

1. Gender Ideology in Movement

David Paternotte and Roman Kuhar

Bologna, Italy, Piazza San Francesco, October 5, 2014. A handful of people are standing on a square, two meters from each other, a book in their hands. They read in silence for one hour. They claim to defend the freedom of expression and combat the destruction of the Human and of civilization. Like them, a few thousand other citizens have gathered on the same day in more than 100 Italian cities.¹ This group, called the *Sentinelle in Piedi* (Standing Guards), first appeared in 2013 to oppose the Scalfarotto Bill against homophobia. Since then, such rallies have mushroomed across Italy and have become one of the landmark modes of action of opponents to LGBT rights and “gender ideology” in the country. Vigils present themselves as the heirs of Gandhi or Socrates; that is, as the victims of political abuse, and members of a movement of resistance. Standing on a public square, they refer to other forms of citizen protests occurring at the time, such as the Arab Springs and the protesters in Istanbul’s Taksim Square.

Ljubljana, Slovenia, Kongresni trg, December 12, 2015. Eight days before the second referendum on marriage equality in Slovenia. A group of about 70 people line up in straight lines with about two meters between each of them on one of Ljubljana’s largest squares. They are reading a book in silence. The group is called *Stražarji* (The Guards) and they present themselves as advocates for freedom of speech, thought, and consciousness. They are instructed not to engage in debate with other people and not to react to any provocation. The Guards claim to be “sick of the fact” that gender theory activists impose their own will and a way of life upon them. According to their own leaflet, they are the guards of “a natural family as a union of a man, a woman and

children” and of “matrimony union between a man and a woman”.² They also defend the right of a child to have a father and a mother, the respect for male and female identities and the parents’ freedom to raise their children as they wish. Unlike other protesters who usually occupy the public space by protesting loudly, they demonstrate in silence, as they believe that their consciousness can only speak up in silence.³ However, they did not want their action to be unheard: in a press statement they asked the media to report on the event, which was part of the referendum campaign.

These two examples show the diffusion of specific modes of action across Europe. In both cases, demonstrators claim to defend the freedom of speech, thought, and consciousness. They contest gender equality and LGBT rights and invoke the intriguing notions of “gender ideology”, “gender theory” or “(anti)genderism”. Such mobilizations are not unique, but have spread across Europe in recent years. In fact, Slovenian activists were inspired by Italian activists, and Italian activists were themselves inspired by a French group, the *Veilleurs* (Vigils), which they imported to their own country and hybridized. Born in 2013 in Paris, this group initially gathered a few (mostly Catholic) youngsters who wanted to oppose the same-sex marriage bill and promote “human ecology”. Reclaiming a tradition of non-violent resistance, they organize candlelit sit-ins in public squares, during which they sing and read extracts from books by authors as diverse as Gramsci, Gandhi, Martin Luther King or Saint-Exupéry (Lindell 2014). Unlike the French, the Italian and Slovenian protesters were standing and remained silent. Their movement became more important than the French one, and was later emulated in France with the foundation of the *Veilleurs debout* (Standing Vigils). These finally took the name of their Italian counter-parts: the *Sentinelles* (Garbagnoli 2016a).

The silent reading of books is only one form of action in the repertoire of a new movement emerging in Europe, which claims to oppose gender and mobilizes against some of its most pernicious effects. As this book will discuss, these campaigns, which all bear a striking resemblance, have emerged in different parts of the continent. They share discourses, strategies and modes of action across borders, observe what each other is doing, and are increasingly connected transnationally (Paternotte 2015, Hodžić and Bijelić 2014). These similarities are the starting point of this project, which attempts to understand the origin of these mobilizations, their concrete manifestations on the ground, and their diffusion. Our focus is therefore on national manifestations of a transnationally circulating movement against “gender ideology”. In this book, we want to shed light and better understand campaigns against gender in Europe today.

Scholars have described similar mobilizations against gender equality and/or sexual citizenship in other parts of the world. The objectives and the modes of action of the American Christian Right have long been studied, leading to fruitful academic debates on notions such as counter-movements and culture wars. Research has both focused on the history and the development of this movement (Diamond 1989, Liebman and Wuthnow 1983, Williams 2010) and on its influence on specific issues such as women’s rights, especially abortion (Saurette and Gordon 2015), and LGBT rights (Herman 1997, Fetner 2008, Stone 2012). Latin American scholars have also produced important work from an early stage (Vaggione 2010). This is particularly the case of Argentine sociologist Juan Marco Vaggione, who has examined the deprivatization of religion and the “reactive politicization” of gender and sexual politics by religious movements in the region, following José Casanova’s seminal insights (1994). Vaggione (2005, 2012) claims this process would be accompanied by

an NGOization of religious actors and by a secularization of their discourse. More recently, scholarship on Africa has documented the export of the American culture wars (Kaoma 2009, 2012), often with a focus on Protestant Churches, as well as the intersections with concerns about national sovereignty and traditional authenticity (Anderson 2011, van Klinken 2013, van Klinken and Zebracki 2015).

