Judaized in anti-gender discourse, that is, described in a language strongly reminiscent of conspiratorial antisemitism. The link becomes most obvious when Soros and Butler are mentioned, or when the term "Cultural Marxism," notorious for its antisemitic subtext, is employed (Jamin 2019; Busbridge et al. 2020). The discursive pattern linking gender to Jews in right-wing discourse is quite complex. Its core elements were examined by Polish sociologist Adam Ostolski in a 2007 study of the "Judaization of gays" in homophobic hate speech. He compared politicized homophobia in Polish media of this period and the political antisemitism of the right-wing press of the 1930s (Ostolski 2007). Like Jews in antisemitic attacks, sexual minorities are presented as engaged in a secretive plot: they are scheming, devious and powerful. To this end, the term "homosexual lobby" is often used, and the link between homosexuality and cosmopolitanism or rootlessness is persistently made. Furthermore, LGBT activists are routinely accused of sacrilege, their very presence is said to contaminate sacred events and spaces, while the rainbow flag is seen as offensive to religious and patriotic feelings. Finally, like Jews in pre-World War II Eastern Europe, gays are blamed for provoking violent attacks by making themselves too conspicuous.

How significant is the antisemitic component of anti-gender discourse? This remains open to debate. We may dismiss it as a vestige of an earlier era (after all, gender has replaced Jews in the role of the despised Other, so why bother with what is now gone). We might also toy with the idea that antisemitism links the anti-gender movement to certain strands of the extreme right. In fact, a popular conspiracy theory linking Jews to obscenity does enjoy popularity in certain realms of the far right in the U.S. Jews, it is believed, deliberately produce and disseminate pornography as well as lobby for homosexual rights in order to undermine the traditional family – all part of their plan to destroy Western civilization (Kerl 2019, 2020). No such claims are made – at least not explicitly – by the anti-gender movement. Gender is a conspiracy, yes – but who is behind it? George Soros comes to mind, but only rarely and in very particular cultural contexts does an explicit answer to this question come to the surface. When Michael E. Jones travelled to Poland on a book tour in 2013, his reputation for antisemitic views followed him without becoming much of a liability. Articles appeared in liberal media outlets signaling his notoriety in the U.S. (e.g. Jęczmionka 2013), but this did not deter respectable Catholic institutions from hosting him as an authority on the dangers of gender. We are not claiming here that the anti-gender authors are anti-Semites in disguise, though some of them may hold antisemitic views. Nor do we suggest that anti-genderism is *really* a new version of antisemitism as some scholars have done (Chetcuti-Osorovitz and Teicher 2018). Rather, our point is to demonstrate historical continuity and structural affinity between the two discourses: they are

inextricably connected as parts of the same cultural code: anti-modernist, conspiratorial, polarizing and heavily gendered (Graff 2021).

Many scholars observe that the radical right often expresses antisemitic views in the guise of a critique of capitalism. Wodak notes that during the financial crisis of 2008, "fantasies of powerful and greedy Jewish bankers, Jewish capitalism and Jewish speculation served to trigger many stereotypes of a Jewish world conspiracy" (2018: 6). In such discourse, "big capital" oppressing the "common man" is simply a code for wealthy Jewish bankers who allegedly rule the world. Some scholars of the anti-gender movement suggest that this is also the case with anti-genderists, whose:

> seemingly anti-capitalist stance has to be understood with regards to right-wing populist articulations […] These articulations have historically been grounded in anti-Semitism and do not present a critique of capitalist structures but of specific (types of) actors. Therefore, they do not conflict with the neo-liberal belief in the free market, an anti-state agenda and a focus on (national) competitiveness.
>
> (Mayer and Sauer 2019: 27)

While we do not underestimate the role of antisemitic conspiracy theories in anti-gender thinking, we also do not believe that the movement's critique of contemporary capitalism is merely a code for antisemitism. We need to contend with the fact that, unlike earlier waves of anti-feminism, contemporary anti-gender campaigns do include a critique of certain aspects of the neoliberal order. It is thus that the movement becomes capable of addressing anxieties and grievances of people living in this system. The fact that critique of capitalism is historically grounded in antisemitism, and occasionally includes antisemitic rhetoric, does not make it any less poignant and effective. Instead, we would claim, anti-genderism is an ultraconservative language of anti-capitalist critique, wherein George Soros is not targeted as a rich Jew but as a symbol of contemporary global capitalism.

Race also plays an important role in the anti-gender imaginary. In post-socialist countries anti-gender discourse often takes on an explicitly racist form, especially in anti-refugee propaganda where genderists are seen as clearing the way for the influx of racialized others (as we have shown in Chapter 3). In the American context the charge of colonization becomes the charge of race-based eugenics. When identifying key players on the "genderist" side, Kuby points to:

> the rich and powerful of the United States, generally white Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs), who perceived the danger of "differential fertility." They feared that the low birth rate of the upper class and the high birth rate of the underclass, especially blacks in the US and poor Third World countries, would cause them to lose political and economic power.
>
> (2015: 17)

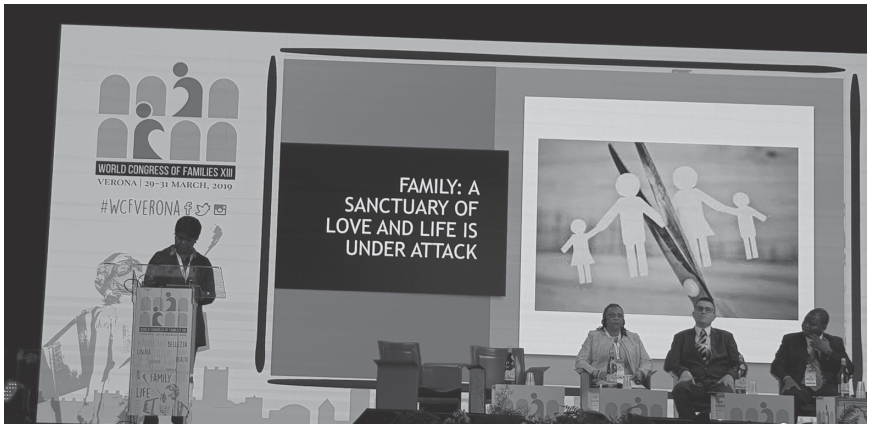

Figure 4.1 The World Congress of Families in Verona, Italy, 2019. Main stage, panel featuring Dr. Teresa Okafor.
Photo by Elżbieta Korolczuk

Taken out of context, this passage could pass for left-wing anti-colonial discourse, with its heightened race and class consciousness, and a critique of population policies. A similar viewpoint was expressed during in Verona by participants of the panel titled "Global perspectives on the family" featuring exclusively Black speakers (see Figure 4.1). Dr. Teresa Okafor, director of the Foundation for African Cultural Heritage (FACH), a Nigeria-based ultraconservative NGO, explained that the "ferocious attacks against family at UN, and many EU countries [efforts] to delete motherhood, fatherhood, family from all documents" are especially dangerous for African countries, where the family rather than the state organizes social life: "in Africa we are not developed, so if you want to destroy society in Africa, you destroy family" (2019).

The fact that the World Congress of Families included speakers from Africa shows that many ultraconservatives are careful to maintain a reputation for mainstream anti-racist views. It also testifies to the efforts to build broad transnational alliances, a contemporary version of the "Baptist-burqa" network of the 1990s (Bob 2012). However, this mainstreaming strategy stands in stark contrast with coalition-building efforts oriented toward extreme right groups in countries such as Italy, Hungary or Poland, whose leaders have publicly expressed openly racist and antisemitic views. The special guests in Verona included not only representatives of African nations, but also the German aristocrat Gloria von Thurn und Taxis, who went on record in 2001 claiming that Africa has the AIDS epidemic because "blacks like to copulate" (Open Democracy 2019). No doubt, it is difficult to achieve a balance between the official image of the movement as defender

of the world's colonized people, and the much darker reality of building a network that includes right-wing extremists and neo-fascists (Hatewatch Staff 2019).

Overall, the movement's rhetoric is based on an overarching opposition between powerful, demoralized, global gender elites and vulnerable, innocent, local people. This populist logic of polarization allows the ultraconservative agenda to be articulated as a noble and ennobling mission. As expressed by the leader of the World Congress of Families, Brian Brown, in Verona: "We are here today to defend, promote, protect and lift up something so true, something so basic, something so beautiful – the family."

The anti-colonial frame in practice: Poland as victim of the gender invasion

In this section we examine closely several episodes of the Polish anti-gender campaign that employed the anti-colonial framing, including the rhetoric used in the 2015 campaign against sex education in schools and key elements of the 2019 anti-LGBT mobilization. The cases examined show how eclectic the anti-gender discourse can be, capitalizing on a rhetoric of both victimhood and cultural superiority.

Our first example is a banner displayed during a large anti-sex-education rally held on 30 August 2015 in Warsaw. In crude English, the sign announced: "Gender + Convention about so called 'violence against the women and violence in the family' this is the Ebola for Poland from Brussels" (see Figure 4.2). Ebola, a virus spread through contact with body fluids, causing vomiting, diarrhea and rash, is commonly associated with tropical regions of sub-Saharan Africa. In the context of the rally, the word Ebola epitomizes fear of the abject and the racial Other. By linking the horrible African disease with the European Union's (EU) gender equality legislation (e.g. the Istanbul Convention), anti-gender actors position Brussels as both a colonizer and a source of contagion, as it spreads the virus of genderism, aiming to destroy the healthy body of the Polish nation. Such ultraconservative discourse is readily adopted by Poland's right-wing populists, who strive to undermine the generally positive attitudes toward the EU.

The choice of an African disease may seem odd, but is by no means accidental. The key metaphors here are those of contagion and contamination, which is characteristic of moral panics and emphasizes the speedy and uncontrollable spread of immoral impulses, desires and behaviors (Thompson 1998). Moreover, the geographical roots of Ebola signal what the source of real danger is. Many politicians on the right assert that Poles are being targeted as the last frontier of "undamaged Christianity" and "true moral values" in Europe, while the real purpose of global elites is to enable mass migration from Africa to Central and Eastern Europe. The ultimate danger awaiting Poles is the destruction of the nation and construction of a new type of multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society, which is envisioned as

Figure 4.2 Demonstration "Stop Depravation in Education," Warsaw, Poland, 2015. Banner stating: "Gender + Istanbul Convention is Ebola from Brussels."
Photo by Elżbieta Korolczuk

easily controllable and unable to oppose transnational institutions and local agents of the "civilization of death." Such conspiracy theories are legitimate political currency in today's Poland, as exemplified by the public statement of Paweł Kukiz, an MP and former presidential candidate who received over 20 percent of the vote in the first phase of the May 2015 election. Commenting on the ongoing refugee crisis, he asserted that EU migration policies are in fact aimed at extermination of the Polish nation:

> The plan is for Poles to be scattered around the world, and a compilation of different ethnic groups is supposed to live here. Such a society would be easy to manipulate and will create a "natural moat" [buffer zone] between the East and the West. Maybe we are supposed to just abandon these lands, maybe we are supposed to die out.
>
> (Kukiz TV 2015, our translation; see also Sosnowski 2015)

While this narrative may appear specific to Poland, in fact it partakes in a much broader pattern of discourse characteristic of the anti-gender movement's conspiratorial view of the world. In this view the family plays

a key role in resistance to a vaguely defined global power, whose aim is to enslave and control the masses. Leaders of the World Congress of Families in Verona also warn that:

> […] a human society disjointed and deprived of intermediate bodies like the family would result in a mass of obedient, servile consumers who would not recognize their roots and traditions and as such would be more easily manipulated by those powers who would exploit them for profit. This would represent the end of the Millennial civilization that human society has so far built.
>
> (Verona Declaration, 2019)

These two narratives – one that identifies the peoples of Africa as victims of a global conspiracy and the one placing Poles in this role, a nation to be replaced by Africans – may appear mutually exclusive. In fact, however, they converge in their valorization of victimhood, ethnic and national homogeneity and local rootedness, as well as in their vilification of Western elites. "Gender ideology" is perceived as an aggressive pseudo-religion, whose success depends on the previous uprooting of indigenous value systems. According to Kuby:

> Rootless, dependent, malleable masses may be ready to celebrate a new – global – savior. The cultural revolution of our time increasingly limits individual freedom and broadens the power of the state over the individual and of international organizations over the states – in the service of the financial oligarchy and for toppling the moral order.
>
> (2015: 278)

"Genderism" is thus portrayed as a criminal plot aimed at demoralizing the people and eventually bringing about the Great Replacement – eradicating entire populations with the purpose of replacing them with migrants or racial others. The pseudo-scientific theory of the Great Replacement (Camus 2017), popular in neo-fascist circles on both sides of the Atlantic, states that, as a result of a Jewish conspiracy, whites are under threat of being replaced by people of color, especially Muslims. Recently, it has been embraced by identitarian movements in Europe and the alt-right in the U.S., and it occasionally surfaces in anti-gender discourse. Proponents of "gender" are viewed as part of the liberal elite, whose moral and spiritual degeneracy eases the way to racial and cultural substitution. The definition of those in danger is broad enough to encompass all traditional, heterosexual families around the globe, which in many countries helps to mobilize the grassroots.

Another case worth exploring in detail is the film "Invasion" produced and aired by Polish public television's info channel, TVPInfo, on the eve of the October 2019 parliamentary elections. The film focused on LGBT organizations and Pride Marches organized in several Polish cities in 2019,

employing what appeared to be "investigative" journalist techniques. One of the main protagonists – a TVP journalist, a young woman – infiltrates an LGBT organization, going undercover as a volunteer in order to reveal the activists' supposedly devious intentions and illicit financial machinations. Despite these efforts, no incriminating evidence is found. Nonetheless, the film is constructed in such a way as to convince the viewer that an ugly truth is being uncovered. This aim is achieved mainly through the inclusion of footage from other countries, especially Germany, and elaborate stylistic devices, such as dramatic music, sinister images shot at bizarre angles at LGBT marches, as well as intercutting images of sexually explicit demonstrators with shots of confused looking children.

The message of "Invasion" is simple: the proponents of gender and sexual equality are wolves in sheep's clothing, dangerous ideologues claiming to fight discrimination, but in fact aiming to dismantle the "traditional" family, the nation and, ultimately, "Christian civilization." Charges against the LGBT community include accusations of pedophilia and "Christianophobia," and the desire to destroy the Catholic Church, portrayed as the healthy core of the Polish nation. Similarly to the American anti-gay-rights campaigners of the 1970s, who employed the conservative master frame of "saving our children" and "protecting the traditional family" (Fetner 2001; Johnson 2018), Polish ultraconservatives spread false information suggesting that gay men are disproportionally more prone to pedophilia and that sex education in schools is in fact just a smokescreen for the "sexualization" of children, which would make them easy prey for sexual predators. Several journalists and right-wing activists featured in the film (all of them middle-aged white men) insist in their commentaries that the LGBT movement is in fact pushing for "Pedo-Pride" – the normalization of pedophilia.

The film's core claim is that "LGBT ideology" is an external force that aggressively targets religion and endangers the Polish nation. Historical analogies to the Swedish, German and Russian invasions of the past are evoked to suggest that LGBT activists are inspired and paid for by foreign elites, that they are acting in the interests of the enemies of Poland. Consequently, the ultraconservatives and far-right groups were portrayed as valiant defenders of the homeland.

2019 was a watershed year for the home-grown LGBT movement in Poland. For the first time, Pride Marches were organized in over 30 cities and towns, including areas where PiS and its allies had considerable power. "Invasion" aimed to discredit these developments by insisting that the movement is in fact foreign-bred, an invasion from the outside. The authors of the documentary portrayed "LGBT ideology" as the work of a dangerous and powerful international network, with headquarters in Germany, which continuously attacks and provokes Catholics and Polish patriots. The aim was to prove to Poles that ordinary citizens are victims of leftists' provocations, not perpetrators of anti-LGBT discrimination and violence. Pride Marches were portrayed in the film as a deliberate

effort of the "LGBT lobby" to provoke violence and pose as victims. This victim-perpetrator reversal, a classic tool of right-wing populists, allows violence to be justified as self-defense. The film should be viewed in the context of rising homophobic violence, e.g. the attacks on participants of the Equality March in Białystok in July 2019, when tear gas was deployed against aggressive far-right groups, and several people were injured. In "Invasion," the attacks were portrayed as a desperate reaction of desperate "normal people" assaulted by the all-powerful "homo-lobby." It is debatable whether the film merely aimed to justify the violence that had already occurred, or in fact constituted an incitement for further violence. The latter possibility was suggested by the Poland's Human Rights Ombudsman, Adam Bodnar, in his official statement published on 21 November 2019, condemning the film as giving permission for violence, justified as defense against the enemy (Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich 2019). Novelist Jacek Dehnel (2019) compared the Białystok events to a pogrom, thus drawing a powerful link between antisemitic and homophobic violence in Poland.

How the East will save the West: moral geography of anti-gender campaigns and worldview

The Polish case attests to the existence of an imagined moral geography of anti-genderism, which is based on assigning Central and Eastern Europe a special position vis-à-vis the West. The West is often portrayed in anti-gender discourse as the source of moral decay and contagion, whereas the East remains a region relatively untouched by and robustly resistant to the corruption resulting from sexual revolution. Some anti-gender authors in the region have identified genderism as a left-over from communism, a form of cultural Marxism (e.g. Nykiel and Oko), but this view is entirely consistent with the narrative of Western colonization expounded by others (e.g. Kuby and Peeters). The colonizer is not the West as such but a West whose healthy (Christian) core has been destroyed by neo-Marxism and feminism already in the 1960s. Eastern Europe and Poland are singled out as the region whose inhabitants are aware of the dangers of Marxism and communism, and hence are able to oppose the global colonizers. Thus, as we have shown in previous chapters, the region is often praised for the strength of its resistance by both European and American figures.

Such praise is much appreciated by local exponents of the movement. Prominent Polish anti-gender author Marzena Nykiel ends her book with a quotation from Michael Jones's enthusiastic affirmation of Poland's special mission in the global culture war:

> It is Poland's calling to save the West. Jan Sobieski came to Vienna with his cavalry and thus saved the West and saved Christianity. Now there is a new enemy at our gates. The new enemy is Wilhelm Reich and sexual

> education. The world looks to Poland with hope that Poland shall save the West once again.
>
> (Nykiel 2014: 305, our translation)

In 2019 Jones was hosted as a guest by far-right online TV outlet wrealu24! To the interviewer's delight, he drew an analogy between Poland as a savior of the Catholic Church and the Horse Lords of Rohan from the popular Tolkien saga, who saved the realm of people against the forces of Mordor (wrealu24! 2019).

The excesses of right-wing rhetoric should not blind us to the political significance of such exchanges. For a long time, Poland and other post-socialist countries appeared to many Western observers as in need of support, help and advice; as "laggards" in regard to democracy in general, as well as gender equality and sexual democracy in particular. Contemporary right-wing discourse reverses this relationship: the East is cast as the conservative world's avant-garde and possibly a savior of the West.

