

14. The Anti Gender Movement in Comparative Perspective

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Despite national specificities, which result among others from specific policy debates, power relations and the role of religious organizations in each country, numerous similarities can be discerned in the strategies and the rhetoric used by anti-gender activists across Europe. It is also interesting to pinpoint that the East-West divide does not offer a particularly useful lens to study these mobilizations. Despite the fact that some differences can be accredited to the historical and political contexts of Eastern European countries, this division does not have a major explanatory power, for the basic “discursive and strategic alphabet” is the same across Europe. These similarities rather show that anti-gender campaigns are neither mere national trends nor isolated occurrences, but take part into an organized transnational – and increasingly global – phenomenon, which we identify as the anti-gender movement.

By using the notion of anti-gender movement, we aim to describe the mobilizations and campaigns against gender which have appeared since the late 1990s in several European countries and elsewhere (particularly in Latin America). We want to insist on a specific type of mobilization and we claim that these mobilizations, which have often been studied separately, can be gathered under a single notion. These countries are facing specific forms of mobilization which should not be understood as mere reiterations of the past but rather as new forms of mobilization against gender and sexual equality. Indeed, as described in this book, a common pattern of mobilization can be observed across borders, including a shared discourse, a traveling repertoire of action, and similar strategies. Despite a diversity of triggers at national level, all these mobilizations address “gender ideology” or “gender theory” as the root cause of the

reforms they want to combat. For this reason, we gather them under the label of anti-gender movements (see also Kováts 2017).

With this notion, we also want to distance ourselves from competing notions, such as ‘counter movement’, ‘polarization’ or ‘conservative/reactionary movement’. Unlike the notion of counter movement, we do not necessarily locate the anti-gender movement in relation to another movement, such as the feminist or the LGBT movement, which often precedes the counter-movement and would explain its emergence (Mottl 1980; Lo 1982). Although scholars have tried to develop subtler approaches to the movement/counter-movement dynamics (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996, Dorf and Tarrow 2014, Ayoub and Chetaille 2017), most accounts still rely on a rather mechanical understanding and are generally modeled after the specific historical experience of the United States. Moreover, the dynamics in play are not only restricted to civil society organizations and call for a more complex understanding of the actors involved. Indeed, the state also combats “gender ideology” in Russia or in Poland, and it may support these struggles abroad, as shown by Russia again and by the Vatican. Finally, some of the chapters clearly show that anti-gender movements are not necessarily direct reactions to massive or influential campaigns, but can be unleashed as a prophylaxis, a preventive means to impede the development of specific claims.

We are equally worried by the scientific and political implications of notions such as polarization (Altman and Symonds 2016) and culture wars (Hunter 1992, Kaoma 2009, Mondo 2014. For a critical account see Ozzano and Giorgi 2015). Again, these notions mirror to a large extent the US experience of the emergence of the Christian Right, which happened at another time and in a much less globalized context, or interpret these campaigns as an export from the United States, overlooking the

homegrown roots of the phenomenon. More crucially, popular – and to a lesser extent scientific – usages of these notions do not only encapsulate these mobilizations into binary categories, but often imply normative considerations about the actors, falling into and reinforcing a series of additional binary oppositions such as the goods vs. the evils, the moderns vs. the ancients etc. Such oppositions impede us from understanding the internal diversity within each camp, as well as the multiple positionings outside or across them. They also obscure the analysis by pushing anti-gender activists into the darkness of the past, depicting them as warriors fighting against the course of history. The same could be said of the notions of conservative (e.g. Agrikoliansky and Collovald 2014) or reactionary (e.g. Lamoureux and Dupuis-Deri 2016) movements, which often take the definition of conservative or reactionary politics for granted instead of leaving it opened for discussion.¹

To offer a sketch of anti-gender movements in Europe today, we will answer three questions, using the chapters presented in this volume to build a comparative and transnational account of anti-gender mobilizations in Europe. First, what are the specificities and the commonalities of these mobilizations in Europe? In this section, we will provide a comparative overview of these movements, and discuss targets, actors, strategies and rhetorical tropes, allowing us to bring them under the same analytical category. We also examine the specific role of religion, with a focus on the Catholic Church. Second, how do we explain their differences across borders and the specific forms they take in specific contexts? As national chapters have made clear, mobilizations were massive in some countries while they remained almost confidential in others. Third, how do such forms of mobilization travel across borders, both within and outside of Europe? This will allow us to discuss the diffusion across

borders, the increasing structuration of these movements at European level and their connections to actors in other parts of the world.

Overview of The Anti-gender Movement in Europe

In this section, we discuss the commonalities of these mobilizations in targets, actors, strategies and rhetorical tropes across national case studies. As described in the introduction, discussions on “gender ideology” started globally around 1994-1995 as a reaction to the Cairo and Beijing conferences. This discourse was elaborated between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s, a process which culminated with the publication of the *Lexicon: Ambiguous and Debatable Terms Regarding Family Life and Ethical Questions* in 2003. However, mobilizations on the ground did not emerge until later. This probably corresponds to the time needed for this discourse to be propagated and for activists to mobilize a wider constituency.