This scholarship insists on the role of conservative understandings of religion as a catalyzer for opposition to gender and sexual equalities, as well as on an ongoing process of reaffirmation of religion in the public space. They show as well that these two projects often intersect with issues related to nationalism and a defense of national sovereignty (Gryzmala-Busse 2015, Ayoub 2016). This was dramatically illustrated by the rejection of the Colombia peace agreement in a referendum in 2016. Indeed, according to several observers⁴, debates about peace have intersected with an “anti-gender panic” promoted by the same actors who opposed the deal with the FARC.

Until now, there has been very limited research on such mobilizations in Europe (Ozzano and Giorgi 2015, Verloo 2017). This is partly due to the recent character of these mobilizations, which have mostly developed since the 2010s. This absence, however, is also explained by the predominance of a teleological account of gender and sexual politics in the region. Scholars, observers and actors alike were generally convinced that Europe was on an unstoppable way toward “full” gender equality and sexual citizenship. They assumed that such forms of opposition were largely foreign to the European experience or could only subsist as remains of the past and primarily in Eastern Europe or in (Catholic) countries such as Italy or Ireland. Largely successful demonstrations (Paternotte 2017a) such as the French *Manif pour Tous* came therefore as a surprise and force them to amend such a grand narrative.

Furthermore, when they exist, the accounts of such mobilizations are generally bound by state boundaries, presenting these mobilizations as uniquely national. Falling into the trap of methodological nationalism (Raison politique 2014), they explain these campaigns by focusing on national factors and interpret them as national phenomena. This was particularly visible in the French case, where an abundant amount of research has been published since 2014. Indeed, despite a few exceptions, French mobilizations against same-sex marriage are generally understood as another French exception, overlooking the similarities with forms of resistance elsewhere, as well as their anteriority in countries like Spain, Italy, Croatia or Slovenia (Paternotte 2015). Elzbieta Korolczuk denounces a similar flaw in the coverage of Polish debates, concluding that “there is evidence however that recent mobilisation against ‘genderisation’, ‘gender ideology’ or the ‘gender lobby’ is not only a local trend” (Korolczuk 2014: 5).

Finally, while there is a growing literature on religion, gender and sexuality in Europe, it covers to a much larger extent Islam, pondering on whether it can be combined with an embrace of gender and sexuality equality. Moreover, these accounts tend not to cover religious movements but focus either on individual faith experiences or on religious authorities. One must also take notice of a public policy literature on “morality politics”, but this often does not disentangle the various religious actors in play and often merely considers religion as a hindrance to more permissive policies without engaging with religion as an object of study (e.g. Engeli, Green-Pedersen and Thorup Larsen 2012, Knill, Preidel and Nebel 2014; Knill, Adam and Hurka 2015). Similarly, the fast developing scholarship on gender, sexuality and populism (e.g. Scrinzi 2014; Spierings, Zaslove, Mugge and de Lange 2015; Lazaridis and Campani, 2016) chiefly focuses on populist radical right parties and their appeal to public

opinions, and engages with civil society organizations to a much lesser extent (Aslanidis 2016).

Against these various shortcomings, this book focuses on campaigns and movements against gender in Europe, and insists on the transnational nature of these discourses and strategies. It postulates that these mobilizations share common theoretical roots in what is called “gender ideology” or – in some countries – “gender theory” and/or “anti-genderism”. At the same time, while emphasizing cross-border similarities, it examines local and national processes of reception and looks at the specific forms taken by these movements on the ground, as well as at the reasons why they did not develop in other contexts.

This introductory chapter reads as follows. We first look at “gender ideology” as a specific discourse and expose its origins and its main tenets. Then, we examine it as a strategy and discuss how the movements in question both intersect with debates within the Catholic Church and with the recent wave of right-wing populism in Europe. Finally, we explicate the structure of the book and the selection of the national case studies.

Gender Ideology as a Discourse

“Gender ideology is destructive, obscurantist, anti-social, anti-popular as much as it is anti-natural.”⁵ This intriguing quote can be found in a brochure on “gender ideology” which can be freely downloaded on the website of the *Manif pour Tous*, the mass movement which opposed same-sex marriage in France in 2012-2013. The brochure

aims to warn the French against the overlooked dangers of gender, which – as indicated by this quote – would represent a major threat for European societies.