This shift is related to the ways in which global conservative networks are constructed. Whereas in the 1980s and early 1990s Western conservatives worked hard to include "third world" actors (Bob 2012), since 1989 the alliances have tended to attach more significance to Eastern Europe and Russia. The vision of Russia as a country destined to become the savior of European civilization is a central tenet not only of Russian anti-genderism (Moss 2017), but more generally of the Messianic nationalist ideology whose central proponent is Alexander Dugin. Similar claims have been made regarding countries such as Armenia (Shirinian 2020), Bulgaria (Darakchi 2019) and Croatia (Brakus 2018), not only by local activists and politicians, but also by the representatives of transnational networks such as Tradition, Family and Property (Datta 2019). Here is an example of such discourse from the TFP website:

> In the past, Croatia was known as the Shield of Christendom thanks to her glorious defense of Europe against Mohammedan invasions. Today, we can deem it as the Shield of the Family. May her example be followed in the West and throughout the world!
>
> (Campos 2014)

As shown by Katharina Bluhm and Mihai Varga, today it is Russia and Eastern and Central Europe that lead the way in re-imagining and promoting conservatism "as an intellectual and political counter-movement to liberalism and socialism" (2019: 10). What appears to be a key to the success of this endeavor is a reinterpretation of transition as imposed imitation. Whereas the liberal understanding of transition focuses on strenuous and not always successful efforts to catch up with the West, the conservative framing highlights the East's cultural sovereignty and the need to defend it against Western influence. Over the years, the refusal to imitate western

ways became the core source of identity for populists and their electorates. Jarosław Kaczyński has often stated that it is high time for Poles to "rise from our knees," to refuse to be "shamed" – and effectively colonized – by Western liberal elites and their local allies. In their widely discussed book *The Light that Failed* (2019) Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes examine the power and consequences of this idea:

> The striving of ex-communist countries to emulate the West after 1989 has been given an assortment of names – Americanisation, Europeanisation, democratisation, liberalisation, enlargement, integration, harmonisation, globalisation and so forth – but it has always signified modernisation by imitation and integration by assimilation. After the communist collapse, according to Central Europe's populists, liberal democracy became a new, inescapable orthodoxy.
>
> (2019: 7)

What is troubling about Krastev and Holmes's conceptualization is that they appear to take the populist rhetoric of imitation at face value, blaming western liberalism for its failure to take into account Eastern Europe's desire for authenticity and recognition. What the book fails to acknowledge is that authenticity, shame and sovereignty are carefully designed rhetorical constructs, meant to fuel resentment and mobilize the people against liberal democracy. Moreover, it is a mistake to follow the populists in collapsing the difference between liberal democracy and neoliberalism. The authors of *The Light that Failed* do not appreciate the fact that Eastern and Central Europe received a package deal from the West; liberalism as an ideology and practice based on liberty, freedom and equality before the law came together with an economic regime and value system promoting rampant individualism, a small state and the decay of social citizenship. While the definition of liberalism is highly contested, we can safely assume that what most Poles and Hungarians hoped for in 1989 was system akin to the Swedish welfare state of the seventies, which combined individual freedoms with economic opportunities. What they got, however, was closer to the American model in the eighties, characterized by a propensity for nurturing inequalities and proudly announcing that from now on it is "every man for himself." Analogously to Janos Kis, who famously said that "What we wanted was civil society, and what we got were non-governmental organizations," we can conclude that what Eastern Europeans wanted was liberal democracy, and what they got was neoliberal governance.

In the narrative promulgated by right-wing populists, liberalism is persistently conflated with what the left calls neoliberalism, so that legitimate grievances concerning economic injustice can be seamlessly transformed into mobilization against liberal democracy. Anti-gender rhetoric is what mediates this elision: in order to harness grievances and frustrations resulting from the present stage of capitalism and the high social costs of systemic transformation, right-wing populists demonize "decadent elites" and the

sexual revolution. Our point in this book is that the success of contemporary right-wing populism is owed largely to its ability to moralize issues and concerns that the left would like to frame in economic terms.

Poland has become a key battleground in a reactionary effort to "save" civilization from genderism not only because it is a Catholic country, but also because here the right had already been successful in mobilizing the anxieties resulting from neoliberal reforms by playing on anti-elitist resentment (Ekiert and Kubik 2001; Ost 2005; Stanley 2017). Politically, what followed the first wave of anti-genderism is the Law and Justice party regime: an authoritarian and conservative version of welfare state, with pronatalist policies, cash transfers to parents and a strong focus on heterosexual family. These developments were legitimized through a prideful narrative of resistance to colonization and shaming, a rhetoric largely absent in the West, where the history of actual colonialism is being downplayed by the populist right in the context of the current migration crisis.

Contrary to Paternotte and Kuhar (2018) we claim that the East-West divide is very much relevant to the development of the anti-gender movement. The relationship between populism and gender equality is clearly highly dependent on the national context, while the moral geography of anti-genderism is best understood by analyzing who is seen as colonizer/invader and who is being colonized/invaded. In Western Europe it is mostly Muslim immigrants who are targeted by the extreme right as barbarian invaders, whereas "genderists" are critiqued as those who facilitate their uncontrolled influx. In Eastern Europe after 2015, when the anti-refugee panic subsided, hate campaigns have been aimed primarily at proponents of gender and sexual equality, while immigrants have featured as secondary targets, a more distant threat than the "LGBT invasion" from the West. One could say that it is a matter of emphasis rather than a substantial ideological difference, which attests to the opportunistic nature of right-wing populism, its thin-centeredness (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). Examples of transnational alliances of right-wing populist and nationalist actors with anti-gender movements show that such differences are easily overcome through the common ground: a worldview in which social conservatism, misogyny and xenophobia come in various shades and proportions, but are always interconnected.

In view of these developments, Poland should not be seen as an exceptional or provincial case but rather as a paradigmatic one, an important predictor for possible future trends in Western Europe. Given the current rise of gendered nationalism and right-wing populism in countries such as the U.S., Sweden, Germany and France, it is clear that the ultraconservative efforts to undermine the hegemonic position of liberal democracy as a political and intellectual project have gone global.

Theoretical and political implications of the anti-colonial frame

This chapter has shown how the use of the anti-colonial frame facilitates the collaboration between the anti-gender movement and right-wing populists.

It is worth considering the theoretical implications of this trend for both postcolonial studies and feminism. As many authors have pointed out, anti-colonialism has historically taken many forms in different contexts:

> it is sometimes associated with an ideology of racial liberation [...] it may accompany a demand for a recognition of cultural differences on a broad and diverse front [... and] was often articulated in terms of a radical, Marxist discourse of liberation.
>
> (Ashcroft et al. 1998: 12; see also Warren 2017)

Scholars who, like ourselves, have examined references to colonialism in contemporary right-wing discourse often suggest that it is an inherent problem with postcolonialism itself that makes the seemingly hostile takeover unavoidable: namely, the tendency to essentialize cultures, and to validate authenticity and the local at the expense of the foreign and universal (e.g. Snochowska-Gonzalez 2012; Bill 2014). They also highlight the tendency of postcolonial theory to define imperialism mainly in cultural terms while disregarding material reality (Snochowska-Gonzalez 2012: 720). Stanley Bill asserts that "postcolonial theory defends the specificity of local cultures but in doing so it risks falling into a form of 'culturalism' " (2014: 6). A similar argument about postcolonial theory is put forth by other scholars, including Vivek Chibber, whose controversial book on Subaltern Studies predicts that "while postcolonialism presents itself as the new face of radical critique, as the leading edge of criticism in an age of global capitalism, its arguments resurrect key pillars of conservative ideology" (2013: 286). The case of Poland confirms that the notion of colonization is remarkably adaptable to right-wing populist discourse, and it can be effectively used in countries with no obvious colonial history as a powerful signifier for humiliation that needs to be resisted.

As an ideology, anti-genderism interpellates subjects as victims of a global conspiracy, manipulated by the neoliberal elites targeting their true nature as men, women and children, as mothers and fathers. This idea is used to present the new religious conservatism and right-wing populism as legitimate and just, helping to mobilize individuals on a mass scale in what appears as a vastly de-politicized modern world. This new ideological configuration, one that links gender conservatism and critique of neoliberalism, has profound implications for any attempt on the left to develop effective strategies to counteract right-wing populism.

The consequences of our findings for feminist theory and practice are urgent and somewhat unsettling. First, it is useful to consider certain intriguing affinities between anti-gender discourse and recent interventions in feminist theory concerning the relationship between feminism and neoliberalism. The anti-genderist conceptualization of feminism, equating it with rampant individualism, with feminists as heralds of neoliberal globalization, is reminiscent of Nancy Fraser's influential argument about the

"perverse subterranean elective affinity" between feminism and neoliberalism (Fraser 2009: 108; see also Charkiewicz and Zachorowska-Mazurkiewicz 2009; Eisenstein 2012; McRobbie 2009). While acknowledging her critics' objections that her narrative overgeneralizes the faults of contemporary U.S. feminism and elides the heterogeneity of women's movements worldwide (Aslan and Gambetti 2011; Funk 2012), we nonetheless share Fraser's concern that "the cultural changes jump-started by the second wave [of feminism], salutary in themselves, have served to legitimate a structural transformation of capitalist society that runs directly counter to feminist visions of a just society" (2009: 99). Her pessimistic diagnosis is accurate as far as the internationally successful part of Western feminism is concerned – precisely the part caricatured as "colonialist" by the anti-gender movement.

Leftist critics of feminism's affinity with, or seduction by, neoliberalism view the two as separate currents that converged in some contexts and at a certain point in time, a development they perceive as an unfortunate anomaly, a betrayal of the original spirit of feminism as a movement for social justice. This is also our view of the matter. From the right-wing perspective, the story is much simpler: feminism has always been part and parcel of the neoliberal project, which sells rampant individualism as emancipation, corroding community and family. Obviously, the proposed solutions to the neoliberal crisis are also irreducibly different: socialist reforms in one case and gender re-traditionalization in the other.

The two critiques of neoliberalism clearly converge in their concern with the undervaluing of care, the dismantling of welfare provisions and the effects of these trends on women and families. We are profoundly skeptical about the possibility of dialogue or cooperation with anti-genderists, but we do believe that the current political configuration opens up new possibilities for feminist strategizing. In fact, a new wave of feminist mobilizations in Poland and other countries testifies to this change (see Chapter 6). Paradoxically, right-wing populism has ushered the problems of care and parenthood into public debate, which may be seen as an entry point for feminist activists to re-claim the territory of care, social provisions, welfare and community in the future. Contemporary women's movements appear much more set on representing "the people," taking a critical stand toward neoliberalism and the crumbling of the welfare state (Arruzza et al. 2019; Di Marco 2020; Gunnarsson Payne 2020a, 2020b; Roth 2020).

Our analysis may also have implications for the decades-long alliance between feminism and postcolonial theory. Our findings are compatible with some critiques of the inherent flaws of postcolonial theory, although they do not depend on them. It is of secondary importance to our study whether or not conservative uses of postcolonial theory are interpreted as a hostile takeover or as an inevitable effect of features of the theory itself (Warren 2016). The key point is that this emergent trend can effectively undermine advances of both transnational and local feminisms and left-wing movements around the globe. Those on the liberal left who believe that postcolonial theory

offers tools to counteract right-wing forces need to acknowledge that the anti-colonial frame is routinely being put to use by these actors, and with remarkable success. To grasp the implications of this trend is to acknowledge that we are facing a new political reality.

Conclusion

The anti-colonial frame plays a central role in the war against gender, and more broadly in the contemporary resurgence of right-wing populism opposing corrupt liberal elites and authentic conservative people. This is not just a rhetorical embellishment, but a set of beliefs crucial to the coherence of anti-genderism as an ideology and to the movement's identity as a coalition of diverse groups within and across national boundaries. It is also a key element facilitating the opportunistic synergy between the anti-gender movement and right-wing populists.

Firstly, the anti-colonial frame determines the targets of hate campaigns; they tend to be transnational bodies and policies regarding gender equality, as well as minority groups that are positioned as elites. Anti-genderism and right-wing populism both vilify not only global/transnational institutions but also liberal governments, which are accused of collusion with genderists, e.g. by implementing transnational treaties on gender equality, and all non-conforming populations, such as the LGBT community. Secondly, the anti-colonial frame allows for alliances between actors and organizations in various locations: it is always the local, authentic, indigenous culture, the local traditional family (whatever its tradition) that is under threat and in need of protection. Anti-colonialism is a populist meta-discourse that trumps some local particularisms and geopolitical conflicts; it presents itself as an effort to defend ordinary people, the poor, the helpless, the abused against a network of corrupt global elites. Finally, skillful use of the anti-colonial frame allows for successful mobilization at the grassroots. It appeals to constituencies that had not previously construed themselves in political terms, such as parents. As we further elaborate in Chapter 5, conservative parenthood has emerged globally as a new political identity, a site of social solidarity and a form of resistance in relation to the state, transnational institutions, the market and feminism, which is viewed here primarily as a form of individualism (Fábián and Korolczuk 2017). Within this framework, feminism is presented as an integral part of neoliberalism, while the traditional family becomes the last frontier of resistance, a place where there is still hope and a sense of community. It is a narrative with enormous affective power, one that endows subjects with a sense of dignity and collective agency, while at the same time giving voice to anxiety, which results from increasingly precarious working and living conditions under global capitalism.

Relying on this anti-colonial frame, the Law and Justice party can insist that it is continuously under attack, thus justifying the sweeping changes they introduce, the colonization of the political-institutional infrastructure of the

state (e.g. Bill and Stanley 2020). By employing such discourse the right also strives to delegitimize its political opponents, to undermine the left-wing monopoly on voicing critique toward capitalism and to offer a new version of cultural universalism, an illiberal one. In short, anti-genderism has become the new language of anti-capitalist mobilization. This may seem paradoxical from the American perspective, given the persistent alliance between neoconservatism and neoliberalism in the U.S. (cf. Brown 2006, 2019), but the U.S. may be an exception rather than the rule. Globally, contemporary right-wing movements and ideologies tend to be illiberal and populist: at the core of their ideology is an equation between neoliberalism and individualism as a value system and ideological project, which heralds human rights and gender equality to colonize the world's impoverished nations. In effect, right-wing critique of neoliberalism and globalization takes the shape of anti-feminist mobilization, and employs the anti-colonial frame as its key discursive strategy.

Note

1 All quotations from the World Congress of Families in Verona used in this chapter are transcribed from recordings and notes made by Elżbieta Korolczuk.

5 Anxious parents and children in danger

The family as a refuge from neoliberalism

On 13 January 2013, hundreds of thousands of protesters took to the streets of Paris to oppose the legalization of gay marriage. Many of them were parents with young children and the main slogans of La Manif Pour Tous, as the protest was named, included the call to resist the *familiophobie* of the state administration and to defend the "natural family" (Fassin 2014; Môser 2020). In Germany, in the southern and western regions of Baden-Württemberg and Cologne, an alliance called Concerned Parents (*Besorgte Eltern*) organized a series of protest in 2014 to oppose the new sex education curriculum initiated by the coalition of the Green Party and the Social Democratic Party of Germany. They, too, protested with slogans such as "Marriage and Family! Stop gender ideology and sexualization of our children!" (Bluhm 2015: 47–48). Very similar arguments were made by people protesting against the No Outsiders program, which was introduced in Birmingham and other British cities to familiarize pupils with gender and sexual diversity. Local Muslim leaders mobilized parents to picket in front of schools with slogans such as "Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve" and "We have a say in what they learn" (BBC News 2019). In the Czech Republic, conservative women formed a group called Angry Mothers to fight feminism, "genderism" and immigration. The group's leader took the stage during an anti-immigration protest in Prague in 2015, explaining:

> Today, I wish to speak on behalf of women, mothers, and, most of all, angry mothers. Because we, women, are more sensitive when it comes to injustice. We are not afraid to use our instincts that help us protect our kids from dangers and threats. And we feel very much threatened these days.
>
> (Svatonova 2019)

In Poland, an important site of anti-gender mobilization was the mass parental movement "Save the Little Ones!", which emerged in 2009 after the government announced its plans to lower the compulsory school age from 7 to 6. Originally, the protesters were opposing the planned reforms and generally the low quality of education in Poland. But when the "war on gender"

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hit the media in 2012, they joined forces with anti-genderists in contesting sex education in schools and the ratification of the Istanbul Convention.

While the specific causes for the mobilization of conservative groups varied, the main campaign slogans as well as the imagery employed were strikingly similar. All these movements referenced the need to protect children and families, which resonated with conservative moral panics around the family worldwide. As Paternotte and Kuhar point out, anti-gender campaigns everywhere focused on the welfare of families, children and heterosexual marriage; they even employed strikingly similar symbols and graphics: silhouettes of parents holding hands or protective gestures symbolizing the need to defend their kids (2017b: 269). The family resemblance among logos used by movements in various countries testifies to effective circulation of ideas and tactics across borders, but it also speaks to the power of the movement's central ideas: the mobilization of parents and the politicization of parenthood.

Existing scholarship analyzing anti-gender campaigns tends to interpret the "child in danger" imagery as a strategy of legitimization, explaining that "the Western construction of 'child innocence' is a particularly effective frame, which can rally larger crowds than anti-gender claims alone" (Paternotte and Kuhar 2017b: 265). Indeed, claiming to represent the interests of parents and children and to defend "family values" has been a tried and tested strategy of conservative cultural warriors worldwide. "Saving the children" was one of the rallying cries of the right throughout the political struggle known as the "culture wars," which emerged in the U.S. in the mid-1970 in response to new social movements demanding gender and sexual equality (Bob 2012; Hartman 2015). Among the precursors of contemporary anti-LGBT rhetoric was Anita Bryant, a modestly successful singer and former beauty queen, who formed the organization Save Our Children Inc. in 1977 in an effort to prevent equal rights for gays and lesbians in Florida (Johnson 2018). In a fundraising letter she proclaimed:

> I don't hate the homosexuals! But as a mother, I must protect my children from their evil influence. […] They want to recruit your children and teach them the virtues of becoming homosexual.
>
> (Fetner 2001: 411)

Calling on parents to defend their children from homosexuals is more than a mere rhetorical strategy. Anti-gender groups have recognized the political potential of deeply felt familial identities, roles and experiences and have managed to capture it. While there is nothing inherently conservative about parenthood and care, it is also true that progressive movements such as feminism have largely neglected this issue (Eisenstein 2012; Fraser 2009; Hryciuk and Korolczuk 2015; Graff 2014b; Kováts 2020). Meanwhile, the populist right has made parenthood its focus, monopolizing issues such as broadly defined child welfare, parental rights and the well-being of the

family (in the conservative version the family is of course nuclear, heterosexual and bounded by marriage).

The strategy of mobilizing parents has been so effective because it harnesses the emotional dimension of politics, something that liberals often distance themselves from. During the last decade or so, the political, cultural and social dimension (or *sociality*) of emotions and the political consequences of "public feelings" became the object of interest of sociologists, many of them feminist and queer studies scholars (Ahmed 2004; Illouz 2007; Kosofsky Sedgwick 2003). As Eva Illouz put it:

> Emotion is certainly a psychological entity, but it is no less and perhaps more so a cultural and social one: through emotion we enact cultural definitions of personhood as they are expressed in concrete and immediate but always culturally and socially defined relationships. […] Emotions are deeply internalized and unreflexive aspects of action, but not because they do not contain enough culture and society in them, but rather because they have too much.
>
> (2007: 3)

Among political emotions, shame holds a particularly significant position. It is more than just one of many emotions. A powerful negative affect, it is the reaction to not being recognized, to the failure of communication that constitutes identity. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick emphasizes the link between shame and identity, claiming that the relationship is "at once deconstructing and foundational, because shame is both peculiarly contagious and peculiarly individuating" (2003: 36). It is this link that gives shame its political potential: shame undermines identity but also leads to efforts to re-build identity. Sara Ahmed also points at the transpersonal dimension of shame, as distinct from guilt: the latter involves the subject's recognition of the badness of an action, but the former touches the entire self, it is "bound up with self-recognition" (2004: 114). Shame is an emotion that produces social hierarchies. Once transformed into righteous anger, it becomes a powerful tool for political mobilization (Jasper 2011). This is precisely what the populist right have achieved through anti-gender campaigns: they have managed to present the feminist and LGBT movements as shamers of the masses and enemies of the common people. Similarly effective have been the efforts to instigate fear that sex educators and trans men will harm children. The ultimate message is shame on you if you cannot prevent the demoralization of your own child.