Spain appears as the earliest case in Europe: from 2004, the Church, conservative groups and political parties mobilized against the government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and the same-sex marriage bill (Aguilar Fernandez 2010, 2013). Early mobilizations have also been identified in Croatia where sex education has been at the center of the debate since 2006, in Italy with the 2007 Family Day against the *Diritti e doveri delle persone stabilmente Conviventi* (DICO), a local form of civil partnership, and in Slovenia where the 2009 government’s proposal to open up marriage to same-sex couples encouraged the establishment of the civil initiative which is still at the core of the anti-gender movement. Interestingly, the notion of “gender ideology” was

not necessarily central at the time, although these mobilizations resemble and undoubtedly precede the ones which spread across Europe in the 2010s. In Spain, “gender ideology” appeared in Church documents in 2001, but it neither reached mainstream media nor was it seized upon by activists until 2005-2006. In Italy, the notion was also used in closed circles soon after the publication of the Lexicon, but did not make its way onto the streets until recently. Finally, in Croatia, the group GROZD started to use it in 2006, claiming that gender is a “feminist figment” (Kuhar, 2015).

In most countries however, mobilizations started in the 2010s, with 2012 appearing as a turning point. As discussed in the next section, these mobilizations were all triggered by a specific policy debate, which may vary across countries. Furthermore, in several countries, mass mobilizations were preceded by smaller forms of protest and sometimes by confidential discussions of the issue. Two models may be discerned, depending on the political context. In the most common one, movements come into existence in reaction to a proposed policy and present themselves in opposition to clearly identified actors such as feminists, LGBT activists, specific elites etc. In some cases, however, they mobilize on the basis of a reverse and more preventive model. While they may react to the development of certain policies internationally, these reforms are not yet tabled in their own countries and the mobilization aims at preventing them from emerging. This happened, for instance, in Croatia (Hodžič and Štulhofer in this volume) and in Slovakia (Smrek, 2015), where anti-gender movements anticipated possible bills for marriage equality and called for a constitutional referendum to change their national constitutions before LGBT activists and their allies could move forward.

Targets

The targets of anti-gender movements include concerns defined by Diane Richardson (2000) as the essence of sexual citizenship: issues related to control over one's physical body, possibilities of self-realization through one's identity and social protection in the context of legal recognition of (non-heteronormative) partnerships. Actual targets, however, depend on the opportunities offered by national policy debates. In the foregoing chapters, authors have identified five clusters of rights and issues attacked by anti-gender activists: LGBT rights, reproductive rights, sex and gender education, gender studies, and democracy. Not all these issues are attacked in every country, and they may be combined in different ways and contested at different times. However, their development is always connected to 'gender ideology' in one way or another: Even in the few countries where gender as such is rarely explicitly addressed, most arguments derived from this theoretical frame.

LGBT rights – particularly civil partnership and the opening up of civil marriage to same-sex couples – appear as a powerful trigger, as confirmed by early campaigns in Spain and Italy. Marriage equality was also the main catalyzer for the French protests (2012-13) and the referendum campaigns in Slovenia (2009-2012, 2014-2015). The attempts of the anti-gender movements to prevent marriage equality proposals by defining marriage as a union of a man and a woman were successful in Croatia (2013) and unsuccessful in Slovakia (2015). Similar developments could take place in Romania in December 2016. Reversely, Ireland saw the development of a rather limited anti-gender mobilization during its referendum on marriage equality (2015). It has to be noted that unlike Croatian or Slovak referendums, the Irish referendum was

not initiated by anti-gender activists but was a consequence of constitutional provisions: any amendment to the Constitution of Ireland has to be made by referendum.

The visibility and the media resonance of same-sex marriage struggles might give the misleading impression that the protection of (traditional) marriage is the only issue on the anti-gender agenda. Opposition to LGBT rights, however, also includes concerns about access to kinship by (gay and lesbian) individuals and same-sex couples, including fierce debates on second-parent and joint same-sex adoption, surrogacy, and reproductive technologies. Often, anti-gender activists claim they defend the best interest of a child against the “egoistic wishes and desires” of adults, and pretend to warn citizens about a slippery slope: same-sex marriage would necessary lead to more controversial policy reforms in the near future, which would overthrow the traditional model of family in Europe. Surprisingly, while Pope Benedict and Pope Francis have repeatedly denounced transgenderism, transgender rights have rarely been attacked by anti-gender activists, including when the issue was discussed in Parliament, as in France in 2016. Yet, a few exceptions can be identified, such as the 2015 Slovenian referendum campaign, during which transgender people were objectified as the ultimate goal of gender ideologists.

As discussed in the introduction, reproductive rights were historically the first target of “gender ideology”, and issues like abortion, contraception and reproductive technologies remain at the center of the debate (Grabowska 2014, Heinen 2013). This was obvious in Spain, where the conservative government tried to limit access to abortion when it came back to power in 2011. More recently, the proposal of the Polish ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party to ban abortion appears as the result of a similar kind of mobilization. While the proposal was dropped after the so-called

“black protest” (October 3, 2016) where tens of thousands of people, dressed in black, boycotted work and school to protest against the proposal, it stirred debate in other countries. In Slovenia, for example, an anti-abortion group staged a 24/7 screening of a pro-life movie on the outside walls of the church during the Polish protest of October 2016. This screening lasted for a week and received public support from anti-gender activists.