Unlike what is sometimes hinted, such discourse does not constitute another French exception. An extensive body of thought has been elaborated over the years and a common theoretical framework can be identified, although different arguments may be stressed in different countries. It is crucial to bear in mind that “gender ideology” does not designate gender studies, but is a term initially created to oppose women’s and LGBT rights activism as well as the scholarship deconstructing essentialist and naturalistic assumptions about gender and sexuality. Erasing fierce controversies within gender and sexuality studies and the complex interplay between activism and the academy, it regards gender as the ideological matrix of a set of abhorred ethical and social reforms, namely sexual and reproductive rights, same-sex marriage and adoption, new reproductive technologies, sex education, gender mainstreaming, protection against gender violence etc. Ignoring the history of the notion, “gender ideology” authors rely heavily on John Money’s problematic experiments and erroneously consider Judith Butler as the mother of “gender ideology”. Curiously, they put together Simone de Beauvoir, Shulamith Firestone, Monique Wittig, Germain Greer, Margaret Sanger, Alfred Kinsey, Wilhelm Reich, sometimes even Herbert Marcuse, Sigmund Freud, and Friedrich Engels. In brief, “gender ideology” offers an interpretative frame, which explains the adoption of these reforms, and connects different sorts of actors under an alleged gender conspiracy (Trillo-Figueroa 2009, Montfort 2011, Scala 2011, Peeters 2013).

According to these authors, “gender ideology” would threaten most societies, especially in the West, and would endanger mankind. Gender would indeed lead to an anthropological revolution because it negates sexual differences and gender

complementarity, “thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family” (Pope Francis 2016: 56). As Marguerite Peeters, one of the most translated theorists of “gender ideology”, argues:

“Analysis will show that, on behalf of a citizen and secular interpretation of equality, solely understood in terms of power and rights, the revolutionary process of gender undermines – culturally, politically and legally – the constitutive identity of man and woman as persons: their identity as spouses, their wonderful complementarity and unity in love, their specific vocation and educational role, masculinity and femininity, marriage and the family, the anthropological structure of any human being, built on a given, received and shared love” (Peeters 2013: 9).

The development of this ideology would stem from the propagation of hedonism, laicism, relativism and individualism in Western societies, as well as from misconceptions of feminism. It intersects with Jean-Paul II’s “culture of death”, the ideology which lies behind acts such as abortion, contraception and euthanasia and would be opposed to the “culture of life” promoted by the Church (Vaggione 2012, Grzebalska and Soós 2016). This leads Peeters to conclude that gender “belongs to a process of negation typical of the mystery of evil, which has engaged humanity, since its origins and all along its history, in a triple perversion: a disordered search for power, pleasure and knowledge as ends in themselves” (Peeters 2013: 73).

This project would be particularly threatening to children, who would be indoctrinated from very early age in schools, often against their parents’ awareness. Gender would also have severe consequences on their development, not the least by blurring anthropological references concerning the sexes. As part of a critique of

“sexual permissiveness” and the legacy of May 68, “gender ideology” is sometimes accused of encouraging the hypersexualization of children as well as pedophilia.

Anti-gender campaigns can also be read as a project of alternative knowledge production, which aims to dismantle post-structural research in social sciences and the humanities in particular. The latter are deemed ideological and not in touch with allegedly unquestionable findings of natural sciences, particularly biological, medical and psychological studies in line with the idea of essential differences between male and female sex (including differences in male and female brains) and the complementarity of male and female sexes.

“Gender ideology”, however, is not only regarded as an anthropological and epistemological threat but also as a covert political strategy, a sort of conspiracy aimed at seizing power and imposing deviant and minority values to average people. The German scholar and activist Gabriele Kubly, who is particularly active in promoting anti-gender campaigns in Central and Eastern Europe, even claims that the main instrument of this cultural revolution is gender mainstreaming, linking knowledge production and political projects:

“For the first time in history, power elites are claiming authority to change men’s and women’s sexual identity through political strategies and legal measures. They had previously lacked expertise in social engineering. However, today this is happening before our eyes on a global scale. The strategy’s name: *gender mainstreaming*. The battle is being fought under the banner of equality of men and women, but that has proven to be a tactical transitional stage” (Kubly 2016: 42).

For these reasons, many authors claim that gender represents a form of totalitarian ideology and regard it as more dangerous than Marxism and Fascism (Kuby 2012, 2016, Schooyans 1997, 2000). In this vein, Kuby again argues that “totalitarianism has made a costume change and now appears in the mantle of freedom, tolerance, justice, equality, anti-discrimination and diversity – ideological backdrops that prove to be amputated, distorted terms” (Kuby 2016: 12).

