

Rita Perintfalvi

The True Face of the “Gender Ideology” Discourse: Religious Fundamentalism, or Questioning the Principle of Democracy?

Introduction

The aim of my study is to analyse a recent phenomenon, which is rooted in political and/or religious fundamentalism. Fundamentalist thinking sees a threat in changing male and female social roles and also in changes to the traditional family model. Rather than understand this diversity, it tries to reduce it, and does so through irrational argumentation. One model, deemed good and morally appropriate, is selected and absolutised of the many existing ones, while everything else is seen as wrong and morally inappropriate.

My study looks at a phenomenon that sees a threat in changing feminine and masculine gender roles as well as in gender studies, the branch of science describing these changes. It also sees a threat in gender mainstreaming, the policy and strategic principle fighting for social equality. The analysis reveals that, in fact, anti-gender attacks are much deeper than they seem: it is not only the concept of gender and the related policy strategy that is under attack, but indeed the entire political consensus based on the language of human rights after World War II [WWII]. These attacks question, in essence, not only the existence of the European Union [EU], but the fundamental European principle of democracy.

The first section of my paper analyses anti-gender attacks on the Central-East-European front. The second section looks at the same phenomenon at the level of Church texts. The concluding section examines the role played by Gabriele Kuby in aggressive anti-gender attacks in Central-East-Europe.

Anti-Gender Attacks in European Political Wars

As Eszter Kováts and Eszter Petronella Soós put it in their study, “after the earlier sporadic interest in the theme, *gender* has recently become an issue, what’s more, a transnational issue.”¹ As Andrea Pető states in her article, “The ‘gender

¹ Eszter Kováts / Eszter Petronella Soós, “Félelem a dominó-elvtől? A gender-ellenes európai mobilizáció jelensége: Francia esettanulmány és magyar kilátások” [Fear of the Domino

ideology’ debate opens up a new chapter in the political, cultural and social landscape of Europe that questions previous political chasms.”² The analysis in this study focuses on Central-East-Europe, in particular Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, as I had the opportunity to personally study anti-gender movements in these countries. Of course, the picture is only full if we admit that this phenomenon is not specific to the Central-East-European region, but also appears in other countries in the wider region, including Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, and France, as well as countries in the nearer region, such as Croatia or Slovenia.

The term gender became the image of an enemy suitable for mobilisation. Initially, only a small professional community knew the term gender, but then – through expressions like “gender ideology”, “gender theory”, “gender totalitarianism”, and “genderism” – a language and definition-based fight began within associated wide-ranging social movements. These arbitrarily distorted reinterpretations lead to a false – and very often ridiculed and demonised – interpretation of the term gender, “in which neither gender policy experts, nor scholars involved in Gender Studies recognise themselves.”³ In this distorted and falsified sense, gender becomes a synonym for the promotion of homosexuality, free choice of sex and sexual orientation, the elimination of the sexes, paedophilia, sexualising children, and “the culture of death.”

According to some scholars, this phenomenon is not merely a classical conservative backlash movement against gender and Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer [LGBTQ] equality, but a sign that a new kind of fundamentalism has reared its head. What seems at first sight as an attack on the gender perspective, is in fact much more in that, since “gender is a symbolic glue.”⁴ The issue runs deeper, as these movements question the post-WWII consensus over a political language centred on human rights and disenchantment as well as a neoliberal, policy-based approach to foster political change.

Principle? The Phenomenon of the Anti-Gender Mobilisation in Europe: French Case Study and Hungarian Prospects.], in: *Társadalmi Nemek Tudománya e-Folyóirat*, (2/2014), 106-124, here 109. (ntefjournal.hu/vol4/iss2/kovats_soos.pdf, 1 May 2015). My translation from Hungarian; emphasis in the original.

² Andrea Pető, “‘Anti-Gender’ Mobilisational Discourse of Conservative and Far Right Parties as a Challenge for Progressive Politics,” in: Eszter Kováts / Maari Põim (eds.), *Gender as Symbolic Glue: The Position and Role of Conservative and Far Right Parties in the Anti-Gender Mobilizations in Europe* (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung: Budapest 2015), 126-134, here 126. (<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/budapest/11382.pdf>, 10 November 2015)

³ Kováts / Soós, „Félelem a dominó-elvtől?,” 109. My translation from Hungarian.

⁴ Pető, “‘Anti-Gender’ Mobilisational Discourse,” 127.

The buzzword “gender” integrates, in a peculiar way, a series of concerns and criticism – not only against gender or LGBTQ equality, but also against gender as a symbolic glue, which thus integrates anti-EU, anti-liberal, anti-communist, and homophobic attitudes.

