

Roman Kuhar and David Patternote (eds.)

**ANTI-GENDER CAMPAIGNS IN EUROPE:
Mobilizing against equality**
London, Rowman & Littlefield, 2017

Anti-gender campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against equality, edited by Roman Kuhar and David Patternote, consists of various subchapters with a common theme – the analysis of anti-gender movements that are appearing and consolidating across Europe. According to the authors, the movements' common background is an opposition to the so called 'gender ideology' or 'gender theory'. In these anti-gender movements and campaigns, 'gender ideology' is perceived as an ideology that aims to destabilize and even destroy social values that are seen as cornerstones of Western civilization, namely, the notion of 'biological sex', heterosexuality, family, and freedom. To formulate it differently, 'gender ideology' is perceived to be socially dangerous because of the effect sexual and reproductive rights, women's rights, and LGBTIQ+ rights have on the taken-for-granted and privileged status of heterosexuality and of a specific family form, that is, family with a 'male' and 'female' parent ('heterosexual family'). Namely, with feminist and LGBTIQ+ movements (where LGBTIQ+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer people) and their accomplishments throughout history, heteronormativity cannot simply be taken for granted anymore; moreover, it is destabilized to such a degree that its explicit and direct defence is made necessary: its common sense status needs to be rebuilt and stabilized by 'unmasking' what 'gender ideology' supposedly stands for and by revealing its 'threatening' consequences.

The idea of 'gender ideology' thus serves as a 'straw man', a face of moral panic, established through the politics of fear and produced for right-wing political parties and civil society actors, now capable of uniting around a misconception of 'gender' as being an unnatural product with unnatural, anti-social consequences for what is perceived to be natural – biological – gender, and natural 'heterosexual' family: "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'." (p. 15). Through various subchapters, different ways of mobilizing against gender equality are analysed in-depth, including political and civil society actors, national differences and their similarities, as well as strategies that are being deployed against LGBTIQ+ and feminist movements, accused of promoting 'anti-social' values.

The analysis of the anti-gender movements' strategies is of special importance, showing the full extent of appropriating the language of rights, freedoms, and freedom of speech in particular, from the predominant framework in which they were used, and thus turning it into an 'empty signifier', that is, emptying it of the previously integral progressive and emancipatory values built up throughout the historical developments of gaining and achieving equality. Instead of explicit and direct opposition to women's and LGBTIQ+ rights, opponents now recognize that being referred to as 'backwards' and being seen as 'on the wrong side of history' do not have the desired and aimed for political effects, that is, reproducing the social status quo, at least not when confronted with progressive movements. Despite the progression in terms of emancipation and achieving equality being far from linear, the mobilization of anti-gender movements clearly shows its achievements cannot be taken for granted (e.g. as evident in the case of abortion rights being seriously threatened).

Kuhar and Patternote, along with the contributions of other authors, offer a rich analysis of campaigns and movements against equality. Their work is significant not only in academic terms but also for progressive civil society, taking into account the times, characterized by widespread right-wing political mobilization not only against women and the LGBTIQ+ community, but also against numerous social Others (refugees, migrants, etc.). In this regard, their contribution can be seen as an intervention aiming not only to provide answers to the questions of right-wing mobilization against equality, but also to open up space and establish opportunities for serious questions to be posed to progressive movements, their mobilization and campaigns, including (or especially) the difficulties in terms of establishing coalition politics, united around common causes – emancipation and equality.

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