This threat long remained invisible: As claimed already in the mid-nineties by US journalist Dale O’Leary, “the Gender Agenda sails into communities not as a tall ship, but as a submarine, determined to reveal as little of itself as possible” (O’Leary 1997: 21). Similarly, critics invoke George Orwell’s concept of “newspeak”, for gender activists are often accused of manipulating language and hiding their objectives (Lopez Trujillo 2005: 8). Nice language embracing equality would actually cover attempts to overthrow natural order and common sense. “Gender ideology” activists and theorists aim therefore to uncover its underpinnings while warning fellow citizens about the dangers of gender. For example, Gabriele Kuby is concerned that, after the ‘gender revolution’, “there would not only be two sexes, but at least six: man and woman, and each in a heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual version. It’s all about creating a human being ‘emancipated’ from nature.”⁶

Corrupt elites would play a key role in this process and international institutions, be it either Europe or the United Nations, are a key vehicle of “gender ideology”, undermining the principles of national sovereignty and democratic deliberations. Comparing gender ideology to a Trojan horse, Tony Anatrella claims that:

“Gender ideology is the new ideology which openly serves as a reference to the UN and its various agencies, in particular the WHO, UNESCO and the

Commission on Population and Development. It has also become the new frame of the Brussels Commission and of various EU Member States by inspiring legislators. [...] It succeeds the Marxist ideology, while being more oppressive and more pernicious because it is presented under the cover of a subjective liberation from unfair constraints, of a recognition of personal freedom and the equality of all before the law” (Anatrella 2011: 3).

As hinted in this quote, “gender ideology” is often presented as a new leftist ideology, created on the ashes of communism. Spanish philosophers Francisco José Contreras and Diego Poole (2011) equate the “old Left” with Marxism and the “new Left” with “gender ideology”. The achievement of socialism remains the goal of the revolution, but it cannot be reached only through social revolution, as the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe has clearly showed. Inspired by Gramsci’s notion of hegemony (Brustier 2014), they claim a cultural revolution is also needed to change one’s mind and thinking so that Marxism can prevail. For obvious political reasons, this argument resonates particularly well in post-Socialist European countries, where gender theory is often classified as new Marxism (Cestnik, 2013).

Furthermore, “gender ideology” is not an offensive restricted to Western societies, but is also imposed by the West on the rest of world. Often understood as a symptom of the depravation of EuroAmerica, it can be read as a neocolonial project through which Western activists and their governments try to export their decadent values and secularize non-Western societies (Alzamora Revoredo 2005: 559, Sarah 2013: 4, Peeters 2013: 79). This is the reason why, when referring to “gender ideology”, Pope Francis prefers the expression “ideological colonization”. This framing also allows Vladimir Putin to present Russia as the harbinger of an alternative moral project based on “traditional values” and authentic national cultures (Ayoub and Paternotte 2014: 1-

4, Moss in this volume). International institutions and private funders such as the Open Society or the Ford Foundation are accused of playing a central part in this process, especially by forcing poorer countries to accept morally problematic laws and regulations in exchange for support and money. Foreign interference was widely discussed during the two recent Synods on the Family, as referred by Pope Francis in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, in which he deems it is “unacceptable ‘that local Churches should be subjected to pressure in this matter and that international bodies should make financial aid to poor countries dependent on the introduction of laws to establish ‘marriage’ between persons of the same sex’” (Pope Francis 2016: 251).

Finally, this discourse intersects with concerns like (human) ecology. As pointed out by Eric Fassin (2007, 2010), this notion not only implies a defense of nature as the creation of God, but also the protection of the human against itself. Popularized by Pope Benedict XIV, it has been taken over by Pope Francis under the expression “integral ecology”. Along with concerns about the environment, this discourse is a vehicle for conservative views on life, gender, and sexuality (e.g. Derville 2016). In addition to attacks against abortion and reproductive technologies, “human ecology” has often been used to target transgender people, who would go against God’s design by seeking gender reassignment treatment. In his famous 2008 Christmas discourse to the Curia, Pope Benedict claimed that the Church “should not only defend the earth, water and air as gifts from the creation that belong to all. [...] Rain forests deserve indeed to be protected, but no less so does man, as a creature having an innate ‘message’ which does not contradict our freedom, but is instead its very premise” (Benedict XVI 2008). Pope Francis (2015: 155) adopted similar positions in *Laudato Si’*, his encyclical letter on contemporary ecological challenges.