It has to be said, though, that attacks against reproductive rights rarely take the form of mass mobilizations such as the ones stirred by LGBT rights. They are more insidious in countries like Belgium, France, or Italy, taking the form, for instance, of an increase of conscientious objection by doctors (Marques-Pereira and Pereira 2014). Often, while they are more recurrent over time, they also gather less people, as shown in Croatia, Spain, or Slovenia, where a few activists have been praying for 40 days outside of gynecological clinics to protect unborn children as part of the mostly American-based campaign 40 days for Life.¹ Ireland might become an exception: after their failure in the marriage referendum, activists are now mobilizing against abortion, which will be one of the main issues on the agenda in the near future. Finally, abortion is sometimes connected to euthanasia through the notion of “culture of death”. While the issue is not discussed in most countries under study, this is the main terrain of the small Belgian anti-gender movement (Voyé and Dobbelaere 2015).

Sex and gender education in schools appear as a third area of discontent. Since 2006, Croats have been discussing different modules of sexual education in schools, in which gender equality and homosexuality appear to be contentious issues (Bijelić, 2008, Hodžić et al., 2012, Kuhar, 2015). Similarly, French mobilizations started with a discussion about the insertion of gender in textbooks in 2011 (Béraud 2013). In all

¹ See: <https://40daysforlife.com/browse-campaigns/>

these cases, opponents invoke the figure of the innocent child and claim to combat any form of indoctrination at school while defending the parents' freedom to raise and educate their children in accordance with their moral and religious beliefs. Debates on the sexualization of the child also offer a fertile background to such mobilizations, particularly in Germany.

Gender itself has been under discussion. Beyond the debates on the notion itself, which can be found in almost every country under study, three issues directly connected to gender relations have been targeted: gender violence, gender mainstreaming, and gender studies. Polish debates started in 2012 in opposition to the ratification of the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Graff 2014). Similarly, in Slovenia, anti-gender activist claimed that this Convention would turn "gender ideology" into the official ideology of the state. Similar debates took place in Spain, when the right came back to power in 2011. While combating gender violence was a priority of Zapatero's presidency, conservative politicians long refused to use the term "gender", preferring the concept of domestic violence (on similar debates in Mexico, Lapalus 2015).

As reminded by Gabriele Kuby's quote in the introduction, gender mainstreaming was at the core of the debate in Germany and Austria. According to activists, it is a totalitarian ideology and non-democratic practice, imposed on European countries by the feminist lobbies and elites from Brussels. They regard it as a destabilizing policy tool, which does not take the natural differences between men and women into consideration. Some claim even further that, as equality between men and women would have already been reached, gender mainstreaming would serve to discriminate against men, eliminate biological sex, and destroy the institution of family.

Gender was thirdly discussed in connection to gender studies and the existence of gender curricula and gender departments at universities. Often brushed aside as a waste of public money, gender studies are constructed as ideological and non-scientific, and the anti-gender project appears as a struggle over the legitimacy of knowledge production. In some countries, anti-gender activists have even either deliberately misinterpreted results from social science studies or have quoted methodologically malformed studies, such as the work by US Catholic sociologist Mark Regnerus (Moore and Stambolis-Ruhstorfer 2013, Manning, Fetro and Lamidi 2014) or by US essayist Judith Reisman (Hodžić and Štulhofer in this volume, Kuhar 2015).

Finally, protesters discuss the very notion of democracy. They claim the popular will has been confiscated by corrupt elites, and argue “gender ideology” is a new form of totalitarianism. Particularly in post-socialist Europe, they equate it with (new) Marxism and the communist political regime in order to emphasize its undemocratic character. They mobilize to defend their rights and present anti-discrimination policies as attempts to curtail the freedom of speech. This is the very meaning of the Italian movement the *Sentinelle*, which first mobilized to oppose a law against homophobia. More recently, these actors have claimed that they defend religious freedom and denounce rising forms of “christianophobia” in Europe, for instance by forcing Catholics to act or speak against their conscience and their beliefs. In order to support their claims they often make explicit connections to the situation of Christians in the Middle East (Anderson 2015, Eberstadt 2016).

Actors and Allies

The anti-gender movement encompasses a complex constellation of actors in each country: family associations, anti-abortion groups, religious conservatives, Catholic dignitaries, nationalists and populists, far right groups etc. The main actors are of three types: already existing and sometimes well-established groups, newly established ones, and allies. In several countries, a generational shift has been noticed, with the emergence of a new generation of activists. For them, these campaigns may constitute a foundational moment in the same way May 68 was considered as a milestone by progressive forces in Western Europe (Brustier 2014). In this context, gender appears as the symbolic glue or the empty signifier that allows the emergence of such coalitions, especially when actors do not share the same ideological framework (Kováts & Põim, 2015). It squeezes different discourse into one big threat that different actors can connect to, and appears as a unifying ground because it is constructed as an attack on at least one of the three Ns defended by these actors: nature, the nation, and normality. These three Ns operate as entry points into the movement.

The first group encompasses actors who existed before the emergence of the movement and have used “gender ideology” as a means to re-launch their activism. This is for instance the case of anti-abortion groups, who found a way to revive their activism in several countries (Avanza 2015, Brébant and Vanderpelen 2015). Other pre-existing actors include family groups and men’s rights and father’s rights groups; far-right and religious organizations, conservative institutes, associations of (local) politicians, and faith-based professional organizations, such as Catholic organizations of lawyers, teachers, doctors etc.

