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**THE CONSTRUCTION OF “GENDER
IDEOLOGY” IN THE TRANSNATIONAL ANTI-
GENDER MOVEMENT: THE CASE OF ESTONIA**

Master's Thesis

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Tallinn 2020

I declare I have written this thesis independently.

All works and major viewpoints of other authors and data from other sources of literature that were used for writing this thesis have been referenced.

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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I inspect a transnational social movement – the anti-gender movement. The anti-gender movement is a transnational social movement that attacks gender equality, women’s rights, and minority rights, particularly the rights of LGBTI persons; however, racist and anti-immigration sentiment is also prominent within the movement. The anti-gender movement refers to all the movements mobilising against what the actors of the anti-gender movement call “gender ideology”. Anti-gender actors oppose the understanding of the social construction of gender, hence the term “gender ideology”, which refers to the English distinction between sex and gender. The focus of my analysis is on the Estonian organisations and actors of the anti-gender movement, and the importing of strategies of the anti-gender ideology from their allies in other states and from the global networks to which they belong.

Focusing on Estonia allows me to inspect how transnational movements are able to manifest themselves successfully in a small state such as Estonia. This indicates that by importing effective strategies and rhetoric from other states and organisations, one does not need a lot of human resources to effectively manifest the anti-gender ideology locally.

The main research questions addressed are:

1. Who are the main actors of the anti-gender movement in Estonia?
2. How has the anti-gender movement mobilised in Estonia?
3. Whether and how the anti-gender movement in Estonia is connected to the transnational anti-gender movement

To answer these questions, I will analyse two concrete actions taken by the anti-gender actors using Critical Discourse Analysis: the petition against the spread of “gay and gender ideology” in schools that attacks inclusive gender and sexual education in Estonian schools, and the attack on the Istanbul Convention, a convention that aims to tackle and end violence against women. These texts in particular are chosen because of their political relevance.

The relevance of this research topic comes from the increasing reach of the anti-gender movement, which has been recognised both by the European Union and the Council of Europe and poses a threat to minority and women’s rights, as well as to gender equality and liberal

democracies. Thus, in order to continue progress towards a society where each person's rights are recognised and protected equally with others, it is vital to understand the causes, strategies, and aims of this social movement as well as its transnational nature.

This thesis has three main sections. The first section gives the theoretical framework of this thesis. I start out by explaining that the thesis follows a constructivist theory, and also acknowledge that an understanding that gender equality, women's rights, and equal treatment and rights of various minorities, including LGBTI persons, are positive and necessary parts of liberal democracies and democratic societies, as well as each person's individual well-being. I will then move on to introducing the key concepts of this thesis and introduce the concept of the anti-gender movement and their construction of "gender ideology". In addition, since the anti-gender movement uses populist rhetoric and strategies, is connected to and represented by a radical-right political ideology in Europe, represents gendered nationalism, and is a transnational social movement, all of these concepts will be introduced as well.

For the actors of the anti-gender movement, gender functions as a "symbolic glue" allowing actors with different strategies and goals to work together against a common enemy – "gender ideology". Using "gender ideology" has allowed the anti-gender movement to mobilise against gender equality, feminism, women's rights, LGBTI equality, sexual and equality education, gender studies at universities, and liberal democracy under one signifier (Kováts & Pöim, 2015).

The discourse of the anti-gender movement is best understood by acknowledging the intersection between the Catholic Church and its concern for "gender ideology" and the current wave of radical-right populism in Europe (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 13). The main actors of the anti-gender movement in Europe are radical Catholic organisations (or sometimes Orthodox or other religious fundamentalists), and radical-right political organisations. This is also true for Estonia. The anti-gender actors have a religious side represented by a radical Catholic organisation, the Foundation for the Protection of Family and Tradition, and a political side represented by a nationalist radical-right party, the Estonian Conservative People's Party. Although the anti-gender movement is not a direct result of the radical-right gaining more power and surface, the shift to the right reinforces the anti-gender movement and provides them ideological support (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 13).

Some central elements of the radical-right populism and the anti-gender movement are very similar, such as European integration scepticism, resistance to globalisation, and national and

racial anxieties. The democratic anxieties are particularly strong in Russia and Eastern Europe. (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 8). Lastly, both discourses use similar repertoires of action and rhetoric mechanisms, and rely on “politics of fear”, which seek to install the fear of real or imagined dangers (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018). Anti-gender actors have successfully used strategic litigation, advocacy, social network, protests, demonstrations, fake news, and participatory democracy tools, such as online petitions and referendums, to advance their agenda, while using human rights language to make their agenda a better fit for the contemporary world (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2018).

In the second section of this thesis, I will introduce the methodology of the thesis. My aim is to analyse the manifestation of the transnational anti-gender movement in Estonia by comparing the actions taken by the actors of the movement in Estonia and other states by bringing out the similarities in their strategies, rhetoric, and symbols. I will also use Critical Discourse Analysis method to analyse how the actors of the anti-gender movement use language to portray reality and construct conceptions of the social world. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an analytical research method that focuses on the ways social-power abuse and inequality are produced, reproduced, enacted, legitimated, and also resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. As CDA also aims to challenge and change social inequality, in addition to understanding it, it is also characterised as a social movement. CDA thus, as van Dijk puts it, is not just a discourse analysis method among others, but rather a discourse study with an attitude (van Dijk, 2015, p. 466). By searching the words “gender ideology”, “gender”, and “*sooideoloogia*”, which is Estonian for “gender ideology”, on the web portals *Objektiiv* and *Uued Uudised* which are administrated by the Estonian anti-gender actors, my aim is to analyse whether and how these actors have imported anti-gender ideology to Estonia.