This politics of emotions has been combined with policy measures designed to cater to families. Contemporary right-wing populist parties such as Law and Justice and Fidesz recognize the potential of parents as an electorate and have invested in a host of pro-family social policies, some of them quite generous. Since 2015 Law and Justice has introduced several pro-natalist policies focused on families with children, including 500+

(direct cash transfer of 500 PLN monthly for each child), increased financing of child care (from 151 million PLN in 2015 to 450 in 2018) and increased general public spending on pro-family policy from 1.78 percent of Poland's GDP in 2015 to 3.11 percent in 2017 (Gov.pl 2020; MRPiPS 2019). Ultraconservative organizations, such as Ordo Iuris, have wholeheartedly supported these changes, presenting themselves as experts and key advisers of the Law and Justice government in the realm of family policy. In Hungary, no significant anti-gender movement exists, but the anti-gender discourse has also been adopted by Fidesz (Kováts and Pető 2017). Right-wing populists readily adopted welfare chauvinism, which combines generous social policies with ultraconservative rhetoric (Grzebalska and Pető 2018; Kováts 2020; Cinpoes and Norocel 2020). These policies include a 30,000 EUR interest-free loan for every married couple if the woman is between 18 and 40 years old and pregnant, subsidized loans for such couples to build or buy a house, and grants to buy a bigger family car. Furthermore, mothers of at least four children are exempt for life from personal income tax, while grandparents can receive a bonus if they are willing to care for their grandchildren. As anonymous authors explain on the official website of the Hungarian's government: "God, marriage, family and children. There is an authenticity about Hungary's policies that speaks to Europe in these ancient, foundational times" (About Hungary 2020). In the light of these data we can safely claim that scared and concerned faces of little children in the anti-gender propaganda are not just an effort to provoke fear of genderism, but also a public relations strategy of right-wing populist governments, promoting the pro-family policies.

There is a fine line between instrumentalization and politicization of pre-existing identities, and we believe that in this case we are dealing with both. Religious groups and right-wing populists have a long history of strategically presenting themselves as apolitical grassroots movements of traditional families in order to attract wider social support. However, it is also true that grassroots movements of parents sometimes embrace conservative agendas and oppose sex education in schools, non-normative family arrangements, and sexual and reproductive rights (e.g. Höjdestrand 2017; Fabian and Korolczuk 2017; Fassin 2014). In our view, there are at least three distinct ways in which the rhetoric of politicized parenthood is used in anti-gender campaigns. First, in some cases, e.g. the World Congress of Families, anti-gender activists and right-wing politicians strategically pose as a pro-family movement, in order to downplay and sanitize what is effectively a radical ultraconservative agenda. The second way in which parenthood becomes politicized is when ultraconservative actors effectively appeal to parents whose original grievances were framed in purely pragmatic terms (as in the case of "Save the Little Ones!"). Third, some grassroots parental networks exhibit an ultraconservative orientation from the start: they oppose sex education, abortion and divorce. Such groups have readily joined the anti-gender movement, attracted by its ideological content. The latter two

scenarios show that the mass appeal of the anti-gender movement has much to do with the culturally entrenched idea that parents always have the best intentions with regard to their children. Speaking as a parent is a way to authenticate one's political engagement: parenthood is a form of political identity, wherein the personal becomes political, though not in the fashion envisioned by feminists. As we will demonstrate in this chapter, it is the ability to mobilize people as concerned parents that makes the movement so powerful and effective. Anti-gender rhetoric consistently sides with community against individualism, with family and love against loneliness and alienation, with solidarity against selfishness.

The dynamic in question is part of a larger trend of populist mobilization of emotions such as fear and anger (Salmela and von Scheve 2017; Wodak 2015). Right-wing populism transforms economic grievances into a moral division between Us and Them, juxtaposing the people and corrupt elites, hence it is sometimes interpreted as moralized anti-pluralism (e.g. Mueller 2016). We complement this argument by showing that parenthood and family have become the terrain where this moralization takes place. Without explicitly mentioning neoliberalism, conservative discourses on family and parenthood effectively harness legitimate anger and shame stemming from the neoliberal condition. As observed by Sauer, it is primarily men who are targeted by this discourse, while masculinity is invoked as a fragile identity in crisis:

> […] right-wing populist parties across Europe […] try to capture the fears of insecurity in the relations between men and women, the shame of "failed patriarchs," in order to safeguard against commodification of labor and life, by restoring the inequality of gender relations. Moreover, neoliberal affective strategies of self-entrepreneurship, of competition and insecurity have created masculinist affective subjectivities – entitled to compensate for fear and shame by anger and irresponsibility for others.
>
> (Sauer 2020: 33)

As we have shown in the previous chapter, a key element of the anti-gender campaigns was the narrative of "colonization" threatening local cultures. Indeed, most grassroots parental mobilizations pride themselves on being authentic and home-grown, representing the true voice of ordinary people, their everyday needs and grievances. They also criticize the trend toward the professionalization and institutionalization of civil society, which makes citizens' initiatives donor-dependent and accountable to foreign funders rather than to the constituencies they claim to represent. In the following analysis we show how right-wing populist discourses on gender employ political emotions by appealing to people as members of families, actual or potential, and stigmatizing their political opponents as bearers of loneliness and alienation.

Family heroes and motherless children: politicized parenthood in Verona and Paris

The first thing a participant of the 2019 World Congress of Families would see upon entering the Della Gran Guardia Palace in Verona was a huge banner announcing: "WELCOME FAMILY HEROES!" in both English and Italian. Indeed, panelists seemed to take on this very role in their speeches: they positioned themselves as heroic patriarchs and matriarchs, deeply concerned about the fate of the family – a sacred institution, the bulwark of Christian civilization. Talking about the family allowed the representatives of the movement, many of whom are affiliated with powerful religious institutions, to present their cause as one rooted in common sense and everyday experience rather than religion. Each panelist would start by mentioning his or her own family: their beloved wife or husband, their number of children (usually larger than three) and grandchildren. Their private lives as fathers and mothers, however, were not presented as the primary reason for public engagement. Rather, they served a strategic purpose: to avoid the stigma of hate-mongering bigots, add warmth to their public image and legitimize their engagement in political struggle (Kalm and Meuwisse 2020). The "heroes" were there to protect THE family, not their particular families. As we will see in the following section, this sets them apart from representatives of grassroots parental movements, who often perceive their public engagement as an extension of their private, familial roles.

WCF participants demonstrated an awareness of the political power of the family as an image to be weaponized in the political struggle. Here is how Edward Habsburg-Lothringen, father of six, Austrian ambassador to the Holy See and an aristocrat with quite an impressive lineage, described it in his speech:

> We need to use Twitter. The best is to talk with pictures about little family moments. Positive nice stories win hearts. Let us cater to people's wish to have a family. And the real way to have a family is Christian family.[1]

In a similar vein, Claudio d'Amico, Lega party politician and member of the WCF executive committee, opened his talk with a touching story about his mother and the importance of love. He concluded with the statement: "Only the relation of a woman, man and children is a true family."

In the WCF narrative "the family" is a discursive construct masking a homophobic and anti-choice agenda. The most important fact about their vision of "the family" is that this category excludes any familial configuration other that the heterosexual married couples with children. Speakers appeared to take for granted that audience members would share this point of view; their talks were designed to provide not only a sense of community but also to instruct fellow activists on how to build a more palatable image of an ultraconservative movement.

A somewhat different framing of family and parenthood, one that focuses mostly on kinship and biological reproduction, can be found in the French context. As many scholars note, the French anti-gender movement – represented primarily by La Manif Pour Tous (LMPT) – strives to downplay its religious origins and inspirations (e.g. Garbagnoli 2016; Môser 2020; Stambolis-Ruhstorfer and Tricou 2017). Instead, LMPT insists on its identity as a French movement, secular and firmly grounded in local civic culture. Thus, it routinely uses "symbolic repertoires of national symbols, past social movements and anti-capitalist rhetoric, with precise local resonance" (Stambolis-Ruhstorfer and Tricou 2017: 80).

An examination of the movement's materials shows that this discourse is centered primarily around a particular understanding of filiation. Eric Fassin (2014) explains how filiation has been both biologized and sacralized in the French context, and how this way of thinking provides justification for opposition to gay marriage. Following legal scholar Daniel Borillo, Fassin elaborates:

> if filiation is modeled after reproduction, then homosexuality could perhaps find a place in *parentalité* (parenting), but it should certainly be excluded (by definition) from *parenté* (kinship) […]. Biology as a foundational fiction has now become the last refuge of heteronormativity.
> (2014: 286–287)

This French construction of kinship explains why so much of La Manif Pour Tous propaganda focuses on protecting children from being denied the right to have both parents, or at least to know their identity. The alarmist tone of the movement's rhetoric and a sense of acute danger threatening "the family," however, are a common feature of most, if not, all anti-gender campaigns (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017).

LMPT's visual trademark, featured on posters and banners used at demonstrations, shows the silhouette of a nuclear family with parents at the center, holding hands with two children. Many slogans stress the importance of fertility, reproduction and "natural" kinship, that is one based on biological parenthood and the legal recognition thereof. This agenda stems from LMPT's adamant stance against gay marriage, surrogacy and availability of in vitro fertilization techniques for same-sex couples and single women. One prominent slogan, employed continuously at demonstrations on various issues, references the French revolution: "Liberté, Égalité, Paternité!" stressing the key role of parenthood and biological kinship ties to the French identity. Another demonstration poster proclaims: "There are no eggs in the testicles," stressing that only heterosexual couples can produce offspring and warning against the chaos that will inevitably ensue if biomedicine is made available to same-sex couples (Liberation 2013). In response to the proliferation of assisted reproductive technologies, which opens up the way to new family configurations, separating genetic from gestational and social motherhood

and fatherhood, activists take to the streets with slogans such as "Tell me daddy, what is it like to have a mommy?"; "I am a man, not a sperm-donor" or "She doesn't need a man, but don't the children need a father?"

Some of the imagery used in this context denounces the exploitation of the women's bodies, as exemplified by a poster featuring a pregnant woman's belly with a barcode. The accompanying slogan opposes the French court's decision to allow the adoption of a child born in Canada through gestational surrogacy. The LMPT president, Ludovine de La Rochère, claims that the possibility to conceal the identity of a surrogate mother is a violation of the fundamental rights of women and children: "The child is not born without a mother! The child is born from an unknown mother – and this is unacceptable!" (*La Manif Pour Tous,* 2018). In a similar vein, in February 2019 the activists issued a press statement protesting against the replacement of the terms "father" and "mother" in children's school documentations with the words "parent one" and "parent two":

> We are all born from a father and a mother. This reality is incontestable and provides the basis for human equality. This equality is to be preserved just as the family, the primary space of solidarity and refuge for the vulnerable, especially in periods of crisis.
>
> (*La Manif Pour Tous*, 2019, our translation)

Although the issue of surrogacy is especially prominent in France due to current debates on regulations concerning such procedures, the topic has a well-established place in the anti-gender movements' political agenda. The Verona Declaration of 2019 includes the following strategic goal: "An international ban on surrogacy of any kind – a total prohibition on trade or donation of gametes – for the woman is not an incubator and the child is not a product" (*WCF Verona Declaration*, 2019). The movement's philosophy as pronounced in the Declaration expresses profound distrust toward capitalism's impact on family life and the value of the human being. Notably, however, nowhere is the word capitalism itself used. Instead, the document's authors employ phrasing such as "the current cultural and economic crisis" or "commodification" of human relations and bodies. Their position is articulated in terms of morality and values, rather than systemic critique:

> Sustainable economic development is not possible without reaffirming the profound link that must exist between economics and morality: the well-being of the human person must always take precedence over the pursuit of profit.
>
> (WCF Verona Declaration, 2019)

In this perspective, the family – and more specifically the parent-child bond, both biological and social – becomes a sanctuary protecting people from the greed of markets and the alienating and uncontrollable developments in

science, epitomized by *l'idéologie du genre*. In the words of Giorgia Meloni, leader of the far-right party Brothers of Italy (*Fratelli d'Italia*):

> [The enemies of the family] would like us to no longer have an identity and just become slaves, the perfect consumers. And so national identity, religious identity, gender identity and family identity are under attack. I must not be able to define myself as Italian, Christian, woman, mother – no, I must be citizen x, gender x, parent 1, parent 2, I must be a number. Because when I am only a number, when I no longer have an identity, when I no longer have roots, then I'll be the perfect slave at the mercy of huge financial speculation. The perfect consumer.
>
> (Transcript from the speech at WCF in Verona, 2019. Translation: Cecilia Santilli)

References to "financial speculations" function in radical right discourse as code for Jews, and are readily recognized as such by like-minded audiences (Wodak 2018). Meloni comes remarkably close to naming the enemy as Jews, but she does not do so for good reason. The anti-gender movements' version of conspiratorial thinking avoids explicit antisemitism and prefers to target consumerism and modernity in general. The family appears as the last frontier of opposition to global markets and their sinister power to deprive people of identity.

In both Verona and Paris the opposition to new types of familial configurations is framed in a secular discourse that is universalistic (in referencing human rights), and anti-neoliberal (in its critique of commodification and commercialization of reproduction). The absence of religious claims may come as a surprise, given the roots of the anti-gender movement, but it testifies to its present-day political ambitions. Participants of the WCF are in fact ultraconservatives, some with fascist leanings, and the event's focus on the family is aimed to convince the mainstream public that the movement is not to be feared. If we were to judge La Manif Pour Tous solely by its rhetoric, we may conclude that it is a movement of gender-traditionalists alarmed by social and cultural changes brought about by sexual revolution, women's liberation and advances in reproductive medicine. Cornelia Möser documents, however, that the origins of LMPT lie in the cooperation between various far-right, religious and neo-Nazi organizations: Action Française, the Renouveau Français, Parti de la France and various fundamentalist Christian anti-abortion groups (2020:120). Thus, the defense of the family and the mobilization of parenthood becomes a smokescreen for what is really a far-right political project. While the term family is repeated endlessly in anti-gender discourse and while it is sentimentalized to convey love, connection and community, the actual aim is that of gaining political power. As Claudio D'Amico, a prominent Lega member, proclaimed in Verona: "We will win in the next European elections, the pro-family [politicians] will be the majority in the European Parliament."

Parental movements as a conservative response to neoliberalism

There is an interesting difference between the rhetoric prevalent in Verona or Paris and the narratives disseminated by grassroots parental activists, especially in Eastern Europe. In France, where the status of citizen takes priority over private roles, such as mother and father, the anti-gender movement strives to include parenthood in the realm of politics. Hence the resonance of slogans such as "Liberté, Égalité, Paternité!" used by LMPT. In contrast, Polish or Czech activists tend to legitimize their claims by distancing themselves from politics and through references to apparently more "authentic" and culturally valued familial commitments (Korolczuk 2017; Kubik 2000; Svatonova 2019). Whereas the representatives of the WCF and LMPT often employ an abstract conceptualization of the family as a treasured value to be protected against "genderists," in the Polish and Czech context leaders of conservative groups tend to legitimize their engagement by emphasizing their identity as parents or grandparents.

Existing analyses of civil society in Central and Eastern Europe and Russia show that many activists indeed perceive their social engagement as an extension of their parental experiences and identities (Fabian and Korolczuk 2017; Hryciuk 2017; Korolczuk 2017). It is as parents that they can transgress the public-private divide; they conceptualize political activism as a result of insights gained in the process of raising children. Being a parent is viewed as a morally superior position allowing people to be future-oriented and responsible for the well-being of society. The mission statement of the socially conservative Mother and Father Foundation (*Fundacja Mamy i Taty*) states:

> Nothing sharpens your social sensibility as much as becoming a parent. Thanks to our children we look at the world around us with new eyes, asking ourselves what has or can have influence on children's upbringing, safety, and their future. Thus, it is not a coincidence that mothers and fathers often become leaders of different, very active social movements or consumer groups, motivated by honest concern for their children and their future.
>
> (Fundacja Mamy i Taty 2020)

Very similar rhetoric is noted by Eva Svatonova (2019), who interviewed a number of women engaged in Czech anti-gender campaigns. When asked about motivations for joining the movement, one activist stated: "I did not engage in activism as a member of a party, but as a mother and a grandmother" (Svatonova 2019). It is this type of politicization of parenthood that we focus on in this chapter, aiming to explain the mass involvement of parents in anti-gender campaigns.

We draw mostly on examples from Central and Eastern Europe (including the Czech Republic, Poland, Russia and Ukraine) with the aim of shedding some light on the sources of mass appeal of anti-gender propaganda in the

region. We claim that the emotional power of anti-genderism may lie not only in effectively fueling the moral panic around "sexualization of children," but also in promoting and exploiting the view of the "traditional" family as a nexus of solidarity, the last frontier of social cohesion, a defense against rampant individualism and consumerism. These are not empty claims. Depending on the context and specific needs of local populations, the movements in question address the state's failures in the realm of care (e.g. Hryciuk 2017). Opponents of "gender ideology" attribute the growing precariousness of everyday lives to the erosion of community and family for which they blame feminists and proponents of the sexual revolution. The source of hope, on the other hand, is in being together: as families, as communities, as good people who love their children. In effect, parental movements have evolved into an alternative to liberal civil society promoted in the transition era (Fabian and Korolczuk 2017; Kubik 2000).

In Poland, the parental movement with greatest public visibility was the mass resistance against the government's plan to lower compulsory school age, which emerged around 2009 and later institutionalized into the "Ombudsman for Parents' Rights" Foundation. Led by the couple Karolina and Tomasz Elbanowski, the "Save the Little Ones!" movement collected 1.6 million signatures nationwide under petitions against this reform: early scholarization was demonized as an outrage against a carefree and innocent childhood. Mr. and Mrs. Elbanowski became household names in Poland due to their many public appearances and the media interest in their growing family (by 2018 they were proud parents of eight). They often talked about their children, claiming that their social engagement against school reform grows out of concern for the kids' well-being. As a vivid example of building political capital on parenthood, the Elbanowskis initially presented the initiative as a politically neutral single-cause movement gathering people of diverse views and backgrounds, a grassroots rebellion against the repressive school system. In 2012, however, they joined the unsuccessful campaign against the ratification of the Istanbul Convention coordinated by the anti-gender alliance. By 2015 they were appointed as an advisory NGO by the Ministry of Education, generously funded by the Law and Justice government. This development illustrates what may seem as a cooptation of a grassroots movement, but can also be interpreted as a natural move for the leaders who never hid their socially conservative views on family life and parenthood.