Gender Ideology as a Strategy⁷

As shown in the previous section, the invention of “gender ideology” is closely connected to debates within the Catholic Church. It is, however, not only a religious issue: For these campaigns intersect with rising right-wing populism in Europe and, to a lesser extent, with political homophobia designed as a political project to increase state power. While chapters examine specific national articulations, we offer an overview of the genesis of this notion, and highlight some of its contemporary intersections with particular political projects.

A Catholic invention

The emergence and the history of “gender ideology” is well documented. Academics like Doris Buss (1998, 2004) and Mary Anne Case (2011, 2016) and actors such as Krzysztof Charamsa (Case, Paternotte & Bracke 2016) or the organization Catholics for Choice (2003) have traced this notion back to debates at the Vatican and more particularly to the elaboration of a counter-strategy after the 1994 UN conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the 1995 Beijing conference on Women. Indeed, although Cardinal Ratzinger had already discussed some of these issues in the 1980s (Ratzinger & Messori 1985), the notion of “gender ideology” really took shape in the mid-nineties as a response to the recognition of sexual and reproductive rights in the UN rights system (Girard 2007: 334, Swiebel 2015, Butler 2004: 185).

Along with other religions and religiously inspired state delegations (Buss and Herman 2003, Butler 2006, Chappel 2006), the Holy See actively fought against the notion of gender, and considered the results of Cairo and Beijing as a defeat. It feared that sexual and reproductive rights would become a vehicle for the international

recognition of abortion, attacks on traditional motherhood, and a legitimization of homosexuality. Over the newly recognized notion of gender, it privileged the idea of complementarity between the sexes and promoted the notion of equal dignity over that of equal rights. In this context, gender – which entered the UN discourse at the same time – was understood by the Holy See as a strategic means to attack and destabilize the natural family. At preparatory meetings, it had, in coalition with conservative allies, managed to bracket the term and to leave it open for discussion at the general conference (Baden and Goetz 1997). As a result, no consensus could be reached in Beijing, and the Platform for action states that gender “as used in the Platform for Action was intended to be interpreted and understood as it was in ordinary, generally accepted usage” (Buss 1998: 351). This problematic definition has never been revised.

The Church hierarchy in the Vatican, along with a few Catholic intellectuals and activists, tried to understand what had happened in Cairo and Beijing. This is the case of Dale O’Leary, a US pro-life journalist who attended the women’s conference. She was already alarmed before the conference and distributed a leaflet entitled *Gender: The Deconstruction of Women* (Fillod 2014). She became even more influential when she gathered this leaflet along with a few other notes in the book *The Gender Agenda* (O’Leary 1997), a volume reputed to have been read at the Vatican. O’ Leary has toured the world to highlight the dangers of gender, and her work has inspired the early response to “gender ideology” of the Peruvian bishops’ conference (Fillod 2014). It opens with the following statement, which summarizes the mind of Catholic actors at the time:

“Without fanfare or debate, the word gender has been substituted for the word sex. We used to talk about sex discrimination, but it’s gender discrimination.

Forms, like credit applications, used to ask for an indication of our sex, but now they ask for our gender. It certainly seems innocent enough. Sex has a secondary meaning-sexual intercourse or sexual activity. Gender sounds more delicate and refined. But, if you think the change signals a renaissance of neo-Victorian sensitivity, you could not be more wrong. This change, and a number of other things you may not have take much notice of, are all parts of the Gender Agenda” (O’Leary 1997: 11).

“Gender ideology” came therefore both as an answer to the interrogations of the Vatican and as a means of action which should be understood in the frame of a global Catholic strategy. Relying on the Gramscian theory of cultural hegemony (Brustier 2014, Peeters 2011: 221), it aims at propagating alternative ideas by using and subverting the notions it repudiates and to contest the supposed cultural and political hegemony of “postmodern gender” in the context of a global battle of ideas. The Church has hence reclaimed progressive notions such as gender or feminism to change their meaning, increasing confusion among average citizens and resignifying what liberal voices have been trying to articulate over the last decades.

The discourse on “gender ideology” did not appear in a vacuum, but takes roots in John Paul II’s theologies of the woman and of the body, which insists on the difference and the complementarity of the sexes (Carnac 2013a, 2013b, Case 2011, 2016, Favier 2014, Garbagnoli 2014, 2016b). It also echoes Vatican’s attempts to promote a “new feminism”, which would foster the collaboration between men and women rather than exacerbating their antagonism (Couture 2012), as detailed in documents like *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988) and *Evangelium Vitae* (1995). Cardinal Josef Ratzinger, who was appointed as the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1981 before becoming Pope Benedict XVI in 2005, played a

key part in this strategy. He was a driving force behind documents such as the *Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons* (2003) and *The Letter to the Bishops on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in The World* (2004).