Looking at Estonia allows me to analyse the specific situation of Estonia regarding the anti-gender movement and the potential consequences to women’s rights and minority rights. To understand the anti-gender movement, we must both look at the movement from a transnational perspective, while at the same time analyse the situation in each state separately. Inspecting each anti-gender movement allows us to understand both the similarities and, thus, the transnational aspects of the anti-gender movement, as well as the state specific differences. Analysing the Estonian anti-gender movement allows me to compare the Estonian movement to anti-gender movements in other states, while also providing important input for Estonian policy makers, activists and the public. If the anti-gender ideology is imported to Estonia, it will influence policy making both domestically and internationally.

The third section of this thesis is dedicated to analysing the anti-gender movement, its actors, and strategies in Estonia and their similarities to anti-gender movement in other states. By looking at the texts, my aim is to analyse if the Estonian anti-gender actors have imported the anti-gender ideology to Estonia by constructing a social reality that reflects the anti-gender ideology and their view of Christian theology. The construction of a social reality around “gender ideology” and a “natural family”, and depicting “gender ideology” as dangerous to children, families, and morality, reflects the anti-gender discourse. My aim is also to see if the Estonian anti-gender actors use self-victimisation strategy, create moral panic and politics of fear to further their cause, and mobilise people similarly to anti-gender actors in other states.

In the fourth and final section of this thesis, I conclude by representing the main findings and conclusions of the analysis.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Constructivism

This thesis follows constructivist theory, and an understanding that gender equality, women's rights, and equal treatment and rights of various minorities, including LGBTI persons, are positive and necessary parts of liberal democracy and democratic societies, as well as each person's individual well-being.

Constructivism is a theory in the academic field of international relations; however, the idea of the social world being socially constructed, a world of our making, is a broader theory in the social sciences. Sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann argued in 1966 that society is created by humans and through human interaction. For them, society is a *habit* and this process is called *habitualisation*. Habitualisation is thus described as any repeated and frequent action that becomes a pattern and can be performed in the same manner in the future. This means we are continuously constructing our own social reality, but this action is based on what has been created before us (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Although the social world is socially constructed, it is often perceived as natural and immanent due to our *habit* of doing the same thing in the manner other people have done before us.

Both academic and political debate emerge in specific cultural and historical circumstances. The main idea in constructivism is the understanding that the social world is socially constructed. To construct something is to bring into existence a subject or an object that would otherwise not exist. Although material objects do exist regardless of our knowledge or perception of them, they only come into meaningful existence through acts of human creation. Social constructivism therefore suggests not a single objective reality, but rather differences across context. Constructivists also emphasise the social dimension of international relations and the importance of norms, rules, and language. Social constructions shape and form social norms and values, what is considered possible and impossible. They do that in a specific cultural and political forms. This does not mean that the social world could be anything or changed at any time easily, as the social world is imbued with history, culture, politics, and norms (Fierke, 2013).

We are thus limited by the social reality that has been constructed before us and is being constructed all the time, but not defined by it. As Bourdieu argues, we are able to exercise

choices inside the limits of the *habitus*. For him, *habitus* is the system of structured, structuring dispositions which are constituted in practice (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 52). The same idea is also echoed by Butler, when she argues that: “I am not outside of the language that structures me, but neither am I determined by the language that makes this ‘I’ possible” (Butler, 1990, p. xxvi).

As fundamentally social beings, individuals, organisations, and states cannot separate themselves from the context of normative meaning that shapes who they are and the possibilities available for them. For constructivists, structures do not just constrain, but also constitute the identities of different actors that are guided by logic of appropriateness. As Fierke argues: “What is rational is a function of legitimacy, defined by shared values and norms within institutions or other social structures rather than purely individual interests” (Fierke, 2013, p. 190). For example, the constructed identity of liberal democracy assumes human rights norms (Fierke, 2013, p. 191), and this means that human rights are a necessary part of liberal democracies. Identity is also constructed through conflict (Fierke, 2013, p. 191), by constructing an enemy or othering.

Both individual and collective identities are constructed in relation to the other that is different from them. Naturalisation and social construction happens through binary construction, where humans are constructed as subjects and non-subjects, as humans and somethings not quite human, less than human and abnormal. Othering is thus constructed through social inclusion and exclusion (Peters & Besley, 2014, pp. 100-101), where some members of the society are seen as “us” and others, who are not like us and are less than us, as “them”. The others, as Foucault argues, are seen as dangerous to the society and thus have to be excluded from “us”, observed and treated until they can re-enter the society as “normal” citizens (Foucault, 1995). Foucault sees otherness as *a priori* to Western societies and connected to power, domination, knowledge production, and conceptions of morality, as othering is hierarchical since the dominant group is perceived as better than the others (McLaren & Giarelli, 1995). Gender also exists through othering, as being a woman means to be something *other* than the other gender (Butler, 1990, p. 30).

In addition, the role of language is vital. It is not so much that language describes the world, but rather that we only come to understand the world through language. This implies that how language is used constitutes reality for individuals, organisations, and states. We are never able to “get behind the language” and compare it to what it describes, and, thus, “language is bound up in the world rather than a mirror of it,” (Fierke, 2013, p. 194). Through language we do not

just learn the words, but how to act in the world. Thus, not just what “lie”, “promise” and “threat” mean as words, but what it means *to* lie, promise, or threaten (Fierke, 2013, p. 197).