A different trajectory is exemplified by the Mother and Father Foundation, which was openly ultraconservative from the outset. Its founders aimed to counteract cultural and social changes such as the proliferation of divorce, abortion and "homosexual propaganda" in schools and in media (Korolczuk 2017). The foundation did not strive to become a mass movement, but strove to impact society through media campaigns condemning contraception, divorce and LGBT activism. The 2019 campaign under the slogan "Marriage: Our way of life," which aimed to promote heterosexual marriage,

was widely discussed in mainstream media, because it was financed from the Justice Fund, administered by the Ministry of Justice and earmarked for supporting the victims of crimes. Responding to the allegations of misappropriation of funds, the foundation's spokesman explained that they had analyzed Polish and international data on crime rates, and the results suggest that the type of family in which the children are raised influences the propensity to commit crimes in adulthood, and good, stable marriage can protect people from engaging in criminal activity (Fundacja Mamy i Taty 2019). Echoing arguments used by the religious right in the U.S. in the 1970 and 1980s (Dowland 2015), the Mother and Father Foundation presents the protection of family values as a remedy for social ills. At the same time, its representatives employ the language of human rights and freedoms, accusing the left, especially the LGBT movement, of hijacking and misusing these concepts.

These two parental initiatives emerged independently of each other around 2009 and eventually joined forces with the anti-gender movement. In both cases activists presented themselves as the advocates and protectors of children: while mobilization against education reform went public with the phrase "Save the Little Ones!", the Mother and Father Foundation's main slogan is "The Whole of Poland Protects Children." As already indicated, similar initiatives emerged in many Eastern European countries. Czech parental groups, such as the Angry Mothers and the Czech Traditional Family, became key supporters of religious authorities and ultraconservative politicians opposing the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in 2018 (Svatonova 2019). In the Ukrainian context, a socially conservative parents' organization was established in 2011, called the Parents' Committee of Ukraine, PCU (*Roditel'skiy komitet Ukrainy*) (Strelnyk 2017). The Russian grassroots mobilization in the defense of traditional family values included over 80 organizations, groups and networks that Tova Höjdestrand (2017) termed the Parents' Movement (*Roditel'skoe Dvizhenie*). It is not only parents who get involved, however. As shown by Roman Kuhar (2017), in Slovenia the engagement of grandparents in the campaign around the second referendum on marriage equality led to a change in the logo used by the movement. All these initiatives have emerged prior to, or at the very beginning of, anti-gender mobilizations in their respective contexts, responding to both the global economic crisis and to what at the time was seen as the victory of progressive liberalism (e.g. signaled by the legalization of marriage equality in many countries and EU-driven gender mainstreaming policies in CEE).

The ultraconservative response to neoliberalism merges cultural and economic liberalism, presenting "the return to the family" as a viable alternative, both on the personal and political level. Ethnographic research confirms that many parental activists genuinely cherish conservative values as central to their worldview (Höjdestrand 2017; Strelnyk 2017; Svatonova 2019). It is as defenders of the "traditional family" that they oppose specific state

policies, such as cuts in welfare provisions, lack of economic support for families or lowering the school age in order for children to enter educational system and the work force sooner. Activists frame these problems in moral as well as economic terms: as changes paving the way for demoralization, rampant individualism, the demise of family and community, which leaves common people at the mercy of global economic powers.

Parent-activists often present themselves as defenders of true democracy and rejuvenators of the spirit of community. A vivid example of such a stance is the report produced by the Mother and Father Foundation in Poland, entitled "Against Freedom and Democracy – The political strategy of the LGBT lobby in Poland and in the world: Goals, tools and consequences." This document presents the fight against LGBT rights and gender equality education in schools as an expression of civic-mindedness, responsibility and commitment to the well-being of the larger community. In a similar vein, the Ordo Iuris Institute continuously engages parents of school children in petition drives against sex and anti-discriminatory education. In 2019 the foundation's lawyers prepared a special website addressed to parents entitled *Dla Rodziców* (For Parents), featuring a guidebook on "Parents' Rights in Schools" and an information brochure "How to Stop Vulgar Sex Education in Schools?" Parents could also download a preformatted "Parental Declaration" to be submitted to the homeroom teacher at the beginning of a school year, preventing their child from taking part in any extracurricular activities that may have anything to do with gender, sexuality or anti-discrimination education. From a feminist perspective such efforts seem like examples of manipulation, but ultraconservatives view them as civic activism. As early as 2013 the ultraconservative pundit Tomasz Terlikowski claimed that parental initiatives, such as "Save the Little Ones!", the Mother and Father Foundation and the Marches for Life and Family organized in several Polish cities, constitute evidence that "Polish civil society is thriving and the republican spirit is not dead" (2013).

The critique of individualism on the part of parental movements goes beyond the debate on lifestyle choices and demographic trends. It is highly emotional, but it is also issue-focused, and at times remarkably specific in its demands and grievances. Activists address specific social policies, e.g. cuts in the sphere of education which lead to the closing of local schools or the lack of investment in high quality care for children. In Poland, activists engaged in the "Save the Little Ones!" campaign not only opposed the school-age reform, but also advocated in favor of state subsidies for textbooks and educational materials for children. They also initiated an informational campaign helping parents to get tax exemptions. In Russia, most parental organizations combine advocacy, critique of the lack of public support for families and self-help activities. While Russian activists regularly take part in writing petitions and organizing conferences, many of them have also engaged in organizing help for families in need: vacation homes for multiple-child families, summer camps or leisure activities for

whole families (Höjdestrand 2017). They stressed the need for solidarity and local community building and engaged in "grassroots charity," e.g. in "assisting families in dire need by pooling resources (toys, clothes, money, help with renovations, legal advice, etc.) or finding others who can help out" (2017: 43). The Parents' Committee of Ukraine, cooperating closely with the Orthodox Church, focused mostly on "anti-gender" education and advocacy, but even this organization occasionally addressed the economic and social conditions faced by parents in contemporary Ukraine (Strelnyk 2017:65).

Analyses of parental mobilizations show that linking a socially conservative stance with opposition toward some aspects of consumerism and individualism results in a very ambiguous relation to the state. Similarly to some feminist thinkers representing the maternalist strand (Ruddick 1995; O'Reilly 2009), parental movements interpret the family as the basic social, economic and emotional unit, which stands in contrast to the neoliberal practice of individualism. Hence, both strands of activism call for policies that would protect and support families, such as sufficient maternal leave, cash transfers in the form of benefits paid to families with children or good quality education. In contrast to feminists, however, conservative actors define the family very narrowly and do not recognize the rights and conflicting interests of individual members within the family. Hence, they oppose the state as the source of regulations influencing parent-child relations. For example, the representatives of the Polish parental organizations support the state's more active role in providing for stay-at-home mothers, but strongly resist mandatory sex education; they advocate for greater financial and institutional support of the family, but harshly criticize state interventions within the family, e.g. when parents abuse their children. This explains why these organizations joined forces with ultraconservative opponents of ratification of the Istanbul Convention: the argument was that the state should not interfere in relations between family members.

Emphasis on the need to re-establish paternal authority and hostility against measures counteracting gender-based violence is what attracts many fathers' rights groups to anti-gender campaigns, even though they rarely form the backbone of anti-gender networks. The majority of such groups were established in reaction to custody and alimony conflicts, but in some countries the activists joined forces with the anti-gender movement (Hryciuk and Korolczuk 2017; Strelnyk 2017). This tendency has been prominent in Poland, where one of the main fathers' rights groups, Brave Dad (*Dzielny Tata*), took part in several anti-gender rallies and mobilized their members to participate via a website and Facebook page.

In Italy, father's rights, specifically changes in divorce regulations, became a focal point of gender-related struggles. A 2018 law drafted by Senator Simone Pillon from the Lega party, one of the leaders of the anti-gender movement in the country and a speaker at WCF in Verona, proposed to change custody rules significantly. Presented as a way to achieve "perfect

shared parenting" and prevent "parental alienation syndrome," the bill was meant to force children to share their time equally between the divorced parents, liquidate child support and cause women who falsely accuse their former spouses of domestic violence to lose custody rights (Giuffrida 2018; Martin 2018). Italian women's organizations vigorously protested, claiming that this would effectively erase decades of women's struggle for equal rights and profoundly destabilize children's lives (Stagni 2018). Clearly, some anti-gender initiatives aimed at defending children and stability of the family profoundly undermine the rights of women. The Italian case reveals the value system underlying the anti-gender position: in the end women's emancipation and family values are opposed to each other, and women need to be disciplined into compliance. This explains why so much anti-gender activism across Europe has been focused on preventing the passage of the Istanbul Convention. The suggestion that violence against women is not a real problem is what draws openly misogynistic men's movements toward anti-genderism.

The cooperation between conservative parental movements and the state evolves along with shifts in the political context. In Italy, the Pillon law was shelved partly due to public outrage fueled by the feminist movement but mainly because Lega lost its majority in parliament in 2019. In Poland, ultraconservative organizations gained financial support and political influence thanks to the electoral victory of Law and Justice. Speaking against the plans for lowering the schooling age in the Polish parliament, before the 2015 elections, Karolina Elbanowska asserted: "We are discriminated against as parents in this country. We feel oppressed by the state [which does not listen to us]" (Elbanowska 2015, our translation). After the Law and Justice party ascended to power, however, this organization became engaged in close cooperation with the Ministry of Education, despite the fact that the reform proposed by the government was heavily criticized by many parents and experts, not least because it was not sufficiently consulted with the parents. This shows that conservative parental movements strive for a version of a non-intrusive socially conservative welfare state. Such a state promotes pro-natalist policies and offers high quality social services for in-groups, while respecting the autonomy of parents when it comes to children's upbringing and education. It also excludes the out-groups, such as migrants, refugees and non-normative families. The emotional dynamic behind these political preferences is a mixture of suspicion (toward the state – as potentially oppressive and always under suspicion of being too liberal) and pride (my family is my castle). The anti-gender discourse, with its valorization of family, community and paternal authority, was readily appropriated by these actors as it resonated with their commitments and values.

To sum up, today's anti-gender campaigns combine gender conservatism with a critique of neoliberal globalization and support for social policies supporting families. As noted above, socially conservative parental activists

seldom, if ever, use the word neoliberalism but they do address many aspects of economic, social and cultural changes associated with this phenomenon. Through constantly oscillating between economic and moral arguments (accusing their enemy of greed and demoralization), anti-gender discourse creates a compelling story about a conflict of values in the modern world. This narrative involves a call for the protection of the people against what is seen as excessive focus on the individual and family relativism. As we elaborate in Chapter 4, "gender ideology" is viewed as a global colonial plot. The logic of resistance is simple: while families, especially strong "traditional" families, can oppose economic and cultural colonization, individuals become easy prey for the colonizers. The endangered child is the emotional center of all this: parents are called upon to become engaged in the struggle for the sake of their children. And many of them have responded.

The parental role legitimizes conservative efforts for social change. Anti-genderists present themselves as oriented toward the common good and the best of possible futures, while portraying feminists and "genderists" as a threat to children and a cause of dissolution of family, the rise of loneliness and depression. The following section examines a particularly poignant campaign, which builds a powerful associative link between the negative effects of capitalism and feminism, accusing the two of having deprived ordinary Polish women of the dignity of motherhood and a chance for personal happiness.

Shaming the shamers, protecting the not-yet-born: the political emotions of anti-genderism

Anti-gender campaigners worldwide routinely use shocking representations of children in their social media campaigns, brochures, posters and banners, as well as propaganda materials. The image of a terrified child is a powerful tool for mobilizing strong emotions such as anxiety, guilt, fear and shame. One case in point is the striking poster used as background for the "Stop Sexualization" campaign, featuring faces of confused pre-schoolers looking straight into the camera with an expression suggesting plea for help and a large slogan "Stop sexualizing our children." Visitors of the website are thus appealed to as adults who are responsible for the welfare of children and who should be shocked into action. Another example of such rhetoric can be found in banners from 2015 demonstration against sex education in Polish schools proclaiming: "Gender is danger" and "Children belong to parents since the beginning of time. Sex educator – persona non grata!". In a documentary film titled "Dusk: Gender Ideology Offensive" (*Zmierzch – Ofensywa ideologii gender*, Dublański 2019) produced by the "Polish Soil" Foundation (*Fundacja Polska Ziemia*) in cooperation with ultraconservative Catholic channel TV Trwam most of the speakers are middle-age priests, but at one point the audience is addressed by a plea for help voiced by a

child. This sentimental message comes to us in voice-over while we watch a blurred image of children playing in a park:

> Childhood is beautiful. But when someone tells me about adult-only things, I am overtaken by fear. My childhood world is irreversibly damaged. Do not deprive me of happy memories and innocence for the sake of experiments you want to prove right. A child should not see everything. […] My dear Mommy, Daddy I am just a child! Only you can defend me and my small world against evil. I cannot do it on my own!
>
> (our translation)

The message here is clear: a powerful link exists between "gender ideology" and child abuse; between LGBT rights and pedophilia. In the film, the naive cry for help expressed by the child's voice is directly preceded by footage about the signing of the LGBT+ Charter by the mayor of Warsaw in spring 2019. It is suggested that concerned parents should defend their offspring's innocence against predatory attacks from both the gay movement and the liberal administration. This is similar to the tactic of shaming one's audience by suggesting that they have failed to save the helpless unborn from abortion, which is persistently employed by the global anti-choice movement (Mason 2019; Rohlinger 2002; Saurette and Gordon 2018). Interestingly, as the anti-gender discourse appeals to the audience in its capacity of parents and protectors, this logic has been extended to children not yet conceived and never to be born. The children may be concrete, insofar as actual children's faces, sad and fearful ones, are used to evoke strong emotions. However, they may also be abstract and absent, referencing the depopulated future world, dominated by loneliness and alienation resulting from the possible victory of "gender ideology."

In June 2015 the Mother and Father Foundation inaugurated its pronatalist campaign with a 30-second video titled "Don't put motherhood off" (*Nie odkładaj macierzyństwa na potem*). The clip features a woman in what appears to be her late thirties wandering aimlessly about a huge, modern and oddly empty house. We watch her walk an elegantly furnished but disturbingly empty interior, taking stock of her life:

> I managed to pass my specialization and have a successful career, I managed to go to Tokyo and Paris, I managed to buy an apartment and renovate a house. But I did not manage to become a mom. I regret this.
>
> (Fundacja Mamy i Taty 2015, our translation)

As the video moves toward its closure, a tear rolls down the woman's cheek, while sad music gives way to muted voices of small children. The clip's final message is delivered in a tone of advice, warning and solicitude: "Don't put motherhood off for later."

The short film enjoyed an astonishing cultural resonance: it went viral on the internet (over 400,000 views) and was heatedly discussed for months

in various media outlets. The campaign gave rise to innumerable satirical memes, reflecting a desire to laugh away and ridicule the specter of the miserable childless woman propagated by the ultraconservatives. Some of the memes featured "shameful confessions" of famous people who somehow did not manage to become parents. The childless woman was replaced by childless right-wing politicians (including Jarosław Kaczyński) or fictional characters such as Jon Snow (Kit Harington) of *Game of Thrones*, or the Witcher, warrior-hero of the celebrated Polish-made computer game and Netflix series. Some memes used the clip's formula to make openly feminist arguments. In one, a happy-looking man boasts having "managed" to do everything, including becoming a dad, because a woman slaved away for him at home. In another, a sad woman says she did not manage to become a mother because her female partner died, and their child was taken off to an orphanage. A popular meme featured the heroine of the original clip with the following caption "Don't put motherhood off. Give it up altogether!" (see Figure 5.1). Rather predictably, there were also memes with childless bishops and the Pope.

Figure 5.1 Screenshot of the meme responding to the campaign "Don't Put Motherhood Off."

Source: Memy.pl, 2015.

What makes this fleeting cultural moment worth re-examining is the way it partakes in the campaign against "gender ideology," employing the discourse of embattled parenthood. Viewed outside of its immediate context – i.e. a country in the midst of anti-gender campaign, heading swiftly for a right-wing populist regime – the clip might appear like yet another example of a familiar media trend: that of blaming feminism for the "infertility epidemic" and the sad lives of women who opted for careers and now regret their childlessness. In her history of 20th-century U.S. feminism, Ruth Rosen recalls that in the late 1980s a popular T-shirt featured a similar image with the text "Oh dear, I forgot to have children!" (2000: 335). Discussed at length in Susan Faludi's *Backlash* (1992: 46–58), the miserable-childless-woman-who-regrets-her-choices continues to thrive as a popular media narrative. Two recent examples include Tanya Selvaratnam's book *The Big Lie: Motherhood, Feminism, and the Reality of the Biological Clock* (2014) and Susan Shapiro's *New York Times* autobiographical essay "Childless, With Regret and Advice" (2015). The latter may in fact have inspired the Mother and Father Foundation, as it appeared online just weeks before the filming of the clip. The article ends with a confession that is almost identical to the latter's voiceover lesson: "By 50, I felt blessed in work, love and real estate. Yet some nights I'm haunted walking by the empty room in our apartment" (Shapiro 2015).

Each time the regretful wealthy childless woman appears in public discourse, her sorry predicament is presented as a new and alarming discovery, an unveiling of feminism's alleged big lie. Feminism is accused of having convinced women that childbearing can be put off indefinitely, and here comes the much needed wake-up call. The women featured in such stories are filled with shame, regret and resentment: they blame feminism and their own selfishness. The social fall-out of such campaigns is the stigmatization of career-women and the pitting of mothers against childless women. The emotion most prominent in such messaging is shame. Heedless of biology, besotted with consumerism, intoxicated by ambition, "forgetful women" are presented as those who failed to reproduce and now regret it. Indeed, they have failed as women and feminism is put to shame for having destroyed their lives. The witness to the shaming here is the imagined unborn child, the unfulfilled possibility of personal happiness. In the clip, it is the spectral child or children crying in the background without appearing on screen. Just as in the familiar backlash narrative, so too in anti-gender discourse, childlessness – the opposite of joyful parenthood – is presented as a source of profound regret and misery.

There is also a class dimension to this narrative. In the clip, childlessness-due-to-postponement is represented as a middle-upper-middle class predicament, caused not just by excessive emancipation, but by too much wealth, too much comfort, too much consumption. The shaming and humiliation of the woman portrayed in the film are protracted and meant to fill us (the viewers) with *Schadenfreude*. We are invited to witness her shame and enjoy

it. Meanwhile, she herself is silenced – the voice-over, thoughts spoken in first person, is delivered in another woman's voice. The luxurious setting of her misery constitutes an important clue to the viewer's intended response. The combination of luxury, minimalist design and sparse furnishing is profoundly alienating. In the Polish context, where most homes aim for a look of warmth and coziness, it appears foreign. The same can be said about the woman's expensive clothes: stiletto heels, beige trousers and shirt all suggest a corporate environment inimical to feminine warmth. She is dressed to compete, a style foreign to mainstream Polish tastes and the Polish ideal of femininity as motherhood. The foreign-looking setting invites hostility rather than sympathy toward the suffering woman. She chose to be emancipated, modern and Western, so her suffering is deserved.

The actress who played the role of the childless victim of excessive ambition claims that after the release of the campaign she found herself on the receiving end of spontaneous hostility from strangers. As she was unaware of the political intention behind the script, the intensity of public response that followed the spot's release shocked and wounded her. "For me it was simply a job," she told us in an interview "but people seemed to think it was all true. They took me for an emancipated, selfish rich bitch who forgot to have children. They would stare me down in the street to show me how much they despised me. There was also a lot of hate on Facebook" (personal communication, 08 August 2017). The hostility should not surprise us. The clip was a set-up, an act of public shaming and an invitation to further put-downs. Its carefully orchestrated sequence of images and sounds was meant to elicit a strong emotional reaction – to unsettle and infuriate. Shame, unlike guilt, is a public feeling. Thus, the goal of the ultraconservatives is to put the liberal elites – the alleged shamers of the people – to shame.