Pető writes about the deeper objective of the anti-gender debate: “This is a fight to redefine neoliberal representative democracy and this process is creating new political chasms.”⁵ This political objective may lead to an unprecedented strengthening of the extreme right, which entails immense dangers: “The real and new challenge is that after 1945 anti-modernist alternatives have never received so many votes in democratic elections as viable alternatives. The rise of the far right is a fact and in their electoral success anti-genderism works as a symbolic glue.”⁶

The Emergence of the Anti-Gender Debate in Poland⁷

The anti-gender outbreak began in the years 2012-2013. There were three important reasons that had brought this discourse to the surface: the Istanbul Convention, a Paedophilia Scandal in the Polish Catholic Church, and the World Health Organisation [WHO]’s recommendations for sex education in schools. Weronika Grzebalska gives the following summary of the role of political parties in the outburst of the debate:

In 2014, ‘gender ideology’ was directly addressed in the programs of three parties – Law and Justice, United Poland and the National Movement – and pictured as a foreign-imposed threat to traditional family and national identity. In their statements, right-wing politicians often used fear-arousing language conflating gender equality with deviations and pathologies.⁸

⁵ Ibid., 130.

⁶ Pető, “‘Anti-Gender’ Mobilisational Discourse,” 130-131.

⁷ In order to understand the events in Poland, see the following texts: Agnieszka Graff, “Report from the Gender Trenches: War against ‘Genderism’ in Poland,” in: *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 21 (2014), 431-442; Magdalena Grabowska, *Cultural War or “Business as Usual” ? Recent Instances, and the Historical Origins of a “Backlash” against Women’s and Sexual Rights in Poland* (Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung: 2014). (http://pl.boell.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2014/10/cultural_war_or_grabowska.pdf, 10 November 2015); Agnieszka Graff, *Gender és politika, de az az igazi* (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung: Budapest 2014). (http://www.fesbp.hu/common/pdf/Graff_gender_es_politika_de_az_az_igazi.pdf, 5 May 2015).

⁸ Weronika Grzebalska, “Poland,” in: Eszter Kováts / Maari Põim (eds.), *Gender as Symbolic Glue: The Position and Role of Conservative and Far Right Parties in the Anti-Gender Mobilizations in Europe* (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung: Budapest 2015), 83-103, here 83.

The anti-neo-colonial, Eurosceptic rhetoric is also present as a mobilisation factor: “The discursive figure of the EU as a cultural coloniser, corrupting innocent Polish children and suppressing the Polish national culture, was used ubiquitously,”⁹ says Grzebalska. According to her, the main stakeholders in the anti-gender debate in Poland are

the Catholic Church, right-wing politicians both on the local and national level, parliamentary committees (e.g. ‘Stop gender ideology’), conservative academics (e.g. Marta Cywińska, Warsaw University of Life Sciences), Catholic and pro-life NGOs (e.g. Healthy Family Association) and Internet platforms (e.g. *stop-seksualizacji.pl*).¹⁰

However, the role of foreign Catholic anti-gender authors who have played a major role in the coarsening of the debate cannot be neglected either. These include Lucetta Scaraffia, Dale O’Leary, Christine de Marcellus de Vollmer, and Gabriele Kuby.

As demonstrated above, the Catholic Church has been one of the key stakeholders in the unfolding of the gender debate in Poland. A pastoral letter was read out to the episcopal conference on Angelus Sunday, 29 December 2013. The faithful and representatives of various Church movements and associations were called upon to act courageously against this ideology. Many rallies, demonstrations, Internet campaigns etc. ensued with thousands of people cussing out “genderism” and “gender ideology” as “anthropological heresy”. “Gender ideology is worse a threat than National Socialism and communism combined.”¹¹ It destroys family and nation.

Hungary and the gender discourse

In Hungary, anti-gender discourse and the mobilisation against the so-called “gender ideology” has not intensified at the same level as in Poland or Slovakia. Still, there are several triggers, actors, and documents relating to this issue that would make a more intensive mobilisation possible in the near future: the debate may explode at any moment.¹²

⁹ Grzebalska, “Poland,” 92.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 90, emphasis in the original.

¹¹ Cf. Tadeusz Pieronek, Polish bishop on the “gender problem”. (http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/27/opinion/sierakowski-the-polish-churchs-gender-problem.html?_r=0, 27 May 2015)

¹² The examination of anti-gender attacks has just begun in Hungarian social research, with, for example, Nikolett Kormos’ introduction to the special issue of the *Replika* journal on Hungarian

The debate first appeared in 2010, when the then governing left-liberal coalition was ousted by the new, conservative government of *Fidesz-KDNP* (Christian Democratic Party). Already in 2010, the Gender Equality Department was disbanded and merged into the Division of Equal Opportunity under the Ministry of Human Resources. The new Family Protection Act which came into force in 2012 reiterates foetus protection from conception, and redefines family as composed of the marriage of a heterosexual couple and their children, or relatives in direct line.