A second group includes newly established groups which were specifically created to combat “gender ideology”. Civil initiatives and groups of concerned citizens, such as the *Manif pour Tous* (France, Italy), *Generazione Famiglia* (Italy), *Demo für Alle* (Germany), *U ime obitelji* (Croatia), or *Civilna iniciativa za družino in pravice otrok* (Slovenia). They often initiate anti-gender campaigns, are the ones appearing in the media, and may unite (pre-existing) organizations or work as an umbrella. Other newly established groups include associations or committees of elective representatives, such as the parliamentary committee STOP Gender Ideology in the Polish parliament, and dissident groups which are derivatives from existing organizations, often because of disagreements with the original group (e.g. the *Printemps français* in France). Finally, anti-gender campaigns have led to the creation of new political parties in countries like Slovenia or Croatia. There, the initial success – particularly in the case of referendums – encouraged the leaders of the movement to transform it into a political party and consequently stabilize what was initially an ad-hoc organization.

Allies form the third group of actors. These are extremely diverse: academics, politicians, or media actors. Some are intellectuals and academics, and may be discredited in academic circles. They often deny being part of the movement, although they act as (independent) experts providing a (scientific) backup for the movement’s causes. Academic departments and institutions may also be strongly involved, such as the Sociology Faculty at Moscow State University, and the Russian Academy of Sciences in Russia, the University established by the Hungarian National Bank, which has appointed Gabriele Kuby, or the Spanish Universidad de Navarra.

Political parties and individual politicians may also engage with anti-gender campaigns. Some political parties have supported the movement to attract more voters,

to improve their public image or to increase their visibility. This is the case – to a certain extent – of conservative or Christian-democratic parties in countries such as France, Spain, Slovenia or Croatia. Such support, however, may not last: In Spain, the *Partido Popular* endorsed these campaigns when opposing the socialist government but rapidly tried to publicly distance itself from them when it came back to power in 2011. In other parts of Europe, like Poland and Russia, the “gender ideology” discourse may become a central part of the party agenda and eventually a state policy if this party comes to power. In most countries, (far)-right parties are the main allies. They may have a Catholic or other Christian background, but are also attracted on the basis of its populist and nationalist potential and its essentializing discourse. Finally, individual politicians may be central figures in these campaigns and embody them both in public debate and in parliament.

Friendly media groups are a third type of movement’s allies. Although the movement skillfully uses the potential of social media, the support it receives from sympathetic (conservative and right-wing) media is substantial and crucial for the reinforcement of anti-gender discourse in public debates. In some countries, these may be major media outlets. Conservative and religious groups may also have their own channels which can be used to promote the campaigns.

Three additional remarks are needed. First, the number of actors and groups that constitute the anti-gender movement vary significantly in each country. In some, the networks of actors are extensive and potentially competitive, and they may address – sometimes strategically – different constituencies. In other contexts, networks are small and the movement might be represented by just one or two organizations or – as they often called themselves – a group of concerned citizens.

Second, some of these actors are empty nutshells. They display a facade organization which gives the impression of being an actual organization and simulates the existence of an extensive network. Similarly, research has shown that the same actors often assume different positions in different organizations: one person can be the president of an organization, a board member in another, the founding member of a third one etc. Close family connections have also been identified in countries like Croatia, where nearly all organizations under the anti-gender movement umbrella, stem from a few families. Finally, an overlap between anti-gender movements and – often transnational – religious and political organizations like the Opus Dei, the Neocatechumenal Way or Tradition, Family and Property has been noticed.

Third, women play a distinctive role in many of these organizations, also as leaders. This is not a new phenomenon, as research on the United States has indicated (Ozzano 2014, Schreiber 2008). Campaigns also heavily rely on the activism of numerous anonymous women, sometimes acting out of their gendered role as mothers (Avanza 2015). Similarly, several of these movements display an active participation of openly gay men and women, such as in France and in Slovenia. Sometimes intersecting with the figure of the repentant homosexual, they participate in the image of modernity and inclusiveness often promoted in these campaigns. Finally, campaigns may give a voice to children raised in same-sex families, as in Ireland during the marriage referendum.

The Religious Dimension

Most of the chapters insist on the role of organized religion, mainly Roman Catholicism, in building and sustaining the movement. As we have shown in the introduction, the emergence of “gender ideology” is closely intertwined with debates and strategies of the Roman Catholic Church, especially at the Vatican. At national level, Catholics also play a key role, although they are neither the only actors involved nor necessarily the most important ones. In some countries, priests have read official documents about the danger of gender sent by their hierarchy during the Sunday mass, distributed the movement’s leaflets in the church or even helped the parishioners go to voting stations and demonstrations.

While the bishops and other religious dignitaries may not be the driving forces of the movement and are not always visible in national campaigns, research has shown that most leaders are active in Catholic circles, although they might publicly deny such connection and present their organizations as non-confessional, secular or ecumenical. In line with the “New Evangelization” strategies discussed in the introduction, these lay Catholics, who depict themselves as “concerned” citizens or a victimized and silenced majority, often advocate the public role of religion and mobilize on the basis of their faith (Casanova 1994, Giorgi and Polizzi 2015, Vaggione 2005). Furthermore, as illustrated by the cases of Croatia or Slovenia, civil initiatives may sometimes be regarded as Church’s satellite organizations, established to work on behalf of or in close connection with the Church. In such a context, as discussed in the introduction, the Catholic Church as an organization appears as a fundamental discourse producer, and a space for intellectuals and activists to meet and exchange views and strategies, as well as an extremely powerful mobilization and diffusion network (Béraud 2014: 346, Paternotte 2015, Robcis 2015).