Given the context of Poland in 2015 – the cultural atmosphere set up by rampant xenophobia, media talk about the need to defend Polish culture against western "colonization" and the anti-gender discourse that linked all these themes – the source of shame in the clip is easily located. The heroine is childless because she has allowed herself to become westernized and seduced by feminism. She has only herself to blame: she has travelled as far as Tokyo, but has failed to produce her own (Polish) babies. She is uprooted, homeless in her own home because her space has been colonized by a foreign force, that she herself invited and followed. The real villain here is not the woman herself but the force responsible for her terrible choices: a force associated with wealth, travel and personal ambition, a force that is also somehow foreign. It is embodied in the look of house, modern and impersonal, the expensive objects that fill it, the way the woman is dressed, the way she inhabits her living space, almost like a visitor. She inhabits a house that is haunted by what the ultraconservatives call gender – the immoral core of the liberal West.

The clip never mentions "gender," but the connection to the anti-gender campaign is evident. The Mother and Father Foundation has long been

involved in promoting "family values," understood as the prevention of divorce, warning couples against the alleged harm caused by hormonal contraception, and honoring the hard work of fathers. The clip went viral at a time of intense political and social polarization around gender issues. Its central theme – motherhood – was heavily politicized within the "war against gender." Two Polish anti-gender books published during the preceding year, both authored by women, insist that "genderism" is responsible for the infertility epidemic and that it undermines the dignity of motherhood (Niewińska 2014; Nykiel 2014). In fact, the women who spoke publicly against gender at the time usually did so as mothers or prospective mothers and claimed that social hostility toward motherhood is feminism's fault.

In Poland, anti-genderism expresses in moralistic terms what is really a deep-seated hostility toward the West, associated with excessive consumption, individualism and precarity. The West is also routinely accused of degrading motherhood, encouraging women to undergo abortions and use contraception. The motivation ascribed to these practices is profit mongering – according to anti-genderists, pharmaceutical companies are behind it all, driven by greed and the desire to de-populate the world, especially to limit the population of societies that still adhere to traditional values (Nykiel 2014). Viewed in this context, the childless woman clip embodies a gendered critique of western capitalism. The aptly named Mother and Father Foundation steps into the role of benevolent grandparent, warning Polish women about the dangers of succumbing to western values.

The clip's message echoes one of the key tropes in the anti-gender campaigns, that of looming de-population. It is here that the religious ultraconservative critique of "gender ideology" meets neo-fascist tendencies and authoritarian discourse of a "demographic winter" promoted by Putin, as well as the discourses of Great Replacement and "white genocide" promoted by the global alt-right (Hennig 2019; Gökariksel, Neubert and Smith 2018; Stern 2019). As Gökariksel, Neubert and Smith (2018) show in their comparative analysis of the U.S., Turkey and India, there exists a striking similarity between cultural narratives deployed by the authoritarian and populist leaders in these countries. The narratives, which the scholars call "demographic fever dreams" are political fantasies – excessive, unfounded and seemingly absurd – designed to evoke panic about an imagined threat to the vulnerable majority population from religious, sexual and racial others. "Fundamentally, these fever dreams are motivated by the fears of the dominant population being made a surplus population" (Gökariksel, Neubert and Smith 2018: 566): outnumbered, displaced and eventually forgotten. The clip can be read as one such dream, an apocalyptic vision in which future Poland is but an empty house, populated by voices of children that never got a chance to be born.

Conclusions

Parenthood, actual and potential, is at the heart of cultural conflict known as the gender wars, in most contexts strongly intertwined with nationalist

sentiments. This is not to say that the right has a monopoly on politicized parental identity. Well-known examples of left-wing mobilization of mothers include Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America and the Mothers of De Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, as well as the single mothers' movement in Poland (Fell and Voas 2006; Hryciuk and Korolczuk 2015). Both progressive and reactionary movements employ the essentialist argument that women as mothers and caregivers are naturally predisposed to care for the world at large (Ruddick 1995). Today's anti-gender activists have been effective in politicizing the discourse of parenthood and mobilizing people in its defense, extending these arguments to men in their paternal role as defenders of the family, whose authority is viewed as natural, much like women are endowed with maternal qualities. As we have shown in this chapter, this is achieved on two levels. First, traditional parental roles are presented as under siege by "gender ideology" and in need of protection in order to mobilize large groups of people. Secondly, ultraconservative movements valorize parental roles and experiences as a basis for political engagement and new forms of political community. Clearly, there is something about the contemporary state of societies that makes parenthood an attractive political identity. We argue that it results from the social, economic and cultural effects of neoliberalism, a system that not only brings about precarity but also drastically devalues the human experience of familial relations and care.

Anti-gender movements skillfully link the cultural with the economic and the political by combining a socially conservative agenda with a critique of some aspects of neoliberalism. The activists representing these movements oppose neoliberalism interpreted as (1) a value system equated with the promotion of rampant individualism and the demise of family and community, (2) an economic trend equated with a lack of state support for families and minimal investments in social services and (3) a political trend equated with the colonization of local communities by liberal actors alienated from "the common people" and supported by foreign global powers. This discursive construction, combined with efforts to re-build local communities and advocacy for the rights of the families, enables socially conservative actors to effectively tap into people's sense of economic anxiety and disillusionment with political elites. Anti-gender rhetoric works because it reorients collective anger away from structural economic issues and toward moral ones. In the process, anti-genderism endows subjects with the memory of an imagined shame and with the promise of a new dignity; it offers moral satisfaction (our enemies are evil but miserable), a sense of purpose and a community.

Anti-genderism conflates "gender" with those aspects of capitalism that are most frustrating to members of the working and lower-middle class, especially to parents and would-be parents: precarity and the crisis of care resulting from unequal distribution of wealth. Instead of naming the problem in economic terms, as injustice and exploitation, anti-genderism presents the world of capitalism's winners as degenerate and morally corrupt, an emotional wasteland destroyed by greed and consumption, peopled by regretful childless women, men deprived of their paternal roles, lonesome

and anxious children. Like the expensive but unwelcoming house in the clip, it is a cold universe cluttered with useless objects. Ultraconservatives – just like the right-wing populists – aim to convince people who stand little chance of becoming the winners in the neoliberal race for success that they have already won what is most important in life: family, love and a sense of community. Simultaneously, right-wing populist governments deliver social policies such as cash transfers to families with children, thus responding to the actual needs of the people and easing the burdens resulting from raising children. The opportunistic synergy between ultraconservatives and right-wing populists is grounded in recognition of the value of the family in the abstract and redistribution of resources to "our" families. With socially conservative actors successfully claiming the language of anti-neoliberalism and populist governments building their appeal on generous social provisions, feminism and the left face serious challenges in articulating their opposition toward the reign of global capital.

Note

1 All quotations from WCF in Verona 2019 are based on the authors' notes from the event and recordings available online on the Facebook page of the event. We are grateful to Cecilia Santilli for help with transcripts and translation.

6 Counteracting anti-gender movements
Toward a populist feminism?

Sitting on a city bus in Warsaw on the rainy afternoon of 3 October 2016, we looked at each other in astonishment. At least half of our fellow passengers were women of various ages, all dressed in black, many of them holding not only wet umbrellas but also feminist signs and banners. We were all heading in the same direction and with the same purpose: to take part in the protest against the proposed law banning abortion in Poland. We too were holding a homemade sign inviting men to join our struggle, and we too felt the wave of emotions sweeping over the city: anger, hope, exhilaration and a peculiar sense of solidarity. The feminist revolution we had long considered impossible was apparently in progress.

Since the beginning of 2016, Poland has witnessed a women's mobilization of unprecedented scale: marches, rallies, pickets, public debates and social media campaigns, initially responding to a proposed total ban on abortion rights brought about by one of the key actors of the anti-gender campaigns, the Ordo Iuris Institute. The first wave of protests peaked on 3 October 2016 with the Polish Women's Strike (henceforth "the Strike") under the hashtag #BlackMonday, which mobilized 150,000 people in 200 cities and towns throughout the country. With moving visuals – pictures of a "sea of umbrellas" in Warsaw's Castle Square, faces of countless angry women in black, and radical banners with memorable symbols (see Figure 6.1) – the so-called Black Protests hit the international media and became an important reference point a year later during the International Women's Strike of 8 March 2017 (Graff 2019; Gunnarsson Payne 2020b; Korolczuk et al. 2019; Kubisa and Rakowska 2018; Majewska 2016; Murawska and Włodarczyk 2017).

In this chapter we offer a brief overview of women's mobilizations around the world, followed by a detailed account of the Black Protests in Poland. While we do not pretend to offer a comprehensive picture of feminist developments in various locations, we highlight the Polish movement's transnational connections, the international sources and resonances of the Polish Women's Strike. Next, we examine the sources of the mobilization's success: its effective employment of powerful cultural symbols, the implications of framing the protest as a Strike and the importance of the connective logic of mobilization based on the use of flexible, easily personalized

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Figure 6.1 Polish Women's Strike at Castle Square in Warsaw, Poland, 2016. Photo by Agnieszka Graff

action frames. Finally, we develop an argument concerning "populist feminism," focusing in particular on participants' self-definition as "ordinary women," the mobilization of emotions and the use of embodied knowledge, a type of episteme characteristic of populist movements (Gunnarsson Payne 2020b; Korolczuk 2020).

A new wave of feminist organizing: women opposing right-wing populism

While the Polish mobilization can simply be interpreted as a massive reaction to the proposed total ban on abortion, we view it as part of a broader struggle against right-wing populism – a stage of this struggle in which feminism strives to take the initiative. The leadership group of the Polish Women's Strike maintained strong bonds with other actors in the wider opposition to the Law and Justice government. In particular, the feminist organizers cooperated closely with other civic organizations, such as the Committee for the Defense of Democracy (*Komitet Obrony Demokracji*, KOD) or Citizens of the Polish Republic (*Obywatele RP*), while insisting on the Strike's autonomy as a feminist movement. In some cases, protests against the abortion ban were organized by women and men engaged in KOD groups. Marta Lempart, one of the key organizers of the Polish Women's Strike, had been engaged in KOD local structures in the city of Wrocław prior to the women's mobilization and had not been previously involved in feminist organizing. Carrying distinctive signs – e.g. with Women's Strike symbols, Gals4Gals banners, hangers, a fuck-you-uterus and Fighting Polish Woman images – participants were also known to engage in, and sometimes initiate, demonstrations for causes other than women's rights, e.g. protests in support of people with disabilities in 2018 (Kubisa and Rakowska 2018). However, activists were remarkably consistent in refuting the expectation that women's issues have to be put on the back burner, sacrificed to, or delayed by, the greater cause of "saving democracy."

What set the Black Protests apart from the wave of protests against Law and Justice rule is that the women's mobilization was openly challenging the hegemony of the Catholic Church. For women it was obvious that what needs to be challenged is not only right-wing populism but also its ultraconservative allies, as well as the political power of the Catholic Church itself. Thus, the Black Protests need to be situated within the broader context of evolving relations between the Church and the state in Poland. Only by doing so we can understand why the mobilization happened in 2016, and why with such force. During the two decades following 1989, the Catholic Church occupied a position of unchallenged privilege in Polish public life. Religion was perceived as the stabilizing force of post-1989 liberal democracy; without the bishops' support for Poland's EU accession in 2003, it was argued, we may never have joined the European Union. The price for this support was the so-called compromise law on abortion

introduced in 1993, which is, in fact, one of the strictest bans in Europe. In the decade following accession to the EU, this law was rarely critiqued in the mainstream media since the Church was still broadly believed to be an ally of democracy and pluralism, a respected institution capable of stopping the dark forces of extreme nationalism. Hence, the marginalization of feminism: women's silence was viewed as a necessary price for the peaceful coexistence of political elites and the Catholic Church. Around 2013, this harmony was upset. The Church explicitly cut itself off from liberal democracy by lending its support to the anti-European populist right. Motivations for this move had a lot to do with women's rights and the rights of sexual minorities: the Church-inspired, conservative anti-gender campaign, which peaked in Poland in 2013, was explicitly anti-European.

The Church's betrayal of liberal democracy in Poland has had many aspects and stages, but it revealed itself most fully in 2016 when the Episcopate lent its support to the "Stop Abortion" law. Thus, the Black Protests were both about women's rights and about much more than gender equality: what made them possible was a massive realignment in Polish politics and the public sphere. But the movement was also part of this tectonic shift in political culture, as well as a historic breakthrough in women's history. It introduced angry women as a new political subject into Polish political life. Women refused to give up on their women's-rights-centered agenda. They refused to be shamed, silenced or marginalized, neither by their opponents (the populist right and Catholic clergy) nor by allies (the broader movement of anti-PiS resistance).

The Polish case challenges the view shared by many scholars that anti-gender mobilization is a form of backlash or a countermovement to modern feminism (Corredor 2019; Krizsán and Roggeband 2019). In fact, it is the new wave of feminist activism that can be construed as a reaction to the rise of ultraconservatism and right-wing populism. The conceptualization of anti-genderism as a backlash or a countermovement ignores regional differences in feminism's development and institutionalization. As we have shown in the preceding chapters, anti-gender movements seem to be most influential in countries such as Poland, where feminism has been less rather than more powerful. While some might argue that this simply reflects the tendency of post-socialist countries to "lag behind" the West in matters of gender equality, we propose another explanation which has to do with the social and economic consequences of neoliberalism. Throughout this book we have been arguing that anti-genderism is a right-wing critique of neoliberalism, thus it is no accident that the ultraconservative influence has been particularly strong in Eastern Europe, where both the market dogma and individualism were imposed throughout the 1990s as the ultimate path to modernization (Ost 2005; Dunn 2004). Central and Eastern Europe and Russia also play an important role in the ultraconservative imaginary as the repository of conservative family values (e.g. Bluhm and Varga 2018). This chapter examines the feminist response to these developments, showing how

a new wave of women's mobilization sought to turn the tables on right-wing populism by claiming to represent "the people" and picturing anti-gender actors as "the elites." Thus, we challenge the movement-countermovement framing as an explanatory model for the global struggle around gender equality, siding with researchers who interpret these developments within the framework of a populist moment (e.g. Biglieri 2020; Gunnarsson Payne 2020b; Roth 2020).

We do not see feminism and the anti-gender movement in a temporal sequence, but rather as competing forces responding to one another, as well as to the neoliberal condition. If we were to insist on a chronology, however, we would risk the claim that the new wave of feminist activism that erupted around 2016 in countries such as Argentina, Italy, Poland, Spain and the U.S. was a reaction to the rise of ultraconservative and right-wing populism discussed in this book: anti-genderism in its various manifestations as well as the misogyny of political leaders. The mass protests in these countries were in fact efforts to stop the progression of the right. In the States, the 2017 March on Washington was driven by fear and anger after the election of Donald Trump (Boothroyd et al. 2017; Gökarıksel and Smith 2017; Jamison 2017; Moss and Maddrell 2017; Roth 2020). Similarly, in Brazil over the last two years, thousands of people continued to protest against the populist President Jair Bolsonaro, whom women's activists view as racist, homophobic and a threat to indigenous people's rights (Snyder and Wolff 2019). In Poland, women took to the streets to protest further restrictions in access to abortion (Gober and Struzik 2018; Korolczuk et al. 2019; Majewska 2018). In Argentina, Italy and Spain feminist mobilizations in the last three years were triggered by horrific cases of femicide and sexual violence, condoned by state apparatuses (Barros and Martinez 2020; Biglieri 2020; Campillo 2019; Chirioni 2019; Di Marco 2020; García et al. 2018; Martinez 2019a; Sutton and Borland 2019; Szczepańska 2019). Activists responded to specific efforts and initiatives of ultraconservative organizations and right-wing populists, e.g. the Italian movement Non Una di Meno organized a series of public meetings and debates, as well as a mass demonstration in reaction to the World Congress of Families organized in Verona in 2019. The authors of NUM's official statement, which was sent to the media, stated that feminists plan to:

> occupy the city with rage, determination and wonder [because]…despite a rhetorical discourse that fosters the values of human life, the attacks against abortion rights and the celebration of a traditional idea of family, which are put forward by these "lords" of patriarchy, are closely intertwined with a whole social system based on violence and oppression. […] Behind their defense of the "natural family" lays violence.
>
> (Non Una di Meno 2019b, our translation)

In each of these cases, the attacks on women's rights were waged by right-wing populists in collaboration with ultraconservative actors, often in

tandem with religious authorities and transnational anti-gender networks. The feminist movements that emerged in connection to these developments have tended to be intersectional, composed primarily of young women and grassroots in character. They were often locally organized, driven by the logic of connective action and facilitated by social media (Korolczuk 2016). This new wave of feminist organizing has also been remarkably attentive to the claims of different social groups, including working class women, the LGBT community and indigenous people. While locally embedded, these movements quickly became aware of each other's existence and increasingly developed transnational networks, sharing a sense of common goals and solidarity.

Movements partaking in this new wave share features that cannot be contained within the familiar narrative of feminist progress in Western democracies, where women's movements became increasingly sophisticated in theoretical terms but also elitist and bureaucratized, while feminist values were gradually entrenched in state policies (e.g. Hemmings 2011). The new feminist mobilizations are characterized by an emotional intensity and claims to represent the people rather than a specific marginalized group. Distrust of and refusal to cooperate with state institutions resonate within these new mass movements, although depending on the context, some groups and networks do cooperate with political actors.

The authors of the book *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* construct a definition of this new trend based on the assumption that the feminism of the future should be not just anti-neoliberal, but thoroughly anti-capitalist:

> What we are living through is a crisis of society as a whole. By no means restricted to the precincts of finance, it is simultaneously a crisis of economy, ecology, politics and "care." A general crisis of an entire form of social organization, it is at bottom a crisis of capitalism – and in particular of the viciously predatory form of capitalism we inhabit today: globalizing, financialized, neoliberal.
>
> (Arruzza et al. 2019: 16)

Based on the adoption of the strike as form of protest by the new feminist actors, Cinza Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya and Nancy Fraser claim that the movement is inherently anti-capitalist and that it has replaced what they see as a crumbling liberal feminist hegemony (2019: 82). But is this really true? As much as we ourselves happened to agree with the authors' diagnosis of the state of the world, e.g. their left-feminist worldview, we are not entirely convinced that such a view was overwhelmingly shared by most participants of the new wave of mass protests. The problems of economic exploitation, crisis of care and precarity were indeed often voiced by activists, but were not necessarily framed in explicitly anti-capitalist terms. Programmatic documents of the Italian movement Non Una di Meno do make an openly radical left-wing proclamation: the movement claims to

be "transfeminist, intersectional, anti-racist, anti-fascist and anti-capitalist political […] which aims at the radical transformation of society" (Non Una di Meno 2019a). The tendency toward left-wing intersectional orientation is also evident in Latin America and Spain, but even there some feminists are doubtful as to the movement's position vis-à-vis capitalism. In a conversation with the co-authors of the manifesto, Argentinian activist Paula Valera explains that "NiUnaMenos, as yet, does not position itself as having a clear anti-neoliberal agenda; it does not have an anticapitalist discourse" (Arruzza and Bhattacharaya 2019). It also remains debatable to what extent the new wave of feminism is anti-capitalist in countries such as Poland. Women's protests in many contexts erupted in response to religious fundamentalism, which had entered a strategic alliance with right-wing populism, both striving to be seen as forces protecting people against the excesses of global capitalism. Responding to these claims, feminists have tended to take the position of the people, but explicit anti-capitalist arguments were the exception rather than the rule.