Currently, the gender debate infiltrates the discourse held around the issue of migration. Talking at the Budapest Demographic Forum on 5 November 2015, prime minister Viktor Orbán pointed out as important that communities can sustain themselves even without the involvement of external resources. "Who will inhabit Europe?" is a key question for Orbán, and the anti-gender rhetoric appears in this context again:

It would be worth the while to talk about this seriously, but somehow there is much more time, attention, energy, and money for other things and debates that are alienated from life. Gender debate, homosexual marriage, and we could certainly mention a few more. These things are cute and important, but are secondary after all; they will not move Europe from the economic and societal pitfall.¹³

Gender Studies, "Előszó: A genderideológiáról," in: *Replika* (1-2/2014), 7-11. The above-mentioned study by Eszter Kováts and Eszter Petronella Soós, as well as Lília Balogh's paper of February 2015 entitled "A nemek közötti egyenlőség normái a 'gender-ideológia' diskurzusának tükrében" [Norms of Gender Equality in Light of the Discourse of '[Norms Ideology]'], in: *Állam és Jogtudomány* (4/2014), 3-25. Eszter Kováts / Maari Pöim (eds.), *Gender as Symbolic Glue* looks at the role of right and extreme right parties in the mobilisation around the "gender ideology" discourse, with two Hungarian studies included: Anikó Félix, 62-82 and Andrea Pető, 126-132. One of the defining studies in gender debate in Hungary is the article of Gerhard Marschütz, "A biológiai nem megszüntetése? Teológiai megfontolások a katolikus területen folyó gender-vitához" [Dissolving Biological Sex? Theological Considerations of the Debate on Gender within Catholicism], in: Szécsi József (ed.), *Keresztény - Zsidó Teológiai Évkönyv 2014* (Keresztény-Zsidó Társaság: Budapest 2014), 160-177. (http://teologusnok.hu/files/temak/gender/201504_Gender-ideologia_Prof.Marschutz.pdf, 30 May 2015). Marschütz looks at the phenomenon of the gender debate from a theological perspective, and points out that the concepts of Gabriele Kuby, who has been of definitive importance in this debate, are strongly questionable from a theological perspective.

¹³ The prime minister's speech is published on his website: http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/cikk/az_eu_nem_epitheti_a_jovojet_csaladok_helyett_bevandorlasra, 10 November 2015. My translation from Hungarian.

In the domains of theology and the Church, the first books that attempted to explain why “gender ideology” was dangerous appeared in 2008. Prime examples are the volumes *Die Gender Revolution – Relativismus in Aktion*¹⁴ and *Die globale sexuelle Revolution. Zerstörung der Freiheit im Namen der Freiheit*¹⁵ by Gabriele Kuby, and the essay *A szexuális forradalomtól a gender-forradalomig* [From Sexual Revolution to Gender Revolution] by pater Ferenc Tomka.¹⁶ Tomka assumes Kuby’s entire gender conspiracy theory without any critique whatsoever.

Another definitive piece of work for the theological discourse is the volume of the Austrian auxiliary bishop Andreas Laun, *Keresztény ember a modern világban* [Christian Man in the Modern World], also published in Hungarian in 2014.¹⁷ Laun introduced his book personally at a book presentation held at the Pázmány Péter University in October 2014. According to the extreme right-wing associated website “eredetiemep.hu”, Andreas Laun highlighted that

National Socialism and Communism tried to disable the Church’s work; and we hoped that we would not face any attacks anymore. Alas, we were wrong because the gender movement appeared, which represents the absurd concept that there are no essential differences between being a man or a woman, and it is only a matter of socialisation if someone becomes a man or a woman.¹⁸

The Possible Emergence of a Movement; Preventive and Halting Strategies

If we look at the countries where a significant societal anti-gender movement has emerged, it is easy to map the first steps of a movement, the necessary structural requirements and focal point around which the discourse intensified. The first steps of such emerging movements exhibit, milder mobilisations as

¹⁴ Gabriele Kuby, *Die Gender Revolution – Relativismus in Aktion* (fe-medienvverlag: Kießlegg 2006). The book was also published in Hungarian: *A nemek forradalma. A gender forradalma – A nevelés államosítása* (Kairosz: Budapest 2008).