As individuals, gender is the most important and usually the first category that we learn in terms of how to act in the world. We consider our gender ours, an innate part of ourselves, but gender is also constructed in time and space, based on history, norms, and culture. As Butler argues: “The very attribution of femininity to female bodies as if it were a natural or necessary property takes place within a normative framework in which the assignment of femininity to femaleness is one mechanism for the production of gender itself. Terms such as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are notoriously changeable; there are social histories for each term; their meanings change radically depending upon geopolitical boundaries and cultural constraints on who is imagining who, and for what purpose” (Butler, 1990, p. 10).

Another important factor in constructivist reality is *reasoning*. Fierke illustrates this by giving the example of US President Bush starting “The War on Terror” and invading Iraq, and the reasoning for how that became possible. Intelligence communities on both sides of the Atlantic believed that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, which was later proved to be false. This was further strengthened by a political discourse in which Saddam Hussein was connected to 9/11, giving this decision even more legitimacy. Thus, although false, this reasoning still allows for an explanation that the reason for invading Iraq was the weapons. Thus, although the weapons never existed, construction of a reality in which they did had real-life consequences when the US invaded Iraq (Fierke, 2013, pp. 197-198).

Constructivism thus emphasises that meaningful objects only come into existence through social construction, and it highlights the importance of norms, rules, language, historical, and political situation in social construction and reasoning for providing the ideological grounds for particular actions and ideas to spread.

1.2. Key Concepts

In this section I will introduce the concept of the anti-gender movement. In addition, since the anti-gender movement uses populist rhetoric and strategies, is connected to radical-right political ideology in Europe, represents gendered nationalism, and is a transnational social movement, all these concepts will be introduced as well. I will first introduce the concept of populism and radical-right political ideology. Then I will give an overview of nationalist

ideology and gendered nationalism. Next, I will introduce the concept of the anti-gender movement, its origins, starting points for mainstream spread, and strategies.

1.2.1. Populism and the Radical-Right Politics

Populism is a political ideology where “the people” are positioned against “the elite” (Bardhan, 2017). It can represent either left- or right-wing politics, and often includes gendered nationalism. Populism has been described by different research as an ideology (Stanley, 2008) and also as a particular and radical political communication style (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). In the context of this thesis, both are important. Populism is an ideology but using populist communication strategies is a strategic choice for the anti-gender actors as well. Thus, for the anti-gender actors, populism offers both the content and the packaging of their messages.

As an ideology, populism divides the world into two opposing groups: the “pure people”, represented by the populist leaders, and the “corrupt elite” against whom they struggle (Landau, 2018). Populists appeal to “true” citizens to reclaim their homeland and often threaten the judiciary and legislative mechanisms that secure the separation of powers (Fukuyama & Muggah, 2018). Thus, what populists do is to attack liberal democracies. Populism is a way of constructing “the people” whose demands populists then claim to represent against the elite (Cleen & Galanopoulos, 2016).

Liberal democracy is characterised by free elections with various distinct political parties, the separation of powers, the rule of law, and the protection of human rights, civil rights, civil liberties, and political freedoms for all people (Liberal Democracy , 2020). Thus, in liberal democracies it is not only the will of the majority of people that matters, but each person’s individual rights and freedoms as well. The state and progress of liberal values varies from state to state; thus, what the anti-gender actors attack within liberal democracies varies according to the state of liberal values and freedoms in a particular state. For example, in some states the anti-gender actors may choose to attack marriage equality or civil partnership in states where marriage equality is not legal or topical, or, in states where neither is possible, they try to secure any such developments are left behind. It is therefore not that important what particular right, freedom, or the possibility of such that is attacked, but the fact that these values, freedoms, and rights are attacked in the first place.

The threat of populism lies in the fact that if the populists claim to be the only legitimate power to carry out people’s will, they will seek to make themselves harder to dislodge, weaken checks on their own power by weakening the separation of powers, and undermine protections for

minority groups, who they do not consider part of the “right people” they represent. They will not necessarily abolish courts, but instead will bend these institutions to their will, which makes them less liberal and less democratic (Landau, 2018).

Tõnu Viik calls this “new-archaic politics” and refers to ideas where one claims to speak for the people by people who “who actually understand how things are”, “who are not corrupt”, and “who have a conscience” (Viik, 2018). Thus, what populists argue is that not only do they represent the people, but that they are the only legitimate carriers of their will (Landau, 2018). Although populism is nothing new and elements of populism can be traced back to 1870s Russia, the current wave has assumed a more international form (Cox, 2018).

Populism assumes that each country has an authentic “people” that have been violated by international and foreign forces and by the elites at home. Populist leaders claim to speak for “the people” and seek to destroy institutions such as legislatures, judiciaries, and the press. Populism comes from a variety of political approaches and is thus not defined by a view of economic distribution, but rather by a faith in strong leaders and a dislike of limits on sovereignty and the power of international institutions (Colgan & Keohane, 2017). Populism is also characterised by a decline in the trust in experts and intellectuals, whose views are suspect and whose words are seen as skewed and biased (Argandoña, 2017). Populism is also characterised by “reactive” language, lack of dialogue, or argumentation, resentment, and hate speech, as well as so-called alternative facts and alternative media (Vallespín, 2020).

As states have become more and more interdependent, they have had to give up part of their autonomy to international organisations such as the United Nations or the European Union in order to solve common problems. However, the tendency of these institutions and their leaders to expand their authority, which even when done with valid reasons, gives people the sense that foreign forces are controlling their lives. This results in public alienation from these institutions (Colgan & Keohane, 2017). Developments in technology, which favour the rich who are more educated, and cuts in social welfare have also fuelled the rise of populism (Argandoña, 2017). People also do not necessarily understand how decisions are made within international organisations and how and if they work for their benefit.