A number of scholars observe that contemporary feminism both challenges right-wing populism and co-opts its majoritarian appeal and anti-elitist discourse (Emejulu 2017; Gunnarsson Payne 2020a, 2020b; Hall 2019; Snochowska-Gonzalez and Ramme 2018). Julia Roth argues convincingly that "what the new feminist movements have in common is strong opposition to the ways in which gender has become a central platform for right-wing mobilization, which can be observed in a number of right-wing patterns of en-gendering" (2020: 252). In other words, the new feminism responds not only to specific legal changes in the realm of gender proposed by right-wing populists but to the broader patterns of cultural change, including the re-masculinization of the public sphere, the gendering of fear and femonationalist discourses.

Our own research and activist experience have led us to the conclusion that the mobilization known as Black Protests can, indeed, be viewed as "populist feminism," a gendered version of the "left populism" theorized by Mouffe (2018). We are not the first to propose such a conceptualization: existing research shows that the self-perception of Black Protest participants cohered around the idea that they were "ordinary women" – a people rebelling against an arrogant patriarchal elite (Gunnarsson Payne 2020a; Snochowska-Gonzalez and Ramme 2018). Emerging scholarship on other contexts, including Argentina, Italy, and Spain, shows that a tendency to formulate the feminist agenda in left-populist terms has been present worldwide (Biglieri 2020; Di Marco 2020; Emejulu 2017). These findings resonate with the proposal made by Chantal Mouffe (2018) that the only way to effectively oppose right-wing populism is to develop a left-populist discourse. In a similar vein, Graciela Di Marco and other authors in the special issue of Baltic Wolds entitled "Women and the People" (2020) conceptualize the strategy of contemporary women's movements in terms of a left-wing populist challenge to nationalist, misogynic and xenophobic vision

of political community. The new "popular feminism" is not a sophisticated intellectual project involved in the deconstruction of patriarchal myths and dwelling on its own complicated identity. Rather, it engages in the collective expression of powerful emotions, the production of inclusive symbols and embodied knowledge in a rejection of ethno-nationalist definition of "the people" enforced by right-wing populist forces. In this chapter's conclusions we will revisit this claim, outlining its theoretical grounds and implications.

The Black Protests' story: mobilization against the ultraconservative agenda in Poland

The Black Protests' story began with two groups of citizens striving to change existing abortion laws through civic initiative. In Poland, civil society actors may introduce a piece of legislation for parliamentary debate, but the law requires that the submitting group first register and then gather 100,000 signatures within three months. On 14 March 2016, the legislative initiative "Stop Abortion" was registered with the Polish Parliament and aggressively lobbied for by the Ordo Iuris Institute.

The proposed law sought to outlaw abortion in all cases, including serious fetal damage, and stipulated up to five years in prison for women undergoing abortions. Fetal damage is one of three conditions under which abortion is legal as per existing legislation, and it constitutes the legal grounds for the vast majority of legal abortions in Poland. The proposed legislation was thus rightly perceived as an effort that would result in an effective ban on abortion in the country. If passed, the law would have forced women to give birth, not only to disabled children, but also to infants bound to die soon after birth. In addition, there was well-founded reason to believe that doctors would stop offering prenatal testing in fear of being prosecuted for facilitating abortion, and that involuntary miscarriages would be followed by criminal investigations. These was extreme even by Polish standards. Prior to 2016, neither the ruling Law and Justice party nor Poland's Bishops' Conference had supported the idea of putting women in jail for abortion. Yet, in the final days of March, the Episcopate of the Catholic Church made an official statement supporting the initiative, and Prime Minister Beata Szydło communicated her personal support for the proposed law. The threat of "Stop Abortion" becoming law was very real.

Feminist groups raised the alarm, and counter-mobilizations began on 1 April 2016 with the appearance of the group Gals4Gals (*Dziewuchy Dziewuchom*) on Facebook. The profile gathered thousands of members within hours, and provoked the creation of dozens of local groups in the subsequent few days. On 3 April, the left-wing Together (*Razem*) party organized the first demonstration under the slogan "No to the torture of women." Participants were armed with wire hangers – an international symbol meant to be reminiscent of the horrors of back-alley abortions. A video showing women walking out of church services began to circulate on

social media – they would leave ostentatiously while the bishops' statement was being read in parishes throughout the country. Different groups and individuals began to initiate small-scale creative actions, which included sending packages with wire coat hangers to the Prime Minister's office and posting detailed information about women's menstruation cycles on her Facebook profile under the hashtag #toughperiod (#TrudnyOkres) as an ironic commentary to the government's efforts to control women's bodies. Many of these initiatives running alongside one another were started by feminist activists, but some were instigated by persons with no such experience. Three former first ladies also announced their opposition to the proposed law and instead came out in support of the existing one.

On 13 April, a group of activists led by left-wing politician Barbara Nowacka registered the legislative initiative "Save the Women," which aimed to legalize abortion and guarantee access to sex education and contraception. This opened up a new stage of the conflict: two rival committees would now simultaneously collect signatures under their respective draft laws. "Stop Abortion" filed 400,000 signatures in July, whereas "Save the Women" filed 215,000 in August. The difference can be explained by the fact that anti-choice groups collected signatures in churches, with active support of (and often pressure from) parish priests. The parliament's reaction to the two initiatives speaks volumes about the political power of the Church in Poland. On 23 September, the "Save the Women" initiative was rejected without debate, while "Stop Abortion" was directed for further work in committees. The following day, Poland's most famous actress, Krystyna Janda, wrote a Facebook post reminding the public of the Islandic Women's Strike of 1975 and calling for mobilization. The hashtags #czarnyprotest and #BlackProtest gave the entire mobilization its popular name. During the Wrocław rally, a speaker named Marta Lempart called for a nationwide women's strike on 3 October. Together with Natalia Pancewicz, Lempart set up the Facebook profile Polish Women's Strike, which would remain the center of the movement's national and international connective leadership. Moreover, this site became known as the movement's "helpdesk" – the go-to contact for media and the model for regional groups (Gober and Struzik 2018: 133).

The 3 October Women's Strike was undeniably the Black Protests' largest success and most memorable event. Its iconic status is in part owed to the beauty of the images that soon flooded social media: the sea of umbrellas shot from above, and thousands of women dressed in black, soaking wet and visibly exhilarated. The black clothes worn by participants were meant as a sign of mourning for women's reproductive rights, but there is an additional symbolic dimension worth pausing over: the Black Protests harked back to the spectacle of Polish women wearing black during anti-Russian demonstrations in 1861 (see Graff 2019: 485; Kowalczyk 2018: 14). The umbrella would become one of the protests' most popular symbols and, like the black clothes worn by participants, it carried additional symbolic

significance. One of the core myths of Polish women's history – contested by historians but well-established in the collective imagination – is that in November 1918 a group of suffragettes gathered in front of the villa of the Chief of State, Józef Piłsudski, and (reportedly) knocked on the windows with their umbrellas to remind him of the need to grant women voting rights in the new republic. Thanks to the rain, the symbol was now revived and would soon become omnipresent in the movement's iconography and discourse (as in the popular slogan "We will not fold our umbrellas").

The Warsaw rally assembled over 30,000 people, but Warsaw was only a small part of what happened that day. There were demonstrations in 150 cities and towns, some with over 10,000 participants. Solidarity events took place in 49 cities in 29 countries in Europe and elsewhere (Gober and Struzik 2018: 137). For the first time in Polish history, there were women's demonstrations in small towns, where being seen at a protest could have immediate consequences at work and at home. All around Poland, women failed to show up at work (often with their employers' consent, but sometimes with serious risk involved) and joined the innumerable rallies around the country instead. Thousands of others went to work wearing black.

A poll conducted a month after the Strike testified to the impressive resonance and popularity of the protests: 90% of the population knew about the Strike; 64% of women and 52% men declared their interest and support; 17% of women and 6% of the men said they had dressed in black on 3 October to show their support; 4% of women said they had participated in demonstrations in person (CBOS 2016). According to another poll, the year 2016 witnessed the highest level of participation in public protests in 28 years (Kowalska and Nawojski 2019: 53). Politically, too, the Strike was a success: the "Stop Abortion" law was withdrawn from parliamentary proceedings. This was the first time that the Law and Justice government backed down under public pressure. The Church, too, eventually withdrew its support for the initiative.

Black Monday gave organizers and participants a heady sense of the movement's power. It was the starting point of numerous initiatives leading up to the next great mobilization – a response to the new anti-abortion legislative initiative, which came to be known as Black Friday (23 March 2018). In the interval between the two massive protests, much activity demonstrated the ongoing strategizing that was taking place on both sides of the political feud. The government introduced a special financial provision for women who give birth to disabled babies, emergency contraception was effectively banned, and there were direct repressive actions (including police raids) against women's NGOs. Meanwhile, women continued to organize: there were protests against the emergency contraception ban and marches on Women's Day (in solidarity with International Women's Strike) and on Mother's Day 2017. A network of doctors was established to advise women in crisis (*Lekarze Kobietom*, Doctors4Women). During summer 2017, women activists played a central role in street protests in defense

of independent courts, and – dressed as handmaids (based on Margaret Atwood's classic novel) – protested against Donald Trump's visit to Poland.

Over time women's protests underwent significant radicalization. In March 2017, after the ultraconservative forces proposed yet another total abortion ban, protesters from all around Poland descended on Warsaw employing a quasi-militaristic rhetoric. The main slogan was "*Idziemy na Nowogrodzką*" ("Marching to take Nowogrodzka street" – Law and Justice headquarters). It was the largest gathering in defense of women's rights in Poland's history – the headcount varied from 50,000 to 90,000. Banners and speeches showed a new level of anger aimed specifically at the Catholic Church: "I decide about religion, not religion about me"; "My uterus is not your chapel"; "Freedom of choice, not terror"; "Fuck the curia." Some signs alluded to recent church pedophilia scandals: "Hey priest! I don't look up your dress"; "Go play with your own organs." Another favorite that appeared at this march and many others read: "I think, I feel, I decide." As with Black Monday of the previous year, the protest's outcome was a temporary victory. In June, the reactionary law was rejected, but it was then clear to all, and so it remains at the time of writing, that its proponents would renew their efforts. The slogan "We are not folding our umbrellas" continues to circulate on social media, a clear sign that the struggle is far from over.

Local struggle in a global context

The Polish case must be seen against a broader transnational context. After all, the "Stop Abortion" campaign – the second stage of anti-gender campaign in Poland – was itself part of a wider effort to roll back women's rights worldwide. To global anti-gender networks, Poland – a predominantly Catholic country ruled by right-wing populists – was a promising testing ground for radical solutions to what they perceive as "the culture of death," and the Ordo Iuris Institute became an important player linking the local and the transnational. The global context mattered on the feminist side of the struggle, too. Cooperation across borders allowed the activists to position their struggle as part of a broader effort to defend democracy, equality and justice.

As we have already noted, key events in several countries, including Poland, Italy and Spain, were carried out under the banner of "strikes." In Poland the choice of strike as a protest form and all-encompassing slogan for the movement was inspired by Icelandic women's strike of 24 October 1975. The event was one of second wave feminism's more spectacular initiatives: up to 90% of the country's female population did not show up at their workplace that day and did not perform any household tasks in order to demonstrate the true value and indispensability of women's work. This shows that the Polish Women's Strike, an authentic grassroots movement with no external institutional funding, had a keen awareness of the broader context

of the struggle. For Polish feminists, however, to use the word strike was also to suggest a linkage with the struggle of Solidarity movement against the communist regime (Kubisa and Rakowska 2018; Majewska 2019).

Thanks to social media, the local groups that emerged not only built links with one another but also established lasting transnational connections with activists in other countries. The Polish Women's Strike received online support from women all over the world, who posted photos of themselves – singly and in groups – with solidarity signs. These images were disseminated in Poland as evidence that "we are not alone." Mobilization inside the country also led to the formation of a sizeable "transnational feminist diaspora," comprised of Polish women living abroad who organized solidarity protests wherever they happened to live. According to Greta Gober and Justyna Struzik this experience had a transformative effect on participants – guided by a sense of solidarity and responsibility for "sisters" at home, they built new connections to Poland and to each other, and emerged with a new definition of feminism (2018: 143). Transnational connections became instrumental both for expressing solidarity across borders and for exchanging information about activities of the anti-gender actors in different national contexts. During the public debates organized by Non Una di Meno in Verona one of the authors (EK) presented an analysis of recent developments in Poland during an academic panel, while simultaneously representing the Polish women's movement during the general assembly meeting.

While Black Monday was modeled on the 1975 Women's Strike in Iceland, the Polish Women's Strike, in turn, inspired the International Women's Strike of 2017. As early as 9 October 2016, the Facebook group Black Protest International (established by Polish activists including Marta Lempart and Klementyna Suchanow) posted the following call for a global mobilization for women's sexual rights and autonomy:

> Sisters and Brothers! An outrageous reminder of how much there is still to do about women's rights in the context of rape culture. We must reclaim our feeling and thinking bodies from the hands of those who usurp power over us. Trump is just one striking, globally-visible example, but there is so much more violence occurring that goes uncovered by the news. It is hard to believe the ways in which rapes committed by powerful men, like Julian Assange, Dominique Strauss-Kahn and Roman Polanski, are publicly excused on the grounds of the high social and political positions and merits of the rapists. […] Let us learn from this experience and not let our voices fade!
>
> (Gunnarsson Payne 2020b: 13)

Slogans and graphics originating in Poland enjoyed resonance around the globe, including the Women's March on Washington on 9 January 2017. Two weeks after Black Monday, on 19 October 2016, the #NiUnaMenos

protest against femicide took place in Argentina in response to the murder of 16-year-old Lucía Pérez. Similar demonstrations were organized in Mexico, El Salvador and Chile, leading up to the #NiUnaMenos strike in Brazil (27 October 2017). As Gunnarsson Payne (2020b) documents, these mobilizations used slogans and images from the Black Protests, resulting in a kind of "fantasy echo" effect, which inscribed each of the local struggles in a much longer feminist history, giving participants a sense of common identity. One such obvious echo is the Polish activists' use of wire coat hangers to reference women's suffering under patriarchy. Originally employed in the U.S. as a symbol of self-induced abortions in the pre-Roe vs Wade era, in Poland – where illegal abortions have been carried out in gynecological offices or abroad – they came to symbolize women's anger and solidarity. Gunnarsson Payne follows feminist historian Joan Scott in arguing that

> fantasy is crucial in understanding any successful political mobilization. For an intense affective attachment to a political cause to be formed, it is necessary for the subject to form a narrative in which they imagine themselves taking part, and begin identifying with – this is precisely where fantasy comes in.
>
> (2020b: 11)

This fantasy was based on a sense of shared oppression and solidarity, but its dissemination required coordinated efforts.

Polish feminists were also echoing international feminist voices, not only in terms of symbols, but also referring to iconic feminist foremothers, as in the following Facebook description of Black Protest International:

> We want to show that international solidarity of women is a powerful political tool.
>
> Let us remember Audre Lorde's words "Any power you don't use yourself is gonna be used against you". Let's remember Lorde's concept of "joint survival" – the notion that each individual survival is interrelated with the survival of others, so is the wellbeing. Let's stand together and imagine the tools for the fight together!
>
> (Black Protest International)

Prior to 2016, the Polish women's movement had perceived itself as somewhat isolated in Europe, a "special case" viewed as hopeless by women from the West, due to the political power of the Catholic Church in the country. Following the mass protests of 2016 and 2017 this was no longer true. The Polish Women's Strike leaders made efforts to coordinate the International Women's Strike in 2017 and took pride in having initiated this broader movement. In the herstory of the Polish Women's Strike published on the movements' official website, this achievement occupies an important position. Polish Women's Strike leader Marta Lempart has often underlined

the grassroots nature of the movement and the key role of Polish activists in coordinating the global effort (e.g. in Wittichová 2019). Activists closely followed the unfolding feminist struggles in other countries, especially Ireland's campaign for legal abortion ("Repeal the 8th") and organized a number of solidarity actions, though the movement's strategies were different in the two countries. Whereas in Ireland the "In her shoes" campaign led countless women to relay their personal experiences of abortion, in Poland a similar initiative failed to take off and individual women, who came out with their abortion stories faced enormous backlash (Cullen and Korolczuk 2019).

Polish activists also spread information about the experiences of women living in countries where abortion is banned. El Salvador and Nicaragua were most often brought up. Polish feminists and Amnesty International activists publicized the fate of Evelyn Beatriz Hernández Cruz, who was sentenced to 30 years in an El Salvadorian prison after the court decided she had undergone an illegal abortion, a procedure qualified as murder. As is often the case, mainstream media outlets also started to report on the situation in those countries, picking up on the trends arising on social media. For example, on 9 April 2016 the daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* ran an extensive reportage piece on the situation of women in El Salvador, which was then widely shared via social media, reflecting the circular nature of contemporary news flow.

The fear and anger that such stories stirred became widespread, as reflected in slogans such as "We don't want El Salvador here" painted on homemade banners that many women carried at demonstrations. As these slogans testify, El Salvador came to epitomize the mental backwardness and "barbaric" laws that are supposedly characteristic of developing countries, while Poland was imagined as part of the "developed civilized West." This rhetorical strategy led to tensions in the movement. Some feminists criticized this phrasing as highly problematic and racist, claiming that we should focus on building transnational solidarities between women in different countries in order to lift the ban on abortion in both Poland and El Salvador. These critiques, however, did not resonate widely among protesters, many of whom carried EU flags at marches and chanted "We are in Poland, not in El Salvador," voicing a sense of superiority rather than solidarity. A similar dynamic can be seen in the repeated usage of the figure of "Muslim women" in feminist debates as shorthand for women's oppression at the hands of religious fundamentalism (Bobako 2017): a tactic that seems obvious and justified to some and inacceptable to others.

This split tells us something important about the meaning of transnationalism within the Polish movement: to some women it means solidarity with oppressed women everywhere, but to others it signifies belonging to the "advanced" liberal West, echoing the superiority implicit in some western feminist discourse, which postcolonial scholars have critiqued since the 1980s (Mohanty 1984), and which have made feminism susceptible to

femonationalist co-optation (Farris 2017). The debate itself testifies to the opening up of local feminist identities and struggles to broader transnational contexts and conflicts. With the Black Protests, feminist identity in Poland rapidly transcended the narrow bounds of national identity, as participants of the upheaval viewed themselves as partaking in a worldwide women's revolution, a struggle against patriarchal forces that are global rather than local. We share this perspective as activists and participants of the feminist struggle, but also as scholars examining the broader pattern of mobilization around gender.

Explaining the success of Black Protests: why it happened and why it worked

The Black Protest phenomenon has by now been investigated by a number of scholars: sociologists, ethnographers, cultural studies scholars and political scientists. How did so many women manage to become mobilized at such short notice? Why was so much anger triggered by the "Stop Abortion" law? After all, legal abortion had been almost impossible to obtain in Poland since the passage of the so-called "compromise law" of 1993. Depending on their theoretical toolkit, scholars have offered various answers to these questions, but all studies emphasize the protests' egalitarianism, emotional intensity, spontaneity and reliance on social media. The proposed law was perceived as cruel and inhuman rather than just restrictive, and the fact that it received support from the Episcopate was an important trigger. The abortion ban became a symbol for a much broader set of issues and grievances.