¹⁵ Gabriele Kuby, *Die globale sexuelle Revolution. Zerstörung der Freiheit im Namen der Freiheit* (fe-medienvverlag: Kießlegg 2012). The book was also published in Hungarian: *Globális szexuális forradalom – A szabadság elpusztítása a szabadság nevében* (Kairosz: Budapest 2013).

¹⁶ Ferenc Tomka (in collaboration with László Bíró, Ilona Ékes, and Péter Roska), “A szexuális forradalomtól a gender-forradalomig”, in: *Magyar Bioetikai Szemle* (1-2/2010), 63-74. (<http://makab.sk/Hu/anyagok/gender.pdf>, 10 November 2015)

¹⁷ Andreas Laun, *Keresztény ember a modern világban*, (Kairosz: Budapest 2014).

¹⁸ A summary of Andreas Laun’s speech can be read at the following link, under the title “Gender Ideology is Demonic and Also Destroys Families: <http://www.eredetiemep.hu/fuggetlenseg/2014/november/14/13.htm>, 10 November 2015. My translation from Hungarian.

an initial step, followed, in the right moment, by a burst up of a much stronger societal movement. The theoretical background work, the arguments and materials had usually been at hand for several years already.

The lack of two of these structural conditions slows down the intense emergence of anti-gender attacks in Hungary. One is that the integration, organisation, and civic relations of the Catholic Church in Hungary are all very weak due to its historical background; and it is not very likely that it would be able to build up and operate enduring civil organisational structures that are independent of party politics.¹⁹ A second, very important, structural factor lacking in Hungary, is that contrary to Slovakia, Poland, or Croatia, for instance, Hungarian legislation pushed gender mainstreaming completely to the background since 2010 in, making any fundamentalist backlash quite senseless. The Hungarian government implements a non-liberal (illiberal) cultural agenda, so that anti-gender attacks are meaningless. However, there is already a risk of gender attacks: there are political actors, journalists, Church personalities, and conservative non-governmental organisations that stimulate and may lead on gender attacks. The theoretical background material is already available.

The reasons immediately preceding an outburst are different in different countries. For example, in Slovakia, it was the discussion around government strategy with regard to human rights that set attacks in motion, while in Poland, the financial and paedophiliac scandals of the Church led to similar results.

It seems very feasible that the government itself can also kick-start an anti-gender movement should a new enemy be sought when the immigrant agenda is depleted. An attack against the benchmark human rights and equal opportunity norms of the European Union would very comfortably fit the freedom-fighting, anti-EU rhetoric of the government and its strategy of mobilising its own civil organisations. Possible points of explosion could be abortion, or the topic of LGBTQ rights, or even the current, highly intense issue of immigration.

The main question for preventive and halting strategies, is whether progressive social stakeholders are able to develop a competitive frame, a political narrative that renders comprehensible and politically attractive the critical contents of gender concepts frequented by the actors of gender studies. Seeking dialogue between conservative and progressive thinkers, political scientists and gender studies experts, sociologists, theologians, journalists, opinion leaders, etc., is pivotal. Such a search for dialogue has been going on with increasing intensity since early

¹⁹ Kováts / Soós, „Félelem a dominó-elvtől?,” 120.

2014, with the forums of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, the public political activity of the Hungarian chapter of ESWTR, and the production and translation of theological works trying to remedy the almost completely lacking gender perspective in theological approach in Hungary, playing an essential role. The purpose of the dialogue is to prevent, on all levels, the development of an enemy stereotype, and the escalation helix built upon fear and hatred.

Misunderstanding and Misreading Gender-Conscious Thinking in Church Texts in Slovakia

I have selected texts to which an adequate theological response can be given. One, such text is the pastoral letter of the Conference of Slovak Bishops, published on 1 December 2013, available on the Internet in Hungarian, and read out aloud in various Hungarian churches.²⁰ I would like to point out the rhetorical topoi of the anti-gender campaign that emerged and became widespread not only in Slovakia, but also in Poland, among others.²¹

After the pastoral letter, the politics in Slovakia were polarised in relation to the idea of gender equality and “gender ideology”. There were, of course, some debates on this issue previously connected with the German sociologist, Gabriele Kuby, and her lectures on state sex education for children, homosexuality, and pornography. The strategies of human rights and of gender equality are closely linked with the emergence of the anti-gender discourse. There had been a strong resistance on the part of several NGOs and the Slovak Bishops Conference against the gender equality strategy for the years 2014–2019. Representatives of catholic schools issued a declaration warning of the gender ideology and early sexualisation of children at schools. Oľga Pietručová, Head of the Gender Equality Department in the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, and Family, who has actively participated in the preparation of the human rights and gender equality strategy, has had to deal personally with very aggressive attacks and threats.

