Zusammenfassung
Antigenderpolitik in Ostmitteleuropa: rechter Gegenwind für den Westeurozentrismus


Schlüsselwörter
Ostmitteleuropa, Europäisierung, Antigender, Feminismus, LGBT, Rechtspopulismus

Summary
Anti-gender actors in East-Central Europe (ECE) too claim that gender is an ideological colonization. In this article, in contrasting these accusations with actually existing power relations of the global and European gender architecture, I discuss whether they are – at least to some extent – based on social realities. Neither anti-gender campaigns nor the rise of illiberal forces are ECE phenomena per se and should not be treated as such. However, the relevance of the geopolitical embeddedness of gender equality policies, of gender studies and of feminist and LGBT politics needs to be analysed thoroughly in order to better understand the right-wing discourse. This paper offers a theoretical explanation, based on existing empirical studies and critical theoretical literature. Focussing on the four Visegrád countries, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, it attempts to demonstrate the specific drivers of the anti-gender mobilization in this region and argues that anti-gender discourse is a right-wing language of resistance against existing material and symbolic East-West inequalities in Europe.

Keywords
East-Central Europe, Europeanisation, anti-gender, feminism, LGBT, right-wing populism

In 2017, the conservative-fundamentalist World Congress of Families held its annual meeting in Budapest. Katalin Novák, then Hungarian State Secretary (now Minister) for Family Policy, gave one of the opening speeches, speaking about an experience
she has had at the United Nations in Geneva. She was reporting on the Hungarian
government’s position on same-sex marriage (i.e. its opposition to it), upon which she
allegedly received this reaction: “This is a learning process – you will get to that point.”
She summed up the attitude of the UN body towards Hungary: “We’re always supposed
to feel ashamed. But we shouldn’t be constantly lectured.”

“Has care [as an issue] already arrived to Hungary?” – I overheard this sentence in
an international workshop in 2017, by a German to a Hungarian feminist activist, who
responded: “Yes, it already even left it … towards Germany” – pointing sarcastically to
the pretentious character of the question (i.e. every idea comes from the West) and to one
of the main causes of the care deficit in the East-Central European (ECE) region: care
drain, and to the fact that the emancipation of women (understood as labour market par-
ticipation) of Western European countries is connected to the outsourcing of household
and care work to lower class and migrant women, oftentimes from the EU’s periphery.

These two anecdotes reflect and highlight the topicality of power relations, both
East-West and in the context of supranational bodies like the EU and the UN. The first
case is an illustration of how the illiberal right-wing Fidesz, ruling since 2010, instru-
mentalizes the rhetoric of subjugation for mobilization and to legitimate their own ac-
tions. The second is a regular and widely documented experience of feminists and gender
scholars from post-socialist countries coming in contact with their Western counterparts
since the 1989–1991 political transformations. In the present article, I try to connect
these two sets of experiences and phenomena through an analysis of the anti-gender rhe-
toric of the right-wing actors (parties, social movements, religious authorities, intellec-
tuals) in East-Central Europe. I attempt doing this by contrasting their “key discursive
strategy” (Graff/Korolczuk 2018), the claim of ‘ideological colonization’ with existing
power structures in the global and European gender architecture. I offer a theoretical
explanation, based on available empirical studies on the anti-gender phenomenon of the
four Visegrád countries: Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, and on empir-
ical and theoretical studies on the East-West inequalities of the past decades.

As I seek to understand post-socialist specificities of this transnational phenomenon,
I am taking the risk of glossing over contextual differences and rather go beyond a one
country case study, taking the four countries as one case study for the region. They
share certain core characteristics: their satellite status to the Soviet Union during the
Cold War, the legacy of state feminism, their economic and political starting positions
at the regime changes in 1989/1991, their path to EU accession in 2004, their room
for manoeuvring and dilemmas around adopting Gender Studies and Western type of
feminism and LGBT politics, and the ongoing Visegrád co-operation (V4) make them
suitable for joint analysis. These countries treated as one case study might shed light
on some common features of the former ‘Second World’. While the rise of neither anti-
gender nor of illiberal forces is an ECE phenomenon per se and should not be treated
as such, the relevance of the geopolitical embeddedness of gender equality policies, of
gender studies and feminist and LGBT politics in this region cannot be underestimated.
For this we need to go beyond analysing the anti-gender actors’ discourse. I contend:
these existing material and symbolic East-West inequalities are the anchors the illiberal
right-wing forces use for their political ends, and these partly explain the particular ECE
drivers of anti-gender mobilization.