“Gender ideology” should, however, not be understood as a mere attempt to set John Paul II’s theology in motion or a new version of older tropes. Initiated under the Polish Pope, this strategy has been reaffirmed by Popes Benedict and Francis, with the support of several Roman Congregations and dicasteries, in particular the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Pontifical Council for the Family, the Pontifical Council for the Laity, the Pontifical Council for Culture, and the Pontifical Academy for Life. These efforts led in 2003 to the publication of the *Lexicon: Ambiguous and Debatable Terms Regarding Family Life and Ethical Questions* by the Pontifical Council for the Family with the support of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. This document resembles a dictionary with entries on a wide range of ethical topics, including several on gender. Translated in numerous languages including German, French, English, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian and Arabic, “it informs about the true content of words, about the true reality which must inform their usage and it seeks to shed light on the sense of some terms or expressions which are hardly understandable” (Lopez Trujillo 2005: 7).

Several authors, both lay people and clergy members, have contributed to the elaboration of this discourse. In addition to journalist Dale O’ Leary, the most influential authors and those translated in many of the countries under study are Michel Schooyans, Tony Anatrella, Gabriele Kuby and Marguerite Peeters. Michel Schooyans is a Belgian priest long active at the Vatican, among others at the Pontifical Council for the Family, and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences.

Also an emeritus professor of the Université Catholique de Louvain in Belgium, in 1997 he published *L'Évangile face au désordre mondial*. This book, which includes a foreword by Cardinal Ratzinger and was written with the help of Marguerite Peeters, is one of the earliest analyses of the role of the UN in spreading “gender ideology”. Schooyans repeated his warnings in subsequent publications, such as *La face cachée de l'ONU* (2001). Both a priest and a psychoanalyst, Tony Anatrella was strongly involved in the PACS debates in France, and he is one of the experts of the French Catholic Church on family, gender, and sexuality issues. In Rome, he is a consultant at the Pontifical Council for the Family and at the Pontifical Council for Health. He directly participated in the elaboration of the Lexicon and its translation into French. Gabriele Kuby, a convert to Catholicism and an acquaintance of Cardinal Ratzinger, has published several books to warn citizens about the consequences of sexual revolutions and the dangers of gender. They have been translated in numerous languages. She has travelled a lot to Central and Eastern Europe, and even addressed the Czech Parliament in October 2014. Interestingly, her daughter, Sophia Kuby, founded the NGO European Dignity Watch, and later became the director of European Union advocacy for ADF International. Finally, Marguerite Peeters is a Belgian-American citizen also based in Brussels, where she runs an NGO called Dialogues Dynamics on human identity and global governance. She works in the field of international aid, especially with Africa. Close to conservative Cardinal Robert Sarah, she works regularly with the Vatican and has been invited to Rome for meetings on gender ideology and the family. She is a consultant at the Pontifical Council for the Laity and the Pontifical Council for Culture.

These four intellectuals are well known at the Vatican and have inspired its thinking about gender. Their books are widely translated and travel across borders, although

not equally over Europe. Kuby is for instance not so well known by Francophones or Spaniards, while she is widely read in Central and Eastern Europe, where she is active on the ground. These authors have also inspired numerous national experts who further propagate this discourse in their own country. Their ideas are also diffused by popular culture products, such as Constanza Miriano's books, which are translated in several languages and circulate outside of Italy, sometimes provoking public controversies. Public meetings can also function as sites of discursive production and channels of diffusion. They include events organized in Rome, like the conferences celebrating the 20th and 25th anniversaries of *Mulieris Dignitatem* in 2008 and 2013, or the 2014 interreligious colloquium *Humanum on The Complementarity of Man and Woman* (Lopes and Alvaré 2015), and gatherings such as the first international conference on "gender ideology", organized in 2011 by the Opus Dei Universidad de Navarra.

The Catholic Church has thus undoubtedly played a crucial role in the emergence and the development of the notion of "gender ideology". This campaign has been endorsed by the Vatican's highest authorities, which have long considered it to be a political priority. Furthermore, while it would be misleading to assume that national mobilizations are directly run from an office in Rome, chapters will show that, in numerous cases, the Church has offered a space where intellectuals and activists could meet and exchange views and strategies. It has also provided a powerful mobilization and diffusion network. However, while the mode of production of this discourse is relatively well known, its diffusion across the Catholic world and the ways it fuels grassroots mobilizations on the ground require more investigation, a project which lies at the core of this book. One needs indeed to understand the channels through which this strategy is propagated, also beyond Catholic circles, as well as the ways it

is hybridized when adopted in a specific context. The timing of protest is another source of interrogation. The discourse on “gender ideology” was indeed ready in 2003, when the *Lexicon* was published. Nonetheless, it took 10 years for it to travel from Rome to most European countries, where protests often started in 2012-2013 (although some experienced earlier mobilizations, as documented in this book).