Having said this, the actual cooperation between anti-gender movement and the Roman Catholic Church varies significantly: From very few connections to the Church in Germany to closely intertwined collaborations, where the Church is a key actor of the movement, such as in Poland and to a certain extent in Spain and in Italy. From our study, the role of the Catholic Church and its support depends on its position in each country: the more the Church is regarded as a moral and a national authority (Gryzmala-Busse 2015), the more its actors play visible and front-line roles in the anti-gender movement. The nature of connections to the Vatican, especially under Pope Benedict, is another important factor. For instance, the precocity of Spanish protests in the mid-2000s, which were mounted by some of Spain's leading bishops, are partly explained by the close relations between the German Pope and the national ecclesiastic authorities, in particular Cardinal Rouco Varela (Vidal 2014). Similarly, the Vatican remains a crucial actor in Italian Catholicism. Reversely, the Belgian or the German national churches – two countries where anti-gender campaigns are limited and where the Church is not a key actor – have long distanced themselves from the Vatican's orthodoxy. In the same vein, the Catholic dimension of the campaign is often downplayed in countries where the Church's reputation has been compromised by sexual and/or financial scandal, such as in Ireland or Slovenia.² This also seems to be the case in widely secularized countries, where a public intervention of the Church would not be easily understood and could jeopardize its official status and its public legitimacy.

Divisions within the Church, both in the Church hierarchy and in the wider community, also influence the involvement of the Church in the campaigns. Some bishops, like those who fought for a better acceptance of divorced and homosexual people during the 2015 Synod of Bishops on the Family, refrain from supporting the

germs of the anti-gender movement in their countries and were sometimes personally targeted by anti-gender activists, such as Johan Bonny in Belgium. Divisions may also prevent joint participation in the movement or explain why the hierarchy of a national church only supports the movement for a certain time and then withdraws from the campaign.

Two caveats must be mentioned. First, the Roman Catholic Church is not a monolithic body, but hosts different factions with diverging opinions on the topic, as shown by the two recent Synods on the family. Not all its components are mobilized against gender and dissent was initially expressed from within (Béraud 2015, Marschütz 2014). Second, the Roman Catholic Church is not the only religious organization behind the anti-gender movement. Coalitions with Protestants, Muslims, Jews and other religious groups have been documented in numerous chapters in this book. Protestants have been involved in protest in countries like Germany. In France, activists endeavored – rather unsuccessfully – to involve both Jewish and Muslim leaders and communities (Gross 2015, Larisse 2015). In Slovenia, however, Catholics, Protestants and Muslim issued the first ever common public statement against same-sex marriages just before the referendum in 2012. In Russia, the Moscow Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church – close to the political power – is backing Vladimir Putin’s policies. Finally, at the United Nations, Evangelicals and Catholics have been working together for several decades, and were often joined by a changing coalition of Muslim states. Vladimir Putin’s Russia has become a new ally in the international coalition in defense of “traditional values”, supporting conservative groups in the West and contesting gender and LGBT rights in international institutions in the name of “traditional values”.

1.5. Strategies and repertoire of action

The staging of the protests against gender in Europe share one outstanding feature: their outlook is colorful and festive. As suggested by several authors in this book, local events – be it Family Day in Italy in 2007, mass protests by *Manif pour tous* in France or the Slovenian protest against marriage equality called Day of Love in 2015 – often display elements reminiscent of pride parades or techno music gatherings. These protests move away from stereotypical images of the “old conservative folk” to appear as hip, modern, pop, and young. This feature reflects both a generational shift in this kind of movement as well as an attempt to attract the youth. However, this movement does not focus on a single generation, but articulates a multilayered discourse which allows the movement to reach different audiences. In Slovenia, even grandparents were specifically targeted during the 2015 referendum.

As illustrated by these events, the anti-gender movement tries to build a pluralizing (and secularizing) self-image against the religious or conservative imagery often conveyed in public opinions. It builds itself as a rational, moderate and commonsensical actor, who raised its voice because things have simply “gone too far”. This implies making a distinction with its radical fringes, as happened in France with both extreme right activists and the ultra Catholic movement *Civitas* (Paternotte 2017). Often this movement also uses a self-victimization strategy, presenting itself as the true defender of oppressed people, of a majority who is silenced by powerful lobbies and elites, as well as the savior of national authenticity against international powers.

As shown in the introduction with the example of the standing vigils, anti-gender movements also share a common repertoire, which is articulated in different ways according to the context. This repertoire includes demonstrations, stands in and sits in, petitions and the collection of signatures, litigation, expertise and knowledge production, lobbying, referendum campaigns, electoral mobilization, party politics

(including the establishment of new political parties), incitement to vigilance, and ad hominem exposure campaigns in schools and hospitals.