Despite the promise of prosperity, the gaps between rich and poor have only grown (Bourguignon, 2016). China has shown that one can have economic growth without being a democracy (Ikenberry, 2009). The liberal international order, liberal democracy, has not lived up to its promises, and the roots of populism lie within this economic injustice. The

cosmopolitan elite, business leaders, and stock markets have been doing well and supporting low taxes without any serious cuts in government funding in the United States.

This has brought about a serious blow to ideas such as solidarity (Colgan & Keohane, 2017), as the principle of solidarity has not included all groups of people. Thus, many people, while suffering economically themselves, do not resonate with the values of liberal democracy and feel, for example, that the needs of “common” people are ignored in favour of minority rights. Attacking the European Union, its institutions, strategies, and policies has been a common strategy among populist parties and also by the anti-gender movement. The EU is portrayed as a corrupt elite that amputates the sovereignty of nation states and imposes its liberal values on its member states and on “common” people (Bouvard, De Proost, & Norocel, 2019) without their consent and against “common sense”.

Populists have used economic injustice, arguing that they will bring wealth back to the local communities. This appears in the hostility towards immigration, including any benefits or other expenses this brings, and poaching of the economic policies of social democrats. This means redistributive welfare to citizens only (Búrca, 2018).

Although all populists tend to concentrate on the economy, it is possible to distinguish between different kinds of populist movements according to their views on economic distribution. Left-wing populism seeks to “soak the rich” in the name of equality, and right-wing populism aspires to remove constraints on wealth in the name of growth (Colgan & Keohane, 2017). Left-wingers are “political actors who seek, as a central programmatic objective, to reduce social and economic inequalities” (Levitsky, 2011). The right wing does not prioritise social protection and equality, and rather prioritises economic stability and physical security (Aytaç & Öniş, 2014). In addition to the left-right division, scholars have noted other varieties in populism. Traditional populists focus on political incorporation and economic equality against an oligarchical elite, whereas neoliberal populists concentrate on privatisations and structural economic reforms by arguing against corrupt state elites (Landau, 2018). In all these cases, however, populist ideology is characterised by strong leaders who claim to represent the “right” people and are against the elite and/or foreign interference.

As this paper inspects the anti-gender movement and its actors in Estonia and as anti-gender actors in Estonia represent right-wing populism, right-wing and radical-right populist ideology is the focus of this thesis. Research usually recognises radical-right ideology as excessively centralised around a charismatic leader and an inner circle; however, more recent literature

emphasises that these organisations can also be more complex. Radical-right populist parties seem to embrace the mass party model on one hand while also executing postmodern campaigns (Jakobson, Saarts, & Kalev, 2020, p. 30). For the purpose of this thesis, radical-right populist ideology is understood as representing strong nationalist ideology, ethnic nationalism, xenophobia, authoritarianism, and social conservatism. To conclude, populist tend to construct an idea of national sovereignty in danger and a construction of “the people” that only they represent, these constructions represent an antagonist relationship between “the elite” that in their view is represented by the EU (Norocel, 2019), and them, who struggle for “the people”.

1.2.2. Nationalist Ideology and Gendered Nationalism

In this section I will introduce the concepts of nationalism and gendered nationalism. Understanding nationalism and its gendered aspects is important in the context of this thesis, as radical-right ideology in Europe includes both of them.

Nationalism is a political, social, and economic ideology and movement that aims to promote the interests of a particular nation and its people. There are not many ideologies that can match its power in the contemporary world, and no other political movement has such worldwide appeal and resilience (Smith, 2010). Ethnonationalistic parties have had successful election outcomes across the globe, for example in states such as Russia, the United States (USA) and many European states. Both populism and nationalism have had a successful journey in the West, from the election of President Donald Trump in the USA to Brexit in Britain. This is illustrated by the success of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany, Marine Le Pen in France (Massanari, 2018), and infamous political powers in Poland and Hungary, who have since managed to do away with some of the core principles of the European Union (Beauchamp, 2018) and liberal democracy, and have taken an active role in standing against minority, particularly LGBTI, rights (Herszenhorn & Bayer, 2018). Among them, in March of 2019, the Conservative People's Party of Estonia gained close to 20 places of 101 in the Estonian parliament (Oidermaa, 2019).

The wave of radical-right populism does not mean, however, that these parties are identical or, although there is collaboration between the parties, this collaboration has not always been easy. Among other things, the conflicting nationalism and ideological differences (for example the extent of racism, xenophobia and sexism) make the collaboration more challenging (Jakobson, Saarts, & Kalev, 2020, p. 29). Radical-right nationalist parties may not always be interested in

transnational cooperation, as it contradicts their domestic nativist ideology and politics, since this collaboration may be perceived as what they are against – globalisation.

Nationalist ideology is socially constructed in time and space (Ting, 2008). Nationalism and the term “nation”, as Ting argues, is a mental construct and is constantly constructed, reconstructed, and negotiated through social practices (Ting, 2008). Contemporary radical-right and populist right-wing ideology in Europe represent similar rhetoric to each other as both “cohere around the imagination of a beleaguered continent, under threat from multiculturalism and overbearing feminism,” (Erel, 2018). They share a discourse on race, gender, and migration, where feminism and multiculturalism are presented as a threat to nationalism. It sees white, hegemonic masculinities and femininities in danger and right-wing populists as saviours of the nation (Erel, 2018). This division, however, is unnecessary, and the aim of this construction is to divide people into “us” and “them”.