²⁰ Cf. Conference of Slovak Bishops, “Pastoral letter on the first Sunday of Advent in 2013”. (<http://www.kbs.sk/obsah/sekcia/h/dokumenty-a-vyhlasenia/p/pastierske-listy-konferencie-biskupov-slovenska/c/pastiersky-list-na-prvu-adventnu-nedelu-2013>, 27 May 2015). Available in Hungarian: (<http://www.magyarurir.hu/hirek/szlovak-katolikus-puspoki-konferencia-adventi-korlevele>, 27 May 2015)

²¹ Cf. The pastoral letter of the Conference of Polish Bishops appeared on Sunday of the Holy Family, 2013. (http://episkopat.pl/dokumenty/listy_pasterskie/5584.1,Pastoral_letter_of_the_Bishops_Conference_of_Poland_to_be_used_on_the_Sunday_of_the_Holy_Family_2013.html, 15 May 2015)

"Followers of 'the culture of death' proclaim the sameness of the sexes"

Let us look at the pastoral letter of the Conference of Slovak Bishops.

Advocates of "the culture of death" came up with the new concept of "gender ideology", and in its name they proclaim the sameness of the sexes. When hearing the concept for the first time, one may think that the main objective is to ensure equal rights and dignity to both males and females. However, when referring to "gender equality", the promoters of gender equality mean something totally different. Promoters of gender equality want to convince the public that none of us has been created as a man or a woman; and therefore, they aim at taking away the man's identity as a man, and the woman's identity as a woman, and the family's identity as a family.²²

The greatest problem with the term "gender ideology" is that it does not refer to any clear reality. This is, in fact, an empty term which can be filled with any preferable content. The term "gender ideology" is used in the debate to assault anything that has to do with gender or feminism, rendering many the following concepts suspicious: gender perspective, gender studies or gender theories, gender mainstreaming, feminism, feminist philosophy, feminist social theory, feminist theology, feminist ethics, etc.

What then is the point and purpose of using this term? During the heated debate in Poland, one could hear utterances such as "'gender ideology' is more dangerous than communism and fascism combined."²³ After the fall of the iron curtain, the Church had to face the burden of the pluralism of the modern age within a short time. This confrontation also concerns religious people, who do not side with the Church nowadays as unanimously as they did during communism in the form of shared resistance. Thus, the question today is whether resistance to "gender ideology" will be able to mobilise and unify Catholics.²⁴

What else is the problem with the quotation above? "Advocates of 'the culture of death' came up with the new idea of 'culture ideology', and in its name they proclaim the sameness of the sexes".²⁵ By stating so, the pastoral

²² Conference of Slovak Bishops, "Pastoral letter." My translation from the Hungarian version.

²³ See note 11.

²⁴ Gerhard Marschütz, „Trojanisches Pferd Gender? Theologische Anmerkungen zur jüngeren Genderdebatte im katholischen Bereich,“ in: Kerstin Schlögel-Flierl / Gunter M. Prüller-Jagenteufel (eds.), *Aus Liebe zu Gott – im Dienst an den Menschen: Spirituelle, pastorale und ökumenische Dimensionen der Moraltheologie* (Aschendorff: Münster 2014), 433-456, here 438.

²⁵ See note 20.

letter assumes that the term “gender” entails an “equality of man and woman” that is dissociated from biology and understood as “gender sameness”, as a material lack of differentiation. This quotation from the pastoral letter suggests that the so-called “gender ideology” is about the elimination and disappearance of biological sex. However, gender studies’ concern with gender equality – the formal equality of genders –, is in the context of human dignity. This means that it is also concerned with examining, from the perspective of their non-reflective biological fixations, the gender differences between man and woman assumed to be self-evident in both everyday discourse and science, and which often hinder such equality, and with demonstrating that these are predominantly socially constructed.

Biological sex is a given and does not change. Gender, on the other hand, can change: it is dependent on the cultural context and on other factors. And the term “gender equality” means that “the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are equally valued and favoured and do not give rise to different consequences that reinforce inequalities.”²⁶ Thus, the possibility of gender-based discrimination and the unequal treatment (of either women or men) is precluded.