Finally, the diffusion of the “gender ideology” discourse cannot be understood without paying attention to other projects of the Church with which it is closely intertwined. This is particularly true of the New Evangelization, which was initiated by the same actors, particularly Popes Jean-Paul II and Benedict XVI (Aguilar Fernandez 2011, Béraud and Portier 2015, Paternotte 2017b, Tricou 2016a). This project is an attempt by the Church to regain its influence in secularizing parts of the world (among which Europe is central), and to reaffirm the faith of its followers. Moreover, against a privatization of religion, it insists on the public role of religion, inviting lay Catholics to defend their ideas publicly and to mobilize into politics and onto the streets. The evangelizing role of the family and the importance of its defense by political authorities are often emphasized, and new technologies, especially the Internet, must be explored as new evangelization devices. Lay believers are crucial in this endeavor, and key actors include new ecclesial communities such as the Opus Dei, the Charismatic Renewal or the Neocatechumenal Way, which are also mobilized against “gender ideology”. Interestingly, authors such as Schooyans (2000: 139) and Kuby (2012: 78), as well as actors like the Spanish Cardinal Rouco Varela (2015: 101) or the French activist Frigide Barjot (2014: 42, 91), insist themselves on the intersections between the two projects.

A populist fatigue

The unexpected resonance of this discourse in several parts in Europe as well as the relative success of these mobilizations cannot be understood without acknowledging the intersections between the Vatican's concerns about "gender ideology" and the current wave of right-wing populism taking place in Europe. This is not to say that anti-gender campaigns are the direct consequence of the right-wing populist wave, but the shift towards the right reinforces these campaigns and provides them with new supporters who took over a concept of "gender ideology" which shares some ideological structures with right-wing populist ideology. Equally, reactions to the economic crisis and the strict austerity measures in some European countries have encouraged anti-gender protests as result of a similar dissatisfaction with alleged corrupt elites and additional attacks against minorities transformed into scapegoats. In both cases, gender functions as the "symbolic glue", as it allows actors with diverging goals and strategies to work together against a common enemy (Kováts and Põim 2015).

In several countries, anti-gender actors overlap with those promoting right-wing populist politics, both as members of political parties and of civil society organizations. This is particularly true in countries like Austria and Germany (Villa; Mayer and Sauer in this volume. See also Kemper 2016). Similarly, a dissident group of the French *Manif pour Tous* called itself *le Printemps français* (French Spring), pretending to defend "la France d'en bas" (the France from above) or "le pays réel" (the real country) and to care about people's real problems (Perreau 2014).

More importantly, a sort of populist fatigue with gender and gender equality policies, understood as another interference of corrupt international elites and a marker of political correctness, intersects with the discourse promoted by the Vatican. Although actors may be not aware of its religious origins, the discourse on “gender ideology” often resonates with their own ideas and criticisms against gender. This may include the willingness to overthrow the legacy of May 68 or a defense of national sovereignty against neocolonial impositions from Western Europe or the United States. The nostalgia of a lost golden age, where everything was simpler and genders were what they looked like, may also nourish a quest for firmer foundations when everything is disappearing, which means nature and biology in the case of gender (Villa in this volume). Finally, contested and uncertain masculinities, especially when they intertwine with inverted social mobility or perceived cultural threats, further strengthen these dynamics (Norocel 2013, Wimbauer et al 2015, Tricou 2016b).

In such discourse, common sense and binary divisions between us and them are central. Both movements focus on corrupt elites being responsible for the current situation and seek to give voice to those who are constructed as silenced: the (normal) majority. They also blame international and supranational powers, often summarized under the term “Brussels” in the European context, for imposing perversions over powerless peoples. The latter would be manipulated by all sorts of lobbies, including American billionaires, Free Masons, Jews and feminists (Chetcuti-Osorovitz and Teicher 2016). To reinforce the impression that gender is imposed from abroad, anti-gender activists often use the English term “gender”. By rejecting vernacular translations of the concept, they make it resonate as foreign, strange, and imposed on “unsuspected people” (Kuhar, 2015).