Gleason has identified three stages of nationalism: liberation, where self-determination is a positive attribute of nationalism; exclusivity, where the emphasis moves to promotion of group uniformity and more to “us” and “others” as different and separate; and lastly, domination, where differences are suppressed and “the others”, the outsiders, are dominated by the privileged group and in the name of the group (Gleason, 1993). Peterson emphasises that this division of people by populists not only applies to different nationalities, but nationalism is also problematic from the perspective of people within one nation, as some have more privilege and political representation (Peterson, 2007).

How particular groups are situated, how gender, race, ethnicity, etc., are linked to nationalism, is not predetermined, but depends on historical, political, and social realities. However, it is possible to identify gendered patterns in the construction of group and power dynamics (Peterson, 2007). Gender hierarchies have been and are socially constructed realities that have strong historic roots. Reducing them to nature, however, is part of the social construction that aims, through naturalisation, to explain and justify gender inequalities (Peterson, 2007). It is not enough to simply describe social realities, but we must understand the deeper causes behind them.

Nationalism and masculinity tend to go hand in hand (Nagel, 1998). The nation state is in its essence a masculine institution for several reasons; for example, its hierarchical authority structure, lack of women in decision-making positions, labour segregation, where women tend to hold less powerful and less paid positions, and legal regulation of women’s rights, labour,

and sexuality by powerful men (Franzway, Connell, & Court, 1989). How women act and dress is often a question of men's honour, and thus women's sexuality and sexual behaviour is a concern for men, as women are seen as bearers of masculine honour. Sexual encounters of ethnic majority women and racialised men are often seen as cause for crisis and justification for vengeful violence (Nagel, 1998). Although the family is the centre of nationalistic policy and ideology, only heterosexual couples and families from ethnic majorities count as "true" families (Erel, 2018). Thus, as right-wing or radical-right populists seek control over female reproduction they, in addition to imposing sexist regulations on ethnic majority women, also impose racist policies on persons outside of the ethnic majority. In addition, only heterosexual couples and their children are seen as proper families; therefore, families with same-sex parents are excluded. In Estonia, nation-state and nationality were connected to both heterosexuality and to opposing Russian-speaking immigrants. Sexuality was seen a moral issue and at the centre of national sovereignty (Velmet, 2019, p. 458).

Gender and gender hierarchies are socially constructed, but nevertheless constitute a social reality for men and women. Peterson argues that when men seek group belonging and continuity, they endeavour to control women's sexual reproduction. In addition, they attempt to institutionalise social relations that could endanger loyalties to male-defined groups (Peterson, 2007). Women are primarily seen as biological reproducers of group members, and thus it is often a question of public debate and politics "regulating under what conditions, when, how many, and whose children women will bear" (Peterson, 2007). Restrictive policy on reproduction comes in many forms, among others: restricting contraceptive knowledge and techniques, denying abortions, or providing benefits for having children (Peterson, 2007).

In most societies, heterosexual and ethnic majority men hold higher positions within society than women, homosexuals, and ethnic minorities. In addition, nationalist scripts are written mostly by men, for men and about men, and women tend to hold secondary roles as care keepers and mothers (Nagel, 2016). Nationalism and the ideology of heterosexual masculinity go hand in hand and tend to embrace patriarchal norms. Nagel also emphasises that traditional systems that are historically patriarchal do not usually value and prioritise efforts to eliminate gender inequality. As she points out, they "see women's rights as secondary and subversive to nationalist goals and struggles" (Nagel, 2016).

The anti-gender movement also represents gendered nationalism. The anti-gender actors emphasise the importance of children, particularly ethnic majority and white children, to

reproduce the nation and restore the natural order of things. Discourse around children and nature is a common theme in the anti-gender movement, as will be discussed later on in this thesis. Gender and sexuality education is often blamed for weakening the national ethos, and reproductive rights are depicted as demographic threats. Anti-gender actors plant fear in people and claim that the natural family is in danger from “gender ideology”, and by using this fear the anti-gender movement is able to produce both misogyny and racism (Bouvard, De Proost, & Norocel, 2019). In short, the anti-gender ideology is often constructed around the gendered conception of nationalism and nation states where women’s main role is connected to bearing children and motherhood in order to maintain a particular nation state as it once was.

1.2.3. Transnationalism of Social Movements

In this section I will introduce the concept of transnationalism and transnationalism in social movements.

Transnationalism is a concept that signifies “the processes that transcend international borders” (Faist, Fauser, & Reisenauer, 2013), and transnational communities are able to form social, cultural, economic, and other ties between themselves (Kiesewetter, 2019). Transnationalism is a process that can occur both “from above” and “from below” (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). The first is affected by globalisation, meta-governance, their neoliberal incentives, and the impact of supranational institutions on the international level. The second, transnationalism “from below”, refers to a process that arises from the local, often from individuals, and stands for the transfer of practices and ideas, such as knowledge, education, behavioural patterns, and so on (Kiesewetter, 2019). In the case of the anti-gender movement, both are relevant, as the movement has different actors working both “from above” and “from below”.

Transnationalism can also be characterised through the frequency of relations or activities. Here, “narrow transnationalism” means the institutionalised activities that are continuous. “Broad transnationalism”, however, refers to linkages that are occasional (Vertovec, 2009). Transnationalism includes the exchange of both monetary and non-monetary resources, material, and symbolic objects, as well as cultural values. The flow of ideas and information by the global media, religious and secular rituals and festivals (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998) all contribute to the flow of transnational ideas and identities. As Guarnizo and Smith argue: “The discursive spaces through which transnational actors move are socially structured and shape character and identity – as do more general and enduring features of social structure, such as

patriarchal gender relations, racial hierarchies, and economic inequality” (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998, p. 25).