“Introducing ‘Sodomite Ideology’ into Schools”

Let us examine another thought, the topoi of which are repeated many times and in many different contexts in anti-gender alarmism in Slovakia:

Advocates of the “sameness of the sexes” never give up, but they are waiting for the suitable moment to grab, with the help of legislation, the process of education, and introduce this “Sodomite ideology” into schools and kindergartens. They promote an educational process, which would not only deprive children of their dignity, but also would make them into moral and psychological cripples. Children would not be given the chance to develop into mature men and women.²⁷

This quotation refers to the introduction of “sexual education” into schools, which, in the view of the supporters of anti-gender attacks, leads to the early sexualisation of children and the spreading of “gender ideology”.

²⁶ EUROPEAN COMMISSION: EMPLOYMENT & EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND, *EQUAL Guide on Gender Mainstreaming*, (Luxembourg, 2005), 3. (http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/equal_consolidated/data/document/gendermain_en.pdf, 10 November 2015).

²⁷ Conference of Slovak Bishops, “Pastoral letter.” My translation from the Hungarian version.

An Immediate Political Call with a Combative Tone

Before finishing this chapter, let us look at a final quotation:

The culture of death really threatens the existence of the nation. In such a situation previous generations did not hesitate to sacrifice their lives in the interest of their motherland. From our part, for the time being, no such great sacrifice is demanded, but let's remain vigilant! We warn leaders on every level, parents, local authorities at schools, and every well-meaning citizen to take precautions. Let's reject the culture of death at the very beginning! At any elections, vote for those candidates who exclusively reject the culture of death. Otherwise, we would belittle our ancestors who sacrificed their lives.²⁸

The expression "sacrifice of lives" reminds one of a manifesto for war, which would definitely not promote dialogue or peace in society. Referring back to war suggests, that just as a certain ideology – fascism – had to be fought against in the past, we must now fight with the same resolution against the equally dangerous notion of "gender ideology".

The reason for writing this text, and for gender suddenly becoming the focus of attention, is clearly shown by the following sentence: "At any elections, vote for those candidates..." This clearly shows the intention behind the pastoral letter, namely to exert influence in the context of the presidential elections that took place in March 2014.

The Impact of Gabriele Kuby in the Gender Debate in Eastern and Central Europe

*Die Gender Revolution 2006,*²⁹ *Die globale sexuelle Revolution 2012*³⁰

If we seek to identify the texts which may have influenced the anti-gender campaign in Slovakia, Poland, and Croatia, it does not take long to come up with Gabriele Kuby. Kuby is a German publicist, translator, and sociologist, a Christian fundamentalist who is very popular in politically (ultra)conservative circles in her homeland, and equally in Hungary, too.

The popularity of Kuby's book can be easily understood: it can be downloaded free of charge from the websites of the Christian Democratic People's

²⁸ Ibid. My translation from the Hungarian version.

²⁹ Kuby, *Die Gender Revolution*. The book was published in Hungarian (2008), Polish, Croatian, and Italian translations as well.

³⁰ Kuby, *Die globale sexuelle Revolution*. The book was published in Hungarian (2013), Slovakian, Czech, and Croatian translations as well.

Party [KDNP] and the Piarist Order. This finally led to the situation that the book became the ultimate standard for understanding gender in certain circles of the Church in Hungary as well as in the political field. It has been recommended and popularised with great enthusiasm, and without any criticism.

According to Marschütz, “Kuby’s books function in European postcommunist countries as ‘the’ Catholic answer to challenges of the modern age concerning, especially, the morality of marriage, family and sexuality, with special regard to ‘gender ideology.’”³¹ We must note, that Kuby has no academic qualifications in theology, and is therefore not acquainted with the specific modern literature of moral theology, which discusses these questions with academic precision and an openness to the challenges of the modern age. While gender-aware approaches appear in all disciplines in theology in Western Europe, and there is a great number of research projects held and many publications written, the concept of gender is unfortunately completely alien to theology in Central and East-Europe. Therefore, Kuby’s concepts are met with (almost) no critique. It is only recently, that the first articles in German-speaking countries which seriously criticise the book on a theological basis have been published.³²

*Quotations from Kuby’s “Die Gender Revolution”*³³

In our age we are experiencing the most extreme manifestations of relativism: they [advocates of “gender ideology” R.P.] deny what is obvious and conceivable for every human being, and what is, since the dawn of humanity, as self-evident as the alternation of day and night: *humans exist in two sexes – male and female*. Anyone who hasn’t met this way of thinking may see it as morbid hubris, which is unnecessary to deal with. However, this perspective has, since the last decade, (silently)

³¹ Marschütz, „A biológiai nem megszüntetése?“ [Dissolving Biological Sex?], 166. My translation from Hungarian.