These resemblances are no coincidence. As will be shown by national case studies, anti-gender and populist campaigns utilize similar discursive strategies, identified by Wodak (2015: 4) as the necessary toolkit of right-wing populist rhetoric: victim-perpetrator reversal, scapegoating, and the construction of conspiracy theories. Their politics rely on the “politics of fear” and the “arrogance of ignorance”. The politics of fear seek to instill the fear of real or imagined dangers while instrumentalizing minorities or other social groups to create scapegoats who represent the dangerous Other, whose image is based on collective stereotypical imaginaries (see also Marzouki, McDonnell and Roy 2016). As pointed out by Pelinka (2013), we need to differentiate between primary Others (the actual scapegoats, usually minority groups) and secondary Others (the elites, who promote cultural diversities and stand behind the primary Other). The arrogance of ignorance, on the other hand, appeals to common sense and advocates some kind of pre-modernist thinking. In fact, common sense is a response to a fear which is initially instilled through the creation of a scapegoat. Through scapegoating, a social group moves from the status of victim (for example non-recognition of same-sex partnerships) to that of perpetrator (same-sex marriage will destroy the family). This allows populists to address the fears and to create a clash between “the people”, the enemy and the elite, as well as to depict themselves as the real victims.

In this context, “gender ideology” becomes a “threat” – an empty signifier, which allows coalition making with a variety of actors precisely because of its “populist emptiness”. It corresponds to the basic structure of populism, which is a “thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elites’” (Mudde, 2007: 23). Populists and anti-gender activists also try to implement what

Mudde (2007) calls the “Le Pen’s mantra”: rendre la parole au people (return the word to the people). For that reason, one of their strategies involves public referendums: either they try to initiate them or they advocate for their increased use. Particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, anti-gender activists have relied heavily (and rather successfully) on the use of referendums (e.g. Slovenia, Croatia, Slovakia; and currently there are debates about a similar referendum in Romania which could take place in December 2016). In other countries, they petitioned political authorities to initiate a referendum, as happened in France with the *Manif pour Tous*. They also play on emotional registers “to raise the affects of the people and arouse their immediate feelings” (Benveniste, Campani and Lazaridis, 2016: 12).

Finally, attacks against gender and sexual rights may be instrumentalized to consolidate state power when some of these actors reach power or when those in power see some interest in backing their claims. This relates to Weiss and Bosia’s notion of “political homophobia” (2013), by which they stress that political homophobia may be disconnected from and even precede local activists’ claims to become a tool as embedded in state elites’ political strategies to secure their power and reaffirm their sovereignty. This reasoning can be applied to gender issues (Amar 2013). In Europe, this phenomenon is illustrated by the case of Russia, where Vladimir Putin opposes gender to “traditional values” to strengthen his power and restore the international status of his country (Moss in this volume). Poland and Hungary could follow this path soon, at least regarding the domestic use of such strategies (Graff and Korolczuk; Kováts and Pető in this volume).

Gender Ideology as a National Phenomenon

This book does not aim to discuss the politics of the Vatican, but rather to understand how an academic concept such as gender, when translated by a powerful religious organization like the Roman Catholic Church and intersecting with the current populist wave in Europe, can become a mobilizing tool and the target of massive social movements such as *Manif pour tous* in France and Italy, *U ime obitelji* in Croatia, or *Za otroke gre* in Slovenia. In other words, we want to map out such mobilizations and to explain how religious discourses about sex difference and complementarity can be turned into massive street demonstrations, as well as how forms of organization and protest travel across borders.

As we have already claimed, these protests are indeed not single national phenomena, but share some common roots and display similarities across borders. This collection of chapters is therefore designed as a transnational and comparative project, which examines discourses, mobilization strategies and actors in 11 European countries, including Russia. Cases not only include examples of massive mobilization (as in France, Croatia, Spain or Italy), but also ‘unlikely ones’, where massive forms of opposition could be expected but either did not materialize or only to a limited extent (like Belgium, Hungary or Ireland). Chapters are however not organized according to the intensity of anti-gender discourses and mobilizations, but in alphabetical order. Furthermore, chapters do not follow a unified methodology, partly because the authors come from different disciplinary backgrounds. All of them, however, correspond to a common analytical grid, which was elaborated, thanks to the generosity of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), during two meetings in Budapest in April 2015 and in Brussels in November of the same year. We thank both the Budapest and the Brussels FES Offices for organizing and hosting these events, along

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In sum, we argue in this book that these mobilizations should not be regarded merely as contemporary reiterations of established forms of opposition to particular understandings of gender and sexuality, but rather that these mobilizations are shaped by new discourses and forms of organization in which established and new conservative actors seek to reach beyond their traditional circles and to connect with a wider audience.

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