It is not only states that develop transnational relations, but actors such as organisations, networks, and individuals that are able to influence processes, politics, and relations. These transnational movements are not necessarily historically rooted and are affected by technology, communication, and infrastructure that have helped enable such ties (Kiesewetter, 2019).

Social movements, ideas, and organisational, cultural, and tactical repertoires of social movements can spread transnationally. Modern forms of social movement are not limited to a narrow issue, location, social structures, or groups of people, but are coordinated and sustained across borders, issues, and structural context (Tarrow, 1998). Shawki (Shawki, 2013), in referring to McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, used the term diffusion to point to the “transfer in the same or similar shape of forms and claims of contention across space or across sectors and ideological divides” (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001). For Shawki, the definition refers not just to diffusion within one state, but also across borders, and not only does it contain claims, but also ideas, frames, and organisational forms. It speaks for both the information spread and “to the process by which social movement organizations act upon this information and adopt language, frames, ideas, and organizational forms that originated in other countries” (Shawki, 2013, p. 133).

We can also distinguish between the sources of diffusion. External sources that include mass media and change agents, diffuse an idea, practice or information of a social movement into a particular population, and internal sources are responsible for spreading them within a population. The underlying cultural processes also matter, and they help explain certain diffusion items through framing, which assigns meaning, and theorising, which interprets practices. Framing refers to the “collective action frames developed by social movement participants to give their mobilization effort and their cause meaning and to encourage and validate their actions and agendas” (Shawki, 2013, p. 135), and “framing entails creating meanings and developing understandings and interpretations of specific issues and experiences that can help individuals make sense of them and act accordingly” (Shawki, 2013, p. 135). Framing not only entails how the actors of social movements frame their claims, but also how they contract and frame their enemies. Framing, thus, is an active and continuous process. Both framing and theorising ensure that ideas, policies, and strategies are presented in understandable

ways. The resonation with other ideas and norms in cultural processes also helps the diffusion of particular social movement (Shawki, 2013, pp. 135-136).

The actors of diffusion can create transnational connections between local actors, local and national organisations, and international organisations (Shawki, 2013, p. 136). Although these transnational social movements mobilise around the same ideas and activities, the actors of specific state-based branches of movements and the way ideas are translated, interpreted, and adapted in different settings need to be examined (Shawki, 2013, p. 137). How these transnational, global ideas are adopted in particular cases depends on the actors who, so to say, translate them to particular social settings (Shawki, 2013, p. 137) – those who, as Merry argues, “have one foot in the transnational community and one at home” (Merry, 2006).

Pre-existing social structures and construction of similarities through “collective action frames that define the central cause and goals of the movement and the identity of its participants” (Shawki, 2013, p. 138) help the spread of particular social movements, as well credible individuals and authorities of the movements. In addition, the general political climate, political conditions, and level of compatibility is significant in locating when an idea diffuses (Shawki, 2013, pp. 138-139). In the case of anti-gender movements, this connects well with identifying the particular starting points, the diffusion, for anti-gender movements that have “launched” the anti-gender discussion among the wider public and politics in particular states.

1.2.4. The Anti-Gender Movement

In this section I will introduce the concept of the anti-gender movement and its origin, actors, and strategies. Over the past years, we have seen a rise of political powers across the globe that often implement policies and spread messages and ideas that do not take into account women’s and minority rights or worse – take steps back by implementing restrictive abortion policies (Culina, 2016), limiting access to contraception (Lister, 2016), banning contemporary sexual education from schools (Lister, 2016), and cutting funding from various areas connected to women’s reproductive rights and health (Women’s Rights and Right Wing Politics, 2017) and LGBTI rights (Stille, 2014).

This mobilisation is usually called anti-gender campaigns by some researchers (Kuhar & Paternotte, *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe*, 2018), or the anti-gender movement(s) (Kováts & Põim, 2015). In the context of this thesis, I will use the term “anti-gender movement”, as this is the term also used by international institutions. The anti-gender movement is a transnational social movement (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018) and signifies all the movement mobilising against

what the actors of the anti-gender movement call “gender theory” or “gender ideology” (Kováts, 2017, p. 176). The beginning of this transnational movement can be traced to 1994, when the United Nations (UN) started using the term gender instead of the term sex, signifying the recognition of gender as a social construct in the international arena. However, the Vatican, among other states, opposed this change and, deriving from Christian theology, disagreed with this notion of gender as a social construct – hence the name of anti-gender movement.

The anti-gender movement has since constructed new meanings for the term “gender” and a new signifier: “gender ideology”. Gender in social sciences and policy making today is understood as a social construct. Although the term “gender ideology” was created to oppose women’s and LGBTI rights activism and gender studies, anti-gender actors use the term “gender” differently from activists and researchers, seeing it as an “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 and others” (Kováts, 2018, p. 2). What is important here is to remember that although the actors of the anti-gender movement use gender as a core signifier of their discourse, it does not signify the same meaning used by researchers, activists, or policy makers.

The discourse around “gender ideology” is very similar and sometimes identical from state to state, and the rise of “gender ideology” to the centre of political debate is an international phenomenon. “Gender ideology” is seen by the anti-gender actors as the global “anthropological revolution” of the EU and the UN that aims to destroy traditional and natural gender roles of women and men, and is thus destroying the fundamental aspects of human nature by forced transformation. It sees the developments in women’s rights, gender equality, and equal treatment not as separate causes for freedoms and human rights of all persons, but as an interconnected attempt to radically transform interpersonal relations, nation-states, nations, and societies. Anti-gender actors oppose the understanding of the social construction of gender, hence the term “gender ideology” or “gender theory”, which refers to the English distinction between sex and gender. “Gender ideology” is seen as a totalitarian and cosmopolitan project run by a misguided and malicious elite (Velmet, 2016).