³² Marschütz, „Trojanisches Pferd Gender?“ 433-456; Marschütz, „Wachstumspotenzial für die eigene Lehre. Zur Kritik an der vermeintlichen Gender-Ideologie,“ in: *Herder Korrespondenz* 68 (9/2014), 457-462. (http://www.hk-on.de/HKOnlineDocuments/HTML%20Einzelbeitraege/2014/Heft%209/HK_68_2014_09_Ss_457ff.htm and http://st-theoethik-ktf.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/p_theologische_ethik/Klarstellung_zu_Kuby_HK11-2014.pdf, 10 November 2015). Rebeke J. Anić, „Der Begriff ‘Gender’ als Anathema: Eine Kampagne der kroatischen Bischöfe als Beispiel,“ in: *Herder Korrespondenz* 69 (3/2015), 157-161; Rebeke J. Anić / Jadranka Brncic, „Missverständnisse um den Begriff ‘Gender’: Überlegungen anlässlich einer Botschaft der kroatischen Bischofskonferenz,“ in: *Concilium* 51 (1/2015), 121-126; Rebeke J. Anić, „Gender, Politik und die katholische Kirche: Ein Beitrag zum Abbau der alten Geschlechterstereotypen,“ in: *Concilium* 48 (4/2012), 373-382.

³³ Kuby, “Die Gender Revolution.” Henceforth, my translations from Hungarian.

become the guiding principle of the UN, the EU and national governments, leading to a social revolution, shaking the very foundations of human existence.³⁴

We can see that Kuby portrays so-called “gender ideologists” as people who want to relativise male and female sex. This misinterpretation was the focus of anti-gender attacks in Slovakia and Poland. The anti-UN and anti-EU political orientation of the idea is obvious.

Gender as Synonym for the Dissolution of Biological Sex in Kuby’s Writing

They argue that the sexual difference between men and women is a social construction, invented by “heterosexual patriarchy”.³⁵

The “compulsory heterosexuality” must be exceeded, as long as people are free to define – independent of their biological sex – their gender.³⁶

The struggle is fought with the artificial term “gender”. In 1995, on the Fourth World Conference of Women in Beijing, feminists, in a manipulative way, exchanged the term “sex” with “gender”, in order to deliver the sexual difference between man and woman to the arbitrariness of subjective decision.³⁷

The purpose of gender activists is the “dissolution of the obvious sexes” and creating a malleable identity.³⁸

From these quotations, it turns out that Kuby interprets and condemns the term “gender” as the dissolution of “biological sex”. “By doing this, doesn’t she intentionally misinterpret the concept of ‘gender’, turning it into a threatening target which must inevitably be rejected?” – asks Marschütz.³⁹

“Sex” is nothing else but biological and anatomical differences between men and women. In opposition to this, “gender” refers to socially constructed differences. In this sense, “gender” is a social construction, because it is constantly changing with the social context. However, the fact that different cultures define the socially desirable behaviour, roles, and personality traits of men and women (that is, gender) differently does *not* mean that with a constantly changing and socially constructed gender, biological sex also changes. This claim of Kuby’s is an absurdity.

³⁴ Kuby, *Die Gender Revolution*, 62. Emphasis in the original.

³⁵ Kuby, *Die Gender Revolution*, 63.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

³⁹ Marschütz, „A biológiai nem megszüntetése?“ [Dissolving Biological Sex?], 167. My translation from Hungarian.

Manifestations of Homophobia in Kuby’s Writing

The minority of homo-, bi- and trans-sexuals, which is not discriminated against anymore at all, but, on the contrary, is discriminating others, is making an effort to force its values, during the process of a social revolution unprecedented in history, on the majority.⁴⁰

So far [advocates of “gender ideology” R.P.] were talking about gays, lesbians, bi- and trans-sexuals, but now even the fight for paedophilia and polygamy is going on as well.⁴¹

These claims are equally absurd and dangerous. They portray the endeavours towards gender equality as a homo-, bi- and trans-sexual conspiracy, who no longer fight against hate and discrimination, but want to transform society, and want the majority to become like them. What is more, Kuby “informs” us that these movements are fighting for the legalisation of paedophilia and polygamy as well.

In this claim, Kuby consciously confounds the categories of “minority” and “majority”, depicting the “minority” as the enemy by ignoring the discrimination it is facing from the “majority”, and, by a twisted logic, shifts the emphasis onto the “minority”, which is supposedly threatening the normality and existence of the “majority”. But how would any “minority” be capable of doing this?

Summary

The most dangerous scenario would probably be, if the culture war attacking gender studies and gender mainstreaming would lead to a situation where one would no longer be permitted to talk about gender equality, or where certain groups of people have to suffer even more discrimination and hatred than they have so far due to their sexual orientation. And who knows what else is concealed under the mask of this *Kulturkampf*? What does the face of new political and religious fundamentalism look like in the 21st century?