Anti-gender activists are extremely active on the web and take advantage of the possibilities offered by new information and communication technologies. Their online activities are multidimensional and go far beyond a mere informative function. They skillfully use the internet to build communities and to create feelings of belonging among their supporters, to develop national and international networks, to reach new publics and to mobilize their membership for actions in physical spaces, such as demonstrations, protests, stand ins etc., and on the web (Tricou 2015). The latter includes email bombarding (i.e. sending identical complaint mails to the same list of addressees, usually politicians), appeals for boycotts, the production of news-like stories and e-petitioning, as promoted by the transnational CitizenGO platform, which gathers – according to its own estimation – over 4.5 million followers.

This active presence on the web does not mean that the movement does not target traditional media. The organization of events, lectures, preparation of statements and press conferences are all targeted towards traditional media outlets. These activities also fit into a broader struggle over the production of knowledge and the legitimacy of scientific work on gender, which is illustrated by the increasing number of books on “gender ideology” and their translation in several languages. Interestingly enough, in several countries, these books are presented on the same shelf as gender studies in mainstream bookstores like Feltrinelli in Italy.

Anti-gender campaigns also include extensive lobbying, both at national and transnational level. In some countries, these actors even became an authorized political voice and their public actions and the loudness of their protests turned them

into new stakeholders in issues such as family policies, quality measures, bioethics etc. As mentioned earlier, the transformation of several national anti-gender movements into political parties or their incorporation into existing parties appears as a new strategy.

Finally, the recurring usage of the image of an innocent and endangered child appears as a mechanism for triggering moral panic (Thompson, 1998). By seeking to produce a moral panic, anti-gender activists try to legitimize their particular claims, establish the validity of the issues raised, stir up concern among the general population, and attract media attention. They present their claims in terms of good versus evil and use specific examples to present them as general (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 2009). As developed by Robinson (2008), moral panic strategies are political mechanisms consciously established at a specific critical moment to preserve the status quo. The western construction of “child innocence” is a particularly effective frame, which can rally more important crowds than anti-gender claims. This strategy is reminiscent of the early anti-gay rights movements in the USA, such as 1977 “Save Our Children” campaign, led by Anita Bryan (Fejes, 2008: 99).

An Uneven Development in Europe

As social movement scholars have long demonstrated, a movement’s resources are not sufficient to explain the development or the fate of a specific movement, and the context matters greatly if we want to understand the tribulations of a mobilization. This, for instance, is the objective of the notion of political opportunity approach,

which emphasizes the opportunities and the constraints offered to activists by the political context in which they mobilize (Meyer 2004).

In this section, we do not want to enter into debate on the definition and the nature of political opportunities, but rather build on the insight that the context matters to understand both the forms and the fate of anti-gender movements in specific settings. While some dimensions of political opportunity structures such as access to political institutions and the division of elites or the role of allies have already been discussed earlier, we add specific contextual elements that played an important part and are often overlooked in the literature on political opportunities. We also insist on the importance of time: the same reform discussed at different moments in different countries may face different forms of opposition. Finally, we discuss the importance of discursive opportunity structure in creating a favorable environment for activists' discourse to resonate in their own country.

2.1. State-church relations

While the Church has been discussed as an actor, a network or a bridge between different sorts of actors, we insist in this section on the impact of the multiple ways of settling state-Church relations across Europe, with a focus on Catholicism. A wide literature has indeed revealed the existence of different patterns in Europe (Manuel, Reardon and Wylcox 2006, Gryzmala-Busse 2015, Dobbelaere et Pérez-Agote 2015, Pérez-Agote 2012), and these seem to play a crucial part in anti-gender campaigns.

In their chapters, authors have identified different patterns and attempted to trace their influence on the mobilizations. Often, the relation to a certain idea of the nation is

crucial. When the Church was considered as the conservatory of the national identity, as in Poland, Italy, Ireland or Croatia, it is – or at least was – allowed more political prominence. The legacy of the past is also crucial. In Spain, the role of the Catholic Church under the dictatorship has severely undermined its legitimacy to intervene in public debate, while the heritage of socialism plays out in divergent ways in Eastern Europe. Indeed, in post-socialist societies, the Church is often understood as one of the victims of the communist regime (Zrinščak 2004). Since the early 1990s, the Church has tried to restore its previous role of moral authority and collective intellectual (Kerševan, 1996). Furthermore, while trying to regain its power, it started a process of re-traditionalization of society, which is seen as a return to the traditional values destroyed during the communist regime (Kuhar, 2015). The latter has been achieved with varying degrees of success and plays a role in the visibility of the Church in the national anti-gender movements: the more the Church is seen as a moral authority, the more visible it appears in the anti-gender movement.

Finally, different modes of separation between Church and state, each with a different impact on anti-gender mobilizations, can be identified. In France, the strong separation between the Church and the state, with the implementation of a specific type of secularism, has not impeded the development of radical forms of Catholicism. In Italy, the proximity of the Vatican has never allowed the Italian Church to be fully independent and the Vatican intervenes in Italian politics through numerous formal and informal channels, including political parties. In Germany, religious diversity has turned Catholicism into one religious actor among a plurality of authorized voices. Finally, Belgian pillarization has guaranteed a social presence and important resources for Catholicism while moderating its political expression.