The rhetoric and content of the anti-gender movement’s public opinions, motivation, arguments, and strategies is populist, right-wing, nationalist, and conservative. One of their core political promises is to save the nation-state, which they claim is under attack and in danger.

To reach these goals, they proclaim not only to ensure that women have more children, but also to stop the “gender ideology” that undermines the traditional family and fundamental roles of women and men (Kuhar & Zobec, 2017).

The anti-gender movement is a global movement, influencing policy, politics, public statements, and the lives of real people from the Americas to Europe, Russia, Africa, and elsewhere, where more and more governments are questioning the universal human rights framework of politics. Anti-gender movements from different states share a discourse on “gender ideology”, strategies, and modes of action. They pay attention to each other’s doings and are increasingly more connected transnationally (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 2). The recent mobilisation against “gender” is not a domestic issue, but a transnational problem for liberal democracy, women’s rights, and minority rights (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 3). Although paying attention to the local aspect of the anti-gender movement is important to understand their specific aims and strategies locally, studying it only from a national perspective will not allow for a comprehensive picture of the anti-gender movement and its transnational effect. The resemblance of the anti-gender movements from different states is no coincidence, as has been shown by national case studies. Anti-gender actors use similar and sometimes identical populist campaigns and discursive strategies, such as conspiracy theories, scapegoating, and victim-perpetrator reversal (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 14).

In September 2017, during EuroNGO’s (the network of European NGOs for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Population and Development) annual meeting the rise of populism and its effects on sexual and reproductive rights were discussed. Also, during the same year, the European Commission’s annual colloquium on fundamental rights was dedicated to the study of “women’s rights in turbulent times” ('Women's Rights in Turbulent Times' - 2017 Commission Colloquium on Fundamental Rights, 2017). The aim of the event, with the presence of all the member states, was to discuss the relationships of fundamental rights and democracies, the shrinking space for civil society, and the increasingly hostile climate in some member states (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018).

Since then, the topic of populism, increasing radical-right political forces, and the anti-gender movement and their consequences on the fundamental rights of persons and liberal democracies have been discussed numerous times. The examples do not speak for single cases or regions, but translate to growing concern for fundamental rights and liberal democracy (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018). Attacking liberal democracy does not come in the form of attacking necessarily

the broad concept of liberal democracy, but in different attacks on values, freedoms, and rights that the liberal democracy represents. When the anti-gender actors undermine the rights of women and minorities, such as by attacking marriage equality or women's right to choose, they are also attacking liberal democracy, as the rights and freedoms of each individual are a necessary part of liberal democracies.

1.2.4.1. The Origin of the Anti-Gender Movement

In this section, I will inspect the origins of the anti-gender movement. My aim is to understand the roots of the movement, as they often remain hidden from the public. However, as will be discussed in this section, the origin of the anti-gender movement lies with the Catholic Church, and Catholic organisations continue to play an important part in this anti-gender movement today.

The anti-gender discourse is not a new phenomenon. Its roots lie in social teachings of the Catholic Church (Kováts & Põim, 2015) and in the anti-sexual education movement by the American Christian Right in the 1990s (Kováts & Põim, 2015, p. 90). The beginning of the anti-gender movement can be traced back to the 1994 UN International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the 1995 UN World Conference on Women in Beijing. It is at that time that the UN began replacing the term "sex" with the term "gender" in their official documents (Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995). The Vatican, along with various other states and religious groupings, protested this change, but to no avail, and the Holy See considered this change to be a major threat (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 11). Failing their initial goal, Vatican began producing literature and discourse on their view of what "gender" means and where it would lead. Many prominent religious leaders wrote books on their conception of gender, such as Dale O'Leary's "The Gender Agenda" (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018) and, notably, the Pontifical Council for the Family's publication of the "Lexicon: Ambiguous and Debatable Terms Regarding Family Life and Ethical Questions" that was supported by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 11).

The aim of these books was to implement fear around gender. For example, Tony Anatrella claims that "gender ideology has succeeded Marxist ideology. It is a neo-colonial project in which the decadent West imposes its gender delusion upon the rest of the world" (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018). The former Catholic Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek argues that "gender ideology is worse than communism and Nazism put together" (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018), and Tadej

Strehovec emphasises a similar point, arguing that “gender ideology is Marxism 2.0. The battle no longer exists between the bourgeoisie and the capital against the working class, but rather in the relation between men and women” (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018). The fear of communism works particularly well in Eastern European, post-Soviet states. The Catholic Church has been an important and major driving force behind the anti-gender movement (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 11).

The writings of John Paul II, such as his “Theology of the Body” (1979), “Mulieris Dignitatem” (On the Dignity and Vocation of Women, 1988) and “Letter to Women” (1995), are often referred to and regarded as the foundation of the anthropology of women in the Catholic Church, as ideas about “women’s nature” are formulated in these texts, shifting from women being subordinate to men to women being complementary to men (men exist in relation to women and women in relation to men). In the Pope’s vision, heterosexual love and family were the foundation of personal morality, social cohesion, and social order. The traditional family would naturally provide the structure around which a sustainable society could be built, and which both communism and liberalism had decided to set aside in the name of atheism, institutionalised equality, and hedonistic freedom. The EU and UN, who supported LGBTI rights, reproductive health rights, women’s rights, and gender equality, turned into different sides of the same problem (Velmet, 2016).