N. Docekal recognises that the fight for gender equality can only be successful if it transcends national frameworks:

Any attempt to implement the objective of equitableness within the constraints of individual states is deemed to fail. Therefore, the claims for a participatory parity

⁴⁰ Kuby, *Die Gender Revolution*, 64.

⁴¹ Kuby, *Die Gender Revolution*, 66.

of genders are being devised now also in the context of contemporary blueprints for a "global democracy" [...] This means, with relevance for the feminist cause, that a joint engagement for gender equality that reaches beyond national borders, can be justified from the moral theological perspective.⁴²

All of this is particularly true in the context of anti-gender attacks.

Theology has to carry a societal responsibility: if certain processes are set into motion in society that threaten social equality and human dignity, then theology must not remain silent. Responsibly lived faith is what can liberate us from social injustice, oppression, poverty and exclusion. A just society can only come about if we are able to discover the face of the suffering God in the face of fellow humans who suffer discrimination and despise. We must not pass them by without doing anything.

This study aims to analyse a recent phenomenon, which is rooted in political and/or religious fundamentalism. Fundamentalist thinking sees a threat in changing male and female social roles and also in changes to the traditional family model. Rather than understand this diversity, it tries to reduce it and does so through irrational argumentation. It selects one of the existing models and absolutizes, it declaring it proper and morally right, while everything else is seen as improper, morally wrong, and even dangerous. As a consequence, both politics and the Church give rise to transnational movements which aggressively attack gender studies as the descriptive science of changes, and gender mainstreaming as the political strategic principle that fights for the social equality of men and women. The "gender ideology" debate opens up a new chapter in the political, cultural, and social landscape of Europe, questioning previous political chasms. The current analysis shows that anti-gender attacks are about more than they seem to be at first sight. The issue runs deeper, as these movements question the post-WWII consensus over a political language centred on human rights and disenchantment as well as a neoliberal, policy-based approach to foster political change. Gender here serves as "only a symbolic glue". Finally, these are movements that question not only the existence of the EU, but also the fundamental European principle of democratic functioning.

In meinem Aufsatz analysiere ich ein höchst aktuelles transnationales Phänomen, was im politischen bzw. religiösen Fundamentalismus tief verwurzelt ist. Denn die

⁴² Herta Nagl-Docekal, „Philosophische Reflexionen über Liebe und die Gefahr ihrer Unterbestimmung im zeitgenössischen Diskurs,“ in: Herta Nagl-Docekal / Friedrich Wolfram (eds.), *Jenseits der Säkularisierung. Religionsphilosophische Studien* (Parerga; Berlin 2008), 111-142, here 141. My translation from German.

neue fundamentalistische Denkweise sieht in den wandelnden männlichen und weiblichen Geschlechterrollen und der damit enhergehenden Veränderungen der traditionellen Familienmodelle eine große Gefahr. Anstatt dass Gründe dieser Änderungen verstehen zu wollen, wird versucht, die so eben entstehende Vielfalt sofort wieder zu reduzieren. Dies geschieht mit zum Teil irrationalen Argumenten. Aus den vielfältigen Familien- und Beziehungsmodellen wird ein verabsolutiert und somit einzig als moralisch richtig deklariert. Alle anderen Modelle fallen in die Kategorie „moralisch schlecht“ und „verwerflich“, oder gar „gefährlich“, wobei die wissenschaftliche Geschlechterforschung aggressiv attackiert und als „Gender-Ideologie“ deklariert wird. Aus meiner Analyse wird klar werden, dass es bei der sog. Anti-Gender-Bewegung um viel mehr geht als um eine bewusste Missinterpretation des Begriffs „Gender“. Es werden nicht nur Gender als analytische Kategorie und die sich daran anschließenden politischen Strategien in Frage gestellt, sondern auch das damit verbundene Grundprinzip der europäischen Demokratie.

Rita Perintfalvi is a theologian of the Roman Catholic faith with a PhD in Old Testament Studies. She is a teacher of religion, Manager of Culture and Social Affairs specialising in psychosocial prevention. She currently works as the scientific and pedagogical advisor to Österreichisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, and as lecturer at the University of Vienna (Theological Research of Men, Women and Gender). She is working on her habilitation under the tutorship of Prof. Dr. Gerhard Marschütz, on the topic of “Transformation possibilities of various forms of religious and social exclusion from a theological perspective.” The examination of the “gender ideology” discourse is an integral part of this research.