Both the scale and the emotional intensity of what would later be called a women's rebellion exceeded everyone's expectations, including those of the organizers. What also took many by surprise was the mobilization's immediate effect: the Strike led to the withdrawal of the contested legislation and a massive rejuvenation of the women's movement. Many scholars agree that this was, in fact, the birth of feminism as a grassroots movement in Poland: intersectional, inclusive and internally diverse (Korolczuk et al. 2019; Majewska 2016; Murawska and Włodarczyk 2017). For thousands of Polish women it was also a moment of personal transformation: as one participant from Szczecin said in an interview, even though she was not an activist before 2016, she now felt empowered not just to join the protests but also to take the stage. She recalled "I just started to speak spontaneously during one of the first demonstrations, and people liked that, they could relate, so later the organizers called me and wanted me to speak" (interview 28 September 2019, our translation). Prior to 2016, feminism had been a politically marginal phenomenon, centered mainly around NGOs, university gender studies programs and the largely middle-class Women's Congress, with more radical leftist organizations and informal groups, such as local Manifas, struggling to gain recognition and influence both within the movement and in public

debates (Grabowska 2012, Regulska and Grabowska 2013). When the ultraconservative attacks on "gender ideology" began in 2012, women's and left-wing circles employed a number of strategies to oppose this offensive. As early as 2013 efforts were made to debunk the claims of the anti-gender movement, to promote a gender equality agenda and defend gender studies as a legitimate scholarly pursuit (Duda 2016; Grzebalska and Soós 2016). Academics and non-governmental organizations published a number of books, articles and manuals for teachers targeting the general public as well as specific groups. In most cases authors approached the attacks on "gender ideology" as an unfortunate misunderstanding and tried to enter into a debate with opponents on the nuances and meanings of gender equality as a concept. Meetings, debates, conferences and workshops were organized, aiming to engage academics, teachers and the general public, while gender studies experts were trying to counteract the claims about the dangers of gender promulgated by the likes of Father Oko in mainstream media.

One strategy, prominent especially in social media, was to mock the excesses of anti-gender discourse through satirical memes, cartoons and cabaret songs, whereas some feminist and LGBT organizations engaged in strategic litigation. Yet another strategy was employed by the Women's Congress which in 2013 sent a public letter to Pope Francis, alarming him about "unprecedented attacks against women's rights waged by Polish Catholic clergy" (Kośmiński 2013). Additionally, reports were prepared demonstrating that many Catholic organizations had received UE funds dedicated to the implementation of gender equality standards. In 2013 Feminoteka Foundation held a much publicized press conference, demanding that the authorities review the allocation of EU funds so that organizations that do not fulfill the criteria would have to give back the money (Grzebalska and Soós 2016).

While some of these strategies gained public resonance, they were mostly reactive, oriented toward unmasking fraudulent claims of anti-gender groups. They relied on existing civil society structures and drew on support of the state, a strategy which proved to be largely ineffective after the Law and Justice party came to power in the end of 2015. In retrospect, these early efforts to resist the anti-gender movement appear weak and, in some cases, naïve or misguided, as in the case of the letter to the Pope, to which Vatican officials responded with a vague reassurance about the Holy See's good intentions. What these initiatives did not take into consideration was the wider political dynamic: the scope of the transnational anti-gender movement and its interconnectedness with right-wing populism. In contrast, the Black Protests were a true mass movement with its own agenda and its own political culture. With the Strike, feminism emerged as a nationwide grassroots movement, marked by a radical political rhetoric and a penchant for hijacking patriotic symbols, capable of mobilizing tens of thousands of women at a few days' notice (Graff 2019).

Feminist mobilizations in various countries had much in common. One such striking commonality is the role played by new communication

technologies: social engagement of people who did not previously perceive themselves as activists resulted from their social media participation (Korolczuk 2016). The movements' rapid growth can be accounted for by employing the concept of connective (as opposed to collective) action. The "scaling up" of protests was enabled by personalized engagement of internet users, in which communication became an important element of organizational structure (Bennett and Segerberg 2013). The role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) seems to go beyond enabling communication and fostering the construction of collective identity: the medium changes the action logic. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, who analyzed a number of national and transnational mobilizations against globalization, proposed to distinguish between groups and networks following the traditional logic of collective action and those that follow the logic of "connective action" (2012, 2013). While the former requires high levels of organizational resources and efforts to form and develop collective identities, the latter is based on "using resources to deploy social technologies enabling loose public networks to form around personalized action themes" (Bennett and Segerberg 2012: 757). This in turn changes the core dynamic of the action, making it more flexible and personalized, based on a rather eclectic and fluctuating sense of identity. In the Polish protests against the abortion ban this new logic was one of key factors facilitating mass engagement.

The protests' quick growth shows how personal action frames or memes can effectively mobilize people who are uninvolved observers. Memes are packets of information (textual and/or visual) that are easy to adapt and share, thus they travel fast across diverse populations (Bennett and Segerberg 2012: 745). Inclusiveness, clarity of message and emotional appeal, combined with high potential for personalization, are the aspects key for the popularity of memes in the Black Protests. The core idea was very simple: in order to join, one had to post a photo of her(him)self wearing black, with the hashtag #blackprotest. The uncomplicated and gender-inclusive formula was easy to personalize. As noted by philosopher and feminist activist Ewa Majewska (2016), the power of this strategy consisted not only in its inclusivity but also in its challenging of the traditional hierarchical relation between a powerful creator (of images, slogans or strategies) and weak participants, who can only accept or reject these creations. This formula allowed participants to be in control of what they share with others: most participants publicized carefully arranged selfies, many women choosing to post photos with friends, partners or children, and some opting for a group photo, which in turn helped to engage bystanders. There were also persons who preferred an anonymous version and posted pictures of favorite celebrities, media figures or even pets wearing black pieces of clothing or just in a black-and-white photograph. Most not only used hashtags but also added a personal message: the original concept invited alterations and personalization of the content, which allowed people to express their emotions, agency and control in creating their own meaning.

The choice of a strike as the main form of protest was of major importance for the scale of mobilization. At the beginning, the initiators discussed

the possibility of organizing a typical strike, calling on women to abandon workplaces and take to the streets, but after an internal debate the formula became much more open. The strike became an all-encompassing symbolic packet, which covered a whole range of activities, such as striking, wearing black to work, having one's kids wear black to school or kindergarten, wearing badges, posting supportive messages on social media, blockading the entrance to Law and Justice party offices, holding collective readings of feminist books or debates on reproductive rights or even making sandwiches for fellow activists, as was the case of some Warsaw-based male participants. The open formula allowed people to join in and feel that they are part of a nationwide initiative, even if they could invest just a fraction of the time and energy that a regular strike requires. Arguably, this was of special importance for economically underprivileged women and to people in smaller towns and villages, where scarcity of jobs and conservative local milieu make it risky to publicly engage in potentially controversial issues, such as reproductive rights (Kubisa and Rakowska 2018).

As noted above, in the Polish context the very concept of a strike carries associations with the heroic tradition of the first Solidarity of 1980, the collective action of Polish workers, who – supported by intellectuals and activists – challenged the communist rule. As shown by Julia Kubisa and Katarzyna Rakowska (2018), it is no accident that both the Polish Women's Strike and the 2018 Warsaw protest of parents of persons with disabilities named their mobilizations "strikes," though neither initiative was literally a strike:

> They rejected the division between production (wage labour) and reproduction (non-wage labour), which gave a deeper meaning to the "refusal of work," showing how closely they are interconnected, both in terms of reproductive rights and of care work. The empowerment of this event was derived from taking over the concept of the strike and providing an inclusive space to connect different actions related to the struggle for reproductive rights.
>
> (2018: 37)

So far, the hegemonic narrative has focused on the iconic male heroes, such as Lech Wałęsa (or Lech Kaczyński in the right-wing version of Polish history). This trend continued despite the fact that there is a long tradition of women's strikes under communism, which were organized at big factories, e.g. in the city of Łódź, to protest against low pay, horrible working conditions and unequal treatment (Fidelis 2010; Mazurek 2010). As explained by Ewa Majewska (2016), the mainstream historiography downplays the importance of collective effort and shared responsibility, stressing instead the role of individual qualities, such as (male) charisma, strong will and personal sacrifice. Accounts of the Solidarity strikes tend to focus on specific figures of heroes and the imperative of self-sacrifice. In contrast, the story of the

Polish Women Strike has coalesced around collective effort and solidarity among women who refused to be sacrificed for the greater good – be it God, the Nation or just higher fertility rates. Majewska (2017) has argued convincingly that this new wave of women's protests follows the paradigm of "weak resistance" based on collective effort rather than individual heroism and solidarity rather than charismatic leadership.

Other contextual factors and changes in political opportunity structures also contributed to the movement's success. The "Stop Abortion" proposal was submitted to a parliament dominated by socially conservative parties, and the ruling Law and Justice party was supported by anti-choice groups during the elections – these two facts contributed to a sense of immediate danger. It was widely believed that this time there was a real chance that the parliament would accept a total ban on abortion. The heightened political climate and the mobilization of citizens opposing other reforms introduced by the new regime also played an important role. In some locations, such as Łódź, anti-PiS groups supported the women's protests organizers with know-how and important resources, such as acoustic systems, security staff during rallies or help in printing leaflets and distributing informational materials. As one local activist explained in a personal communication:

> Here in Łódź we have great communication with all citizens' groups, with KOD, with old organizations, everyone chips in, there are no conflicts because we know we are in this together.
>
> (communication during a meeting, December 2016, our translation)

Women's protests against a total abortion ban can be interpreted as part of the transformation of the Polish civil society, which prior to 2016 was often depicted as NGOized and depoliticized (Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017). The socially conservative and populist Law and Justice party was swiftly introducing changes in virtually every sphere of social and political life, gradually dismantling the basic tenets of liberal democracy. In the process, Polish society became extremely polarized but also much more engaged and politically active, and street protests became normalized as a mean of communication between the citizens and power holders. Ironically, the Law and Justice representatives, who appear to be deeply suspicious of any spontaneous grassroots organizing, proved to be extremely effective in mobilizing thousands of women and men in Poland and abroad.

Populist feminism – the extraordinary power of "ordinary women"

How does one situate feminist mobilization within the populist moment? Gunnarsson Payne (2020b) draws a link between the egalitarianism of Black Protests and Chantal Mouffe's (2018) theory of left populism. Mouffe

defines populism as a particular articulation of conflict: one that defines "us" as the people and the opposing force as an arrogant and corrupt elite. If right-wing populism builds the collective identity of the "people" in exclusionary terms (as a collectivity based on common ethnicity, race or nation), left populism does the opposite. It is a political strategy that

> […] aims at federating the democratic demands into a collective will to construct a "we", a "people" confronting a common adversary: the oligarchy. This requires the establishment of a chain of equivalence among the demands of the workers, the immigrants and the precarious middle class, as well as other democratic demands, such as those of the LGBT-community. The objective of such a chain is the creation of a new hegemony that will permit the radicalization of democracy.
>
> (Mouffe 2018: 24)

In opposing right-wing populists, the Black Protests persistently strove to reframe the ongoing political conflict by claiming the identity of the "people" for the women whose rights were in danger. Within the movement's left-populist framing, the right-wing forces – well-funded, well-connected, cruel and manipulative – were positioned as a corrupt elite. A similar political identification has been employed by the women's movements in other countries, e.g. many Latin American activists have explicitly positioned themselves as a voice of the oppressed who rise against political, social and economic elites (e.g. Biglieri 2020).

Arguably, the most remarkable finding about the mobilization concerns the activists' own self-perception as "ordinary women." A study conducted by Jennifer Ramme and Claudia Snochowska-Gonzalez (2019), based on interviews with 95 Women's Strike coordinators from around the country, shows that they persistently used this phrase to describe themselves. The postulated "ordinariness" has several meanings. First, it signifies the diversity of protesters in terms of age, education, class and region; second, it distinguishes them from seasoned activists or people involved in politics (Ramme and Snochowska-Gonzalez 2019: 95–99). "Ordinary women," it appears, are women from all walks of life who had been living their private lives until the "Stop Abortion" initiative enraged them and provoked them to join the protests. Ramme and Snochowska-Gonzalez's conclusion is similar to the one offered by Gunnarsson Payne: they interpret the persistent use of the phrase "ordinary women" within a broader framework of competing populisms. Activists from the Polish Women's Strike are not afraid to claim that they represent "womenfolk" or "the female sovereign," proposing a different understanding of these collectivities – pluralist and inclusive.

Scholars emphasize the egalitarianism of the mobilization, its inclusiveness and spontaneous, uncontrolled growth. The leadership was collective, and initially there were no "stars" of the movement, though some women (notably

Marta Lempart) became well known throughout the country. Solidarity was felt and demonstrated with the most vulnerable and least privileged women: e.g. those who could not afford abortion abroad, rape victims, single mothers, mothers of children with disabilities. Majewska (2016) examined the movement in light of Václav Havels' concept of "power of the powerless" and Antonio Negri's "the common," claiming that the protests were driven by participants' confidence in their weakness and vulnerability.

Viewed as a mobilization of public emotions, the Black Protests were an expression of collective outrage, despair and righteous anger. It is these emotions, rather than a coherent set of political views, that were shared by thousands via the logic of "connective action" and during mass protests, which for many women became a revolutionary moment and a personal breakthrough. As one participant recalls:

> We stood there surrounded by other women, surrounded by a black armor, as if we were one organism, one angry organism, an organism who said: we won't give up without a fight. It was good. No one challenged us. We were a force, we sang songs. For the first time in my life, I was surrounded by people similar to me, thinking like me. We all agreed.
>
> (Smętek 2017: 25, our translation)

Those who joined did not necessarily view themselves as feminists, but they shared a common threat and a common enemy: ultraconservative Catholics supported by the populist right-wing government. This clear us–them division helped to mobilize people who might otherwise have been reluctant to collaborate.

Mobilization of emotions, such as fear, anger, rage and solidarity among women played a pivotal role in the massive growth of the movement. Right after the Stop Abortion bill was publicized, feminist experts and activists "translated" its provisions for the general public, warning about the dire consequences that such a law would have for millions of Polish women and their families. They stressed that the law would open the road for prosecutors to imprison women and to investigate cases of patients who experienced miscarriages. The phrase "barbaric law" became widely associated with the bill. The possible effects of the law were compared to "torturing women," to signal its unprecedented severity and to reference the physical and psychological pain that female patients would be subjected to if the law were introduced. Many women openly expressed their fear of becoming victims by carrying banners stating: "We refuse to die so that you can keep a clear conscience!", "I won't give birth if I'm dead!", "I refuse to be your martyr" and "We need doctors, not prosecutors!". As one of our interviewees, an organizer of protests in Gdańsk, recalled:

> Internet forums and Facebook groups were buzzing with emotions; women were talking about what is happening, they talked about their

> past experiences and understood how many women had to go through similar situations.
>
> (interview 29 September 2019, our translation)

The threat to women's health, freedom and dignity was widely perceived as grave, because Polish women routinely experience humiliation and debasement as patients, both in public hospitals and in private gynecological clinics. The report issued in 2018 by the Birth in a Dignified Way Foundation showed that 54% of women who gave birth the previous year experienced some form of violation of their rights while at the hospital: direct violence in the form of blackmail, threats, insults and the dehumanizing practice of tying the patient's legs to the hospital bed (Adamska-Sala et al. 2018). In 2017, a pro-choice network called the Great Coalition for Equality and Choice organized a contest for women participating in the protests, inviting them to present a short essay about their motivations for engaging in activism. One author focused on her experience in a public birth clinic:

> The public insurance (NFZ) package includes, at the very best, impatience and indifference from your doctor, as well as a standard dose of condescension and bad jokes. But if you are a "difficult patient" – that is, if you ask questions – you may expect humiliation and intimidation.
>
> (Zakrzewska 2017: 39)

Such experiences were also a common theme of talks among friends and on internet forums. Members of Facebook groups, such as Gals4Gals, often shared their horrible experiences, not only during birth, but also at routine checkups with gynecologists and general practitioners.

Focus on personal safety and dignity proved much more effective than abstract categories such as choice or reproductive rights, which had dominated feminist discourse in the preceding years. Highlighting concrete effects that the law might have on women's lives affected not only their expectations for the future but also their perceptions of the social conditions in which they were living (Hemmings 2012). Much of the Black Protest rhetoric was aimed to expose the split between the mainstream discourse on women's rights as being secure and the social reality in which their bodily integrity and a sense of security were under threat.

Thus, it is beyond doubt that the movement owed its success to its ability to mobilize powerful emotions. In this respect the Black Protests differed from earlier struggles for reproductive rights: they downplayed both human rights discourse and the liberal talk of individual choice, autonomy and the right to privacy. Instead, activists used language and imagery that were highly emotional and often dramatic. Slogans, chants, internet memes, signs and banners, made spontaneously by individual women, tended to take the expressive first-person form: e.g. "I am here because I am furious"; "I am here for my daughter's sake." The phrase "torture of women" was often used

to describe the essence of the proposed law. Many of the signs were provocative and confrontational: "Take your rosaries off my ovaries," or "We want doctors, not fanatics." The words "dignity," "suffering" and "cruelty" were used far more often than the emotionally neutral word "choice" (although the latter would also appear in slogans such as "My body – my choice"). Personal accounts, media interviews with activists and stories circulated in social media – all of these materials testify to a powerful emotional experience lived by individuals and immediately shared with the newly established activist community. These messages stirred strong collective affects. In the words of the local protest organizer:

> There was this moment [during the demonstration] when everyone wanted to show how many of us there are and how angry we are, and it was not a bad feeling – we could transform our anger into collective action.
>
> (in Murawska and Włodarczyk 2017: 3, our translation)

Information about the possible effects of the ban invoked a moral shock (Jasper 1997), analogously to cases of femicide and rape in Argentina or Spain. It is through powerful identification with victims of violence and cruel treatment, rather than contemplation of abstract rights, that these movements achieve their wide appeal. As Diana Broggi writes, the struggles for bodily autonomy, economic safety and dignity are all interconnected:

> [women] are the first to feel the effects of cuts to sexual and reproductive health, escalating violence, femicides, and the murder of transgender peoples – 2019 is already a record year for such crimes. Hence the slogan of today's Argentinian feminists rings out: "We're the ones with our bodies one the line."
>
> (2019)

Thus, in Argentina (Figure 6.2) and other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, people joined the ranks of protesters with slogans such as "Not one less!" or "We want ourselves alive!", whereas in Poland the banners declared: "Stop torturing women!" and "I am here for my daughter/sister/friend!". A similar dynamic was visible in Spain in summer 2019, where mass protests were organized in 250 towns and cities across the country, declaring "a feminist emergency" following a series of rape and femicide cases. The protesters were united by a fear for women's lives and the belief that they needed to fight together for a better future. As one of the organizers of the Spanish protests explained:

> This has been a summer dominated by barbarity, murders, rapes, assault, pedophilia and gang attacks. […] We can't let another school or

Figure 6.2 Demonstration on 8 March 2018. International Women's Strike, the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe and Free Abortion "Campaña Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito" Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Photo by Vale Dranovky

> parliamentary term begin as if nothing has happened. To do so would be to tolerate the intolerable. […] This is an emergency!
>
> (Jones 2019)

Such framing – the need to defend women against the immediate danger to their health and life – attracted not only women, but also men. As one of the participants of the Black Protests explained:

> I remember this father who came to the protest with his young daughter and the daughter asked him why they were there, what for. And the father said: I'm fighting for your future. I was very moved by this.
>
> (in Murawska and Włodarczyk 2017: 2, our translation)

This language, marked by powerful emotional investments, stands in stark contrast to institutionalized gender expertise, which often proves eerily compatible with neoliberal governance. The women engaged in the new wave of feminist mobilizations still relied on medical and legal expertise but

saturated it with desires and emotions as premises for building arguments and truth claims. Thus, embodied and affective feminist knowledge emerged as an alternative to both the ultraconservative language of anti-gender actors and the alienating discourse of gender experts, who talk about gender mainstreaming, quotas and "leaning-in" (Korolczuk 2020).