These essentialist ideas about men and women (Kováts, 2017, pp. 178-179), as Paternotte argues, “build the foundation for all argumentations against the critical and constructivist contents of the concept of gender, whether gender equality issues or homosexuality. In this understanding, the term “gender theory” or “gender ideology” serves to represent what is against” (Paternotte, 2015). In short, the anti-gender movement rose in opposition to international recognition of gender as socially constructed.

1.2.4.2. The Actors and the Transnational Nature of the Anti-Gender Movement

In this section I will introduce the actors of the anti-gender movement, as well as the transnational networks they make and belong to. The discourse of the anti-gender movement is best understood by acknowledging the intersection between the Catholic Church and its concern for “gender ideology”, and the current wave of radical-right populism in Europe (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 13). The main actors of the anti-gender movement in Europe are (radical) Catholic organisations (or sometimes Orthodox or other religious fundamentalists), and right-wing or radical-right political organisations. Although the anti-gender movement is not a direct

result of the radical-right gaining more power and surface, the shift to the right reinforces the anti-gender movement and provides them ideological support (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 13). For these different organisations, gender functions as a “symbolic glue” allowing actors with different strategies and goals to work together against a common enemy – the “gender ideology” (Kováts & Põim, 2015).

The actors of the anti-gender movement can be divided into two – **the religious side and the political**. The focus of this thesis is on the anti-gender movement in Estonia and the similarities between the Estonian anti-gender movement and similar social movements from other European states. In Europe, the religious side is usually represented by a **radical Catholic organisation** or organisations, or sometimes Orthodox or some other religious fundamentalism. In Europe, the political side is usually represented by a **radical-right or other right-wing parties** that have recently, across Europe, managed to gain more and more political power.

Several studies have shown the connection between the anti-gender movement and right-wing populism, including the radical-right, and the right-wing contribution to the anti-gender movement (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018) (Kováts & Põim, 2015). Some central elements of the radical-right populism and the anti-gender movement are very similar, such as European integration scepticism, resistance to globalisation, and national and racial anxieties. The democratic anxieties are particularly strong in Russia and Eastern Europe. Lastly, both discourses use similar repertoires of action and rhetoric mechanism, and rely on “politics of fear”, which seek to install the fear of real or imagined dangers while instrumentalising minorities or other social groups to create scapegoats and play on emotional registers “to raise the effects of the people and arouse their immediate feelings” (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018).

However, despite these links and similarities, the anti-gender movement and radical-right populism are not the same thing, as the first has firm roots in religion and the second does not, as not all right-wing or radical-right populists oppose gender and sexual equality, and while right-wing populism is more characteristic to Europe and the United States, the anti-gender movement is also present in Latin America. The anti-gender movement therefore cannot, considering the global scale, be tied only to right-wing politics, as left-wing leaders have endorsed the anti-gender movement in different parts of the world as well, particularly in Latin America, but examples can be found also in Europe (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, pp. 13-14).

The anti-gender actors consist of new groups (concerned citizens and/or mothers, institutes, parliamentary boards and political groups), old groups (religious, anti-abortion, family

initiatives and the far-right), and allies (academics, politicians, media and businesses) (Responding to anti-gender, 2019). Although the anti-gender movement has deep roots in the Vatican, it was never only a religious movement, and the radical-right has successfully adopted the anti-gender rhetoric and uses the terms “gender ideology”, “gender theory”, and “genderism” for their agenda. Examples vary from across the globe, with governments in Ecuador (Rafael Correa), the United States (Donald Trump), Hungary (Viktor Orbán), Italy (Matteo Salvini), and Brazil (Jair Bolsonaro). The 2008 economic crisis also boosted the anti-gender movement (Bouvard, De Proost, & Norocel, 2019) (Responding to anti-gender, 2019).

From a geopolitical perspective, four poles influence the anti-gender movement: the EU (as the promoter of gender equality and equal treatment), the US (previously similar to the EU, but not certain for now), the Vatican, and the Kremlin, who became involved with the anti-gender movement during the years 2008-2010 and promote a strong traditional Christian orthodox identity (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018).

The US-based litigating organisation called The Alliance Defending Freedom International (ADF) has worked what they call “rights of Christians” since 1994, using judicial litigation to “defend religious freedom, the sanctity of life, and marriage and family” (Our First Freedom, 2020). Since 2010, the ADF has moved its resources also to Europe, increasing funding to \$2.5 million in 2016, and creating ADF International, with offices in Belgium, Austria, France, Britain, and Switzerland. It has a long history in advocating against gender equality and women’s rights, in particular against sexual and reproductive health and the rights of women, as well as against equal treatment of minorities such as LGBT+ persons. The ADF has been characterised as a hate group (Alliance Defending Freedom, 2020). Many European organisations are members of the ADF, such as the Polish *Ordo Iuris*. International lobbying by the network organisations and their members is common (Kurasinska, 2018). The ADF has used strategic litigation for their strategic aims, in order to work against women’s and minority rights, and has offered legal training to Christian lawyers. In 2017, their annual budget was more than 55 million US dollars (Mapping the Funding of the Global "Anti-Gender Ideology" Movement , 2020).

Another American-led organisation is the American Centre for Law and Justice (ACLJ), founded in 1990. The organisation also uses strategic litigation as a strategy and has a significant international presence. In 1997, they stabilised the European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ), which has been lobbying in the European Court of Human Rights stationed in

Strasbourg, France. ECLJ has also helped European states to lobby against equality causes, such as marriage equality and the rights of transgender persons (