These structural arrangements have long-term social and political effects. They impact the identity of national churches, their financial resources, and their political capacity. They also influence the type of alliances with specific civil society actors and the forms of the public interventions of the Church hierarchy. They determine the nature of the relationship to the state and to the nation, and the available set of strategies when Church leaders want to express their discontent. While research has indicated that the relation to the (mostly Catholic) church is crucial to understand anti-gender mobilizations, these elements significantly impact their forms in specific countries.

Timing

Time matters. As shown in the Belgian chapter, it is one of the factors explaining the limited traction of the anti-gender movement in this country. Indeed, most of the reforms that triggered a strong opposition in other countries happened earlier and there was probably a disconnection between the timing of reform and that of the transnational offensive against gender.

Furthermore, as we have already discussed with the idea of prophylaxis, timing should not be strictly understood within national borders. Although the policy issues that are tabled nationally have the most direct influence over the (non)-existence of anti-gender movements, oppositions may rise in reaction to diffuse liberalizing trends and reforms adopted elsewhere.

Discursive opportunities

Scholars have tried to assess the impact of the discursive environment on specific mobilizations. By using the notion of “discursive opportunity”, they examine “the aspects of the public discourse that determine a message’s chances of diffusion in the public sphere” (Koopmans and Olzak 2004: 202. See also Ferree 2003). Activists face both discursive opportunities and constraints, which influence the resonance of their message. In this section, we want to pinpoint that the discourse against “gender ideology” strongly resonates with several ongoing debates in European societies, and we suggest that these intersections have diversely contributed to the development of anti-gender mobilizations. Three of them, which characterize European societies with different intensities, have been crucial: European skepticism, national and racial anxieties, and resistances to globalization.

First, one needs to pay attention to the growing skepticism – not to say the critique – of the European Union which is fueling among others the current populist wave in Europe (Laursen 2013). As dramatically illustrated in recent years by the negative vote of the Dutch and the French on the European Constitution in 2005, of Irish citizens on the Lisbon Treaty in 2008, and of the Brits on Brexit in 2015, there is a growing breach between the European project and the citizens of Europe. In many countries, public opinions raise doubts about what happens in Brussels and some political parties have voiced and instrumentalized this discontent. Their discourse is often echoed by the critique of “gender ideology”, which relies partly on the same discursive structures.

This often intersects with fears about national and racial identities, particularly in the context of the so-called refugee crisis and a global discussion about Islam, which profoundly interrogates European secularism (Bracke 2013, Scott 2009). These can be connected to demographic anxieties, which are particularly strong in Russia and parts of Eastern Europe, and to worries about what it means to be French, German or Polish in a globalized world. This explains the specific focus on the child as the future of the nation. Similarly, opposition to specific forms of parenting, kinship and reproduction partly ensue from worries about the (re)production of the nation (Fassin 2014, Perreau 2014, 2016). Furthermore, as shown in Sara Garbagnoli's chapter, these are not only debates about national identities, but also about the collective destiny of Europe, understood as the standard-bearer of civilization, often in opposition to Islam.

Such debates cannot, finally, be disentangled from growing concerns about the status of a region heavily struck by the economic crisis in a globalizing world. Against global transformations, citizens and politicians are defending both their nation and Europe against the rest of the world and potential invaders. This is connected to a return of the national in many European societies, with debates on the defense of national sovereignty and authenticity against supranational diktats and the uniformization resulting from globalization. These fears may also take the form of a defense of national values and traditions against supranational and unrooted elites. In this context, many citizens look for firmer foundations of the nation, which would be found in an idea of nature and biology. As claimed by Eric Fassin "the French battle about kinship is not simply about the family; it is much about the nation. Naturalizing filiation (as conservatives would have it), or denaturalizing it (in progressive terms), is not just about heterosexuality or homosexuality; it is equally about Frenchness, that is, about whiteness in postcolonial France" (Fassin 2014: 288).

Europe in a Global Picture

It has become obvious that anti-gender mobilizations are not specific to a single country, but that they spread across the continent and beyond. This is illustrated by the circulation of logos, flags, and names, as well as lines of argumentation. To give an example, the French *La Manif pour Tous* has been a crucial source of inspiration for activists abroad, as shown by the circulation of its iconographic material. This movement has been directly “exported” to Italy, where activists first named themselves “La Manif pour Tous Italia” (in French), adopted the same image, translated French posters and maintained contacts with its French counterpart. The logo of the “proper” family (mother + father + children – one boy and one girl), posters, strategies and/or rhetorical tropes have been copied elsewhere, as in Germany (Demo Für Alle), Slovakia (Alianca za rodinu), Croatia (U ime obitelji) or Finland (Aito Avioliitto). In 2015, Russian politicians even wanted to turn the national flag into a symbol of heterosexuality, a project fiercely opposed by French activists.

In brief, we see declinations of the same symbols across Europe: depictions of a traditional heterosexual family and use of color codes such as pink and blue. Modes of action also look alike, as shown by the proliferation of concerned citizens’/parents’ committees, the investment of the public space or the launch of civil initiatives. In this section, we map the different forms of circulation, and we attempt to understand the roads through which these ideas and modes of actions travel across borders. Four are explored: diffusion, transnational activism, Europeanization, and globalization.

First, diffusion refers to the circulation of ideas, strategies, modes of action, types of organizing etc. from one point to another, in this case from one country to another. It

implies punctual exchanges and contacts among domestic actors or through a common third country, leading to the adoption of foreign strategies, goals etc. Two types of diffusion have been central here: direct and personal or indirect and without any personal contact (through newspapers, internet etc.).