The privileging of common women's affects and knowledge is sometimes accompanied with ambivalence and distrust toward academic feminists and expert knowledge, echoing right-wing populism's distrust of official institutions of knowledge. Following the debates on the roots and effects of the Women's Strikes, some activists angrily rejected books and articles about the protests published by scholars. Academic studies were viewed as illegitimate appropriations and exploitation of ordinary women's lived experiences and work. Whereas feminist scholars, many of whom are also engaged in the Polish women's movement, viewed themselves as contributing to the struggle, offering useful knowledge and promoting the movement's achievements abroad, such a view has not necessarily been shared by the grassroots. This tension is symptomatic of the shift occurring in global feminism: a move toward what we call populist feminism, which situates itself in opposition to liberal elites, including established feminist circles.

Conclusions

We claim that the success of the Polish Women's Strike relied on the movement's capacity to capture the logic of populism for a progressive political project. Similar claims have been made about the new wave of feminist organizing worldwide. The movements grew by promoting the idea of commonness among participants ("ordinary women"), the disavowal of earlier engagements (one did not need to claim a "feminist" identity in order to join the revolution), and the employment of a powerful rhetorical and symbolic repertoire, one that mobilized collective affect ("dignity," "torture" and "cruelty" rather than "choice"). Abandoning the established liberal discursive frames of human rights, these movements built their power based on emotions, both personal and collective. In effect, a new collective subject was constituted in the public sphere: angry women with a strong political identity.

Interpreting Poland's Black Protests, Argentina's Ni Una Menos or Italy's Non Una di Meno as cases of "populist feminism" relies on a particular understanding of what populism is. If we were to follow Wodak's (2015) conceptualization of populism as an ideology necessarily connected to xenophobia and ethno-nationalism, such a description would make little sense. Feminist activists rejected both the ethno-nationalist definition of the people and the moralist frames of right-wing populism (i.e. the assumption that "ordinary people" are conservative and must be defended against "liberal elites"). However, if we move beyond such definitions, then three aspects

of the feminist movements in question may lead us to viewing them as examples of left populism.

First, feminist activists in various locations continue to reiterate the binarism of "people vs elites," which is central to populist mobilizations, and which is common to otherwise disparate definitions of populism proposed by such thinkers as Cas Mudde and Chantal Mouffe. The Black Protests positioned angry women (and the men who supported them) as "the people" in a struggle against ultraconservative "elites." Secondly, the wave of feminist activism that erupted around 2016 has effectively mobilized emotions such as anger, fear and solidarity, departing from the liberal feminist paradigm in which reasoned argumentation leads the way. Finally, the epistemic strategies employed by activists juxtapose common women's embodied knowledge against both the disembodied expertise of ultraconservative actors and liberal framework employed by mainstream women's movements (Korolczuk 2020). This type of knowledge production is characteristic of populist movements, which seek to challenge the establishment by undermining the authority of experts and academic institutions (Dean and Maiguashca 2020).

Clearly, the question of who are the people, who can represent them in the political arena and whose knowledge counts as legitimate knowledge are key issues in today's struggles. Consequently, it should not surprise us that the current feminist mobilization has attempted "to occupy populism by turning some of its key tenets on their head" (Emejulu 2017: 65). In Poland, women's struggle for reproductive freedom has been successfully enacted as a popular uprising, a struggle for democracy, and against the violence of right-wing populism. It has also turned out to be a left-wing movement, which readily supported protests of people with disabilities demanding state support and including among its goals a number of demands concerning care, social provisions for families and social justice. A similar tendency has been observed in other contexts: both Italy's Non Una di Meno and Argentina's Ni Una Menos emerged in response to gendered violence but soon expanded their agendas to include social justice demands (Arruzza and Bhattacharaya 2019).

As we put the final touches on this manuscript in October 2020, Polish women have yet again taken to the streets to protest against the ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal that deemed abortion illegal in cases of fetal abnormality. This wave of demonstrations was even more massive and more furious than the Women's Strike of 2016. As noted by many commentators it had many features of a revolution aimed at abolishing the authority of the Church as well as the government (Gessen 2020, Pacewicz 2020). The revolutionary spirit was evident in uncompromising demands (including the stepping down of the Law and Justice government), radical language (including profanities and explicit sexual references on banners and in speeches) and willingness to engage in confrontations with the police. The tendency to frame the movement's aims in populist terms is even more visible

than it was in 2016: stressing the opposition between the arrogant, hateful political elites and the masses whose righteous anger and desperation have brought them to the streets in the midst of the pandemic has become the staple of the movement's discourse.

The mass women's movements, which have emerged in recent years in countries such as Poland, Argentina and Italy, challenge not only gender conservative policies and discourses but also the political logic that drives right-wing populists and autocrats. As Margaret Canovan (2005) has argued, over the last two centuries the belief that people's consent is the only legitimate basis of power has become commonplace, but the questions of who are the people and who can represent them have remained open. Today's feminist actors propose a definition of the people radically different from that offered by right-wing populists. Instead of highlighting homogeneity, morality and the need for national sovereignty, women's movements embrace plurality, intersectionality and global solidarity. Whether or not we believe in Chantal Mouffe's claim that left populism is the only effective response to the current ultraconservative, illiberal trend, the analyses of contemporary struggles over gender show that they are, in fact, struggles over the definition of democracy, representation and political community.

Conclusion
Gender in the populist moment

Gender is no distraction from real politics; it resides at the heart of politics today, both as a set of specific policy issues and as the nexus of a symbolic struggle, a space where differences are negotiated and defined. Not a marginal controversy, no mere "cultural" issue, gender has become a site of powerful and often violent conflict. The anti-gender campaigns feed on religious sentiments and employ moralizing discourse, but their spread can only be properly understood in the context of the rise of right-wing political forces seeking ideological and affective means for gaining hegemony.

Anti-genderism is not just another wave of backlash, one that may be peculiar to the post-socialist context. Nor is it simply a tactic of the Vatican in its ongoing efforts to undermine gender equality. It is a new ideological and political configuration, a transnational phenomenon with outposts in both West and East. While the backlash of the 1980s and 1990s combined neoconservatism with market fundamentalism (which is to some extent still the case with neoconservative Christian fundamentalists in the United States and in other countries, such as Brazil), the new wave of right-wing populism in Europe skillfully links gender conservatism with a critique of neoliberalism and globalization. This combination has remarkable ideological coherence and great mobilizing power: right-wing populists have captured the hearts and imaginations of large portions of local populations more effectively than progressive movements have managed to do. The coherence of this worldview relies on three persistent equivalencies linking the cultural with the economic and the political: Western liberal elites are equated with the global political and economic elite; neoliberalism as a source of suffering and injustice is equated with individualism as a value system and ideological project; population and gender equality policies are interpreted as a new phase of global colonialism.

Throughout this book, our aim has been to understand the internal logic of anti-genderism as an ideology, the strategies of anti-gender campaigns and the different ways in which people relate to these socially conservative discourses and movements. Our principal ambition, however, was to theorize the complex relationship between anti-gender campaigns and the rise of right-wing populism. To this end we developed the concept of

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opportunistic synergy to show that anti-genderism is neither an autonomous religious movement, which made its way into politics, nor an intrinsic feature of the right-wing populist worldview. While we acknowledge the role of the Vatican in initiating opposition against "gender ideology" and the significance of gendered nationalism and social conservatism within populism, it is our view that anti-genderism owes its power to the way it combines religious, political and cultural dimensions.

We argue that the anti-gender mobilization has played an important role in the consolidation of the populist right as a transnational movement, one that successfully harnesses the anxiety, shame and anger caused by neoliberalism. In country after country, anti-gender actors have built alliances with right-wing populists: together they have attacked the rights of women, sexual and ethnic minorities, promoting what conservatives call "family values." The various episodes which we observed in different contexts – campaigns against abortion and sex education, efforts to stop the ratification of the Istanbul Convention and attacks against the LGBT community – add up to a transnational phenomenon at the intersection of culture, religion and politics, which links different actors and often disparate ideological agendas.

Anti-genderism is politically effective not because of the persuasive power of the arguments it makes about "gender," but due to its relationship with right-wing populism. The *opportunistic synergy* plays out on two levels: ideological/discursive and strategic/organizational. Since populism is not a robust ideological project, but a thin-centered ideology (Mudde 2004; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017), it readily feeds on narrative structures and arguments promoted by the anti-gender movement. Simultaneously, the actors behind anti-gender campaigns use the organizational and financial resources offered by political parties, especially in contexts such as Poland where populists are in power. What facilitates this collusion is not so much an intrinsic social conservatism of populist politicians, but the fact that the ultraconservative critiques of gender have been framed in populist terms and are thus readily adaptable to populist politics. The movement presents itself as a necessary and courageous defense of the people (often in their private roles as parents) against powerful and foreign liberal elites, with "gender ideology" emphatically identified as a modern version of (Western) colonialism. The affective power of the anti-colonial frame has been a key factor in mobilizing the masses against sex education, gender equality policies or the LGBT community. This frame is remarkably flexible: in Western countries it is used to evoke shame and guilt in liberal elites ("you are the colonizers, shame on you!"), whereas in Eastern Europe it tends to merge with a sense of wounded pride and opposition against the patronizing attitudes of Western actors ("you are being colonized, it's time to resist!"). The violence of systemic transformation paved the way for contemporary right-wing populists who promise a corrective to the effects of the neoliberal revolution. The Polish case is both context-specific and paradigmatic for this global phenomenon. While the choreography of local and transnational cooperation

varies over time and space, the ideological and organizational links between these forces are common. Key players include the Vatican, U.S. religious fundamentalists, Russian ultraconservative actors and right-wing politicians from around the world.

It is worth noting that not everyone who opposes "gender" as a concept is an anti-genderist in the sense employed in this book. For example, the American alt-right is notorious for its anti-feminist stance (Nagle 2017; Strick 2020; Wendling 2018), but the alt-right framing of opposition to "gender" differs significantly from the views of the anti-gender movement. Breitbart news has occasionally reported on "gender ideology," e.g. critiquing families that raise their children in non-gendered ways, but it did so in a mocking and irreverent tone. To the alt-right, the concept of gender as used in academia is an outrage to rational thinking, but it is viewed as ludicrous rather that truly dangerous. In contrast, anti-genderists gathered in networks such as Agenda Europe or TFP view "genderists" as a powerful force undermining the very foundations of Judeo-Christian civilization. Moreover, the alt-right's stand on gender is primarily misogynistic and racist, it is the position of "angry white men" as Michael Kimmel (2013) put it in his influential book. In contrast, anti-genderism expresses the ethos of traditional family in which open misogyny is replaced by a cult of fatherhood and what they call the natural order. One of the most recognizable leaders of the American alt-right, Steve Bannon, devoted several years to establishing an alliance with European right-wing populists and the radical right, such as AfD, Vox, the Brothers of Italy and Fidesz, apparently without much success (Serhan 2019). We have yet to see what role gender will play in this new initiative, if indeed it gains some influence in the future. It is clear, however, that the relationship between socially conservative right-wing groups that attack "gender ideology," the alt-right milieu and the European radical right deserves further research.

As we have shown in this book, anti-gender coalitions sometimes include politicians and organizations with openly fascist leanings. Moreover, ultraconservatives occasionally employ rhetorical tropes whose roots can easily be traced to the fascist imaginaries from the interwar period, e.g. when attacking George Soros as leader of a clandestine Jewish elite ruling the world or when vilifying minority groups for spreading diseases, moral chaos and corruption. Some of the core images of the anti-gender narrative – such as malleable masses manipulated by devious elites, collective identities in danger of dissolution and the dark vision of the West as a dying civilization – bear strong resemblance to fascist narratives circulated in 1930s France and Germany (Sanos 2012; Theweleit 1987). These ideological roots and identities are often effectively masked or sanitized by the seemingly apolitical discourse about family and children (Dietze and Roth 2020a). Anti-genderism appears to be not only a meta-discourse binding together various forces on the right, but also a safe haven for its most radical fringes.

These connections and mechanisms of concealment clearly deserve further analysis.

We claim that anti-gender rhetoric is best understood as a reactionary critique of neoliberalism as a socio-cultural formation. In contrast to left-wing critiques of the neoliberal regime, which focus on economic injustice, the anti-gender movement tends to moralize the phenomenon it opposes. Thus, what the left calls "neoliberalism" the right will call "rampant individualism" or "consumerism"; what to feminists is a "crisis of care" the right redefines as "crisis of the family"; the demographic trends framed by left feminism as a "reproductive strike" appear as a "culture of death" or "abortion as genocide" in the ultraconservative vocabulary. Instead of naming the problem in socio-economic terms, as injustice and exploitation, anti-genderism presents the world of capitalism's winners as degenerate and morally corrupt, an emotional wasteland destroyed by greed and consumption. While we are far from claiming that these two frames have equal claims to truth, we do insist that the ultraconservative frame cannot be dismissed as a mere smokescreen for what is really a neoliberal agenda. In the United States, neoliberal policymakers identified the family as an alternative to the welfare state, thus legitimizing cuts to health, education and welfare budgets (Cooper 2017; Brown 2019). But despite its American connections, the global anti-gender movement is not an expanded version of U.S. neoconservatism. As we have demonstrated, the European anti-gender actors often implement "family values" through redistributive state policies. Rather than accepting the function of promoters of family values in a neoliberal state, they position themselves as experts on social policy in what is to become an ultraconservative chauvinist-welfare state. They gain public resonance by introducing a host of social policies targeted at traditional families, and by critiquing the ethos of individualism which is central to neoliberalism, identifying the latter with modern-era feminism.

Much of the material examined in this book belies the easy distinction between left and right, whereby "left" means culturally progressive and economically egalitarian, and "right" means socially conservative and pro-market. Our findings are consistent with scholarship showing the ongoing realignment of the political scene: a shift from the left-right continuum to a division between cosmopolitan liberals and conservative populists (Norris and Inglehart 2019; Piketty 2018). Given this new mapping, it is necessary to examine not only the differences but also the possible convergences between left feminist and socially conservative critiques of neoliberalism. While it is tempting to deal with the similarities between the two worldviews by dismissing them as symptoms of a hostile takeover or appropriation of left-wing discourse by right-wing actors, this is a path we did not take in this book. As Wendy Brown eloquently puts it, there exists:

> a left political moralizing impulse that wants everything the right stands for to be driven by nefariousness, smallness, or greed, and everything

> we do to be generously minded and good, and impulse that casts Us and Them in seamless and opposing moral-political universes.
>
> (2006: 690–691)

Given the contemporary political and social landscape, the progressive strategy should be to go against such an impulse. Instead, we need to understand the internal logic of right-wing populist critiques of neoliberalism, their uses and abuses of "gender" and the sources of their emotional appeal. The strategies employed by anti-genderists are heavily reliant on the use of emotions and sometimes involve the circulation of lies, misconceptions and false rumors, but they also reflect a coherent worldview and express deeply held convictions and attachments. While we disagree with the ideological claims and condemn the violence that sometimes results from them, we are often convinced of the sincerity of the people who are attracted by such arguments. The core narrative of anti-genderism is so effective because it responds to the tensions which accompany the populist moment. The anti-gender movement effectively harnesses the unmet demands for a voice, inclusion and agency, while pointing to liberal elites as those who should be held responsible for the current crisis. These elites, including feminists, gays and promoters of "gender ideology," are portrayed as guilty of having shamed ordinary people who live ordinary lives. Anti-genderism presents itself as a response to this shaming, a way to regain collective dignity, a sense of pride and solidarity. It also offers a forum for collective action and a vague promise of a brighter future which this action will bring about: you can save the world by being a good parent, by loving your wife or husband and by opposing the forces of corruption.

Are progressive actors helpless vis-à-vis this framing? The logic of the populist moment as described by Mouffe (2018) offers an opportunity to reclaim the initiative. Feminism is for the elites and has nothing to do with the concerns of ordinary women – this old backlash myth has taken on a new life in the era of anti-gender campaigns, which have successfully equated feminism with capitalism. The recipe for success in countering this attack is to claim the role of "the people" for women and other minority groups, and to harness the emotional power of solidarity and hope. The problem is not merely that Western feminism has allied too closely to neoliberalism, as some socialist feminists have convincingly shown (Eisenstein 2012; Fraser 2009). What is perhaps an even greater challenge is that the right has at the same time successfully framed feminism as a form of capitalism. As feminists we need to acknowledge that we have lost the monopoly on a gendered critique of neoliberalism. Not only has the right successfully appealed to many economically and culturally marginalized groups, but it has harnessed the grievances against late capitalism that are specific to women: the crisis of care, the devaluation of reproductive work and motherhood. If feminism is to respond to these developments effectively, it will have to do more than to denounce its alliance with neoliberalism and reclaim its socialist face. The

feminism of the future should be a feminism for the 99 percent (Arruzza et al. 2019), but one that avoids economic reductionism and embraces affective solidarity as the basis for collective action. The struggle over values is real, and not a mere smokescreen for economic conflicts. Our analysis suggests that this new feminism, able to respond adequately to the challenge of the populist moment, has already emerged at the grassroots level in various locations.

With gender becoming a key battleground for the redefinition of the political scene, feminism has stepped in as a major political actor. Contrary to liberal thinkers and commentators who want to blame feminism and so-called identity politics for the onslaught of right-wing populism (e.g. Lilla 2017), we believe that it is the blindness of liberalism and liberal feminism to the problems of care and social politics that has facilitated their opponents' successes in channeling opposition to neoliberalism. Right-wing populism presents itself as a legitimate alterative to the neoliberal paradigm, offering welfare chauvinism and re-traditionalization as the only feasible solution to the crisis of care. The women's movements that have emerged in response to this movement are also a challenge to neoliberalism. What all the recent feminist mobilizations have in common is that they position women as "the people," they tend to have a left orientation and are often developed in cooperation with other marginalized groups. Feminism allies include labor unions in Spain, leftist organizations working with migrants and refugees in Italy, movements for racial justice in the United States, whereas in Poland the new feminism has joined forces with people with disabilities, nurses and care workers. These movements position themselves as opponents of the neoliberal elite which sustains the patriarchy. Feminist activists denounce these elites employing a language that privileges emotion and affects over appeals to common sense and individual rights. They speak of dignity, truth and solidarity; they valorize ordinary women's embodied knowledge and experience, using social media for sharing personal narratives and building affective communities. We claim that the new feminism shares many core features with populism, and thus it can be interpreted as a left populist force, poised to challenge right-wing hegemony in the populist moment. While this book did not examine broader left populist movements, such as, for example, the Spanish Podemos, our analysis clearly suggests that in order to be effective such movements must take the gender dimension of the current crisis more seriously than they have done in the past. It is not enough to "add" a feminist perspective to the left-wing agenda. It is about the realization that, as Nancy Fraser puts it: "today struggles over social reproduction are at the cutting edge of left-wing, anti-systemic, anticapitalist struggle, and women are at the forefront" (Martinez 2019b).

This book is an invitation to reconsider the ongoing democratic backsliding – the crisis of liberalism and the rise of the populist right – as a process deeply intertwined with global struggles over gender, the family and reproduction. Conversely, we suggest that anti-feminist mobilizations

cannot be viewed in isolation from broader political dynamics but rather as a key part of the resurgence of right-wing populism. The anti-gender campaigns examined in this book are symptomatic of a major realignment in global politics in which post-material conflicts of values displace the left-right division formulated around economic issues and the role of the state. It is only by taking struggles over "gender" into account that we can understand the affective and epistemological dimensions of the current rise of the populist right.

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