On the one hand, without establishing personal contact with them, activists in one country have learned from their homologues abroad, a mechanism reinforced by the development of social media. This was obvious in 2012-2013, when the *Manif pour Tous* was carefully followed and later emulated outside of France. Russian media, for instance, have carefully covered French protests, and were instrumental in recycling the anti-gender discourse as a way to distinguish Russia from the decadent West, where “gender ideology” is part of the problem. (Moss this volume, Stella and Nartova 2015)

On the other hand, research has documented the travels of anti-gender activists. This is the case of the French Ludovine de la Rochère and Frigide Barjot, who have visited Stuttgart, Helsinki, Dublin, Madrid, Rome, Zagreb, Brussels, the Vatican or the United States, or of Croatian activist Željka Markić, who was invited to tour Slovakia and assist in organizing the referendum on same-sex marriage

Second, transnational activism implies more sustained and frequent contacts among actors. Within these networks, actors do not only exchange ideas and strategies, but also elaborate them altogether. In other words, these groups not only encourage the diffusion and exchange of some ideas and practices, a situation in which they operate as a bridge between different countries, but they also constitute laboratories where new ideas and strategies may emerge and can be discussed before being used in national arenas.

In many parts of Europe, we see a shift from punctual contacts toward attempts to create a pan-European anti-gender movement. Again, the French example is illustrative. Activists not only tour Europe, inducing diffusion mechanisms: they also try to build a more sustained European initiative. On February 2, 2014, they organized a European demonstration which led to (rather small) demonstrations in Germany, Spain, Italy, Belgium, and Slovakia, and they mobilized for the 2014 European elections, starting the Europe for Family Campaign. Similarly, the Spanish organization *HazteOir* is the driving force behind *CitizenGo*, who is now available in 12 European languages and operates as the transnational online platform of anti-gender activists. Finally, the European Citizen's Initiative Mum, Dad & Kids can be read as a joint initiative of domestic activists who are active transnationally, like Ludovine de la Rochère and Željka Markić and European actors such as Roger Kiska, Maria Hildingsson, Gregor Puppincck and Paul Moynan; that is, as an attempt to stabilize an emerging transnational network.

Third, the latter example also illustrates the increasing Europeanization of these actors, with the establishment of specific networks in Brussels and Strasburg to target European institutions. According to Neil Datta (2013), three types of actors may be identified at European level: an old Catholic network active close to the Vatican, a Northern group mixing traditionalist Protestants and Catholics who are sometimes joined by Orthodoxes, and the Ultras who are often opposed to Vatican II. These groups may occasionally collaborate and the first one is by far the biggest and the most influential. It includes European Dignity Watch, led by Gabriele Kuby's daughter Sophie Kuby (who recently became the Director of EU Advocacy at ADF International in Brussels) and the European Centre for Law and Justice, directed by Gregor Puppincck. Beyond their role in lobbying European institutions and litigating at

European courts, they also create connections between activists on the ground. Their leaders have visited several countries during anti-gender mobilizations, and this activism may strengthen domestic actors by sharing resources and know-how.

Fourth, European actors are inserted into a growing global movement. The United States appear as a major international hub, with European NGOs ADF and the European Centre for Law and Justice being regional branches of US organizations. Contacts between US actors such as the National Organization for Marriage and domestic actors in Europe have been documented in countries like France, Ireland, Russia, Spain or Croatia. The same actors may be involved in other parts of the world such as Latin America. ADF is for instance active in the region³, while journalists have traced dense connections between Spanish and Italian anti-gender activists and the 2016 Mexican demonstrations against same-sex marriage⁴. Organizations like the World Congress of Families, established by US and Russian activists in the 1990s, are building a global network to promote “family values”, which relies on the activism of European actors such as Ignacio Arsuaga, Alexei Komov and Luca Volonté. As we see, the anti-gender movement is far from being an isolated national phenomenon, but takes part into a complex constellation of global actors.

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¹ In addition, these notions do not allow researchers to see how self-declared progressive actors may advocate conservative positions, as shown at length in the French context (Stambolis-Ruhrstorfer and Tricou in this volume, Perreau 2016, Paternotte 2017).

² It must be said that similar scandals have urged religious authorities to embrace anti-gender campaigns more intensively in other countries such as Poland.

³ Kane, Gillian. 2015. “Latin America in the Crosshairs: Alliance defending freedom takes aim.” *Political Research Associates*, July 13. Accessed November 15, 2016. <http://www.politicalresearch.org/2015/07/13/latin-america-in-the-crosshairs-alliance-defending-freedom-takes-aim/#sthash.GRdu7t4D.dpbs>.

⁴ About Spanish activists see Garcia, Jacobo. 2016. “El lobby ultraderechista español que mueve los hilos del movimiento antigay en México.” *El País*, September 24. Accessed November 15, 2016. : http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2016/09/24/mexico/1474701661_252876.html; About Italian activists see Gayburg. 2016. “La Conferenza Episcopale messicana arruola Gianfranco Amato, da mercoledì in trasferta per creare odio contro le unioni gay.” Accessed November 15, 2016. <http://gayburg.blogspot.be/2016/11/la-conferenza-episcopale-messicana.html?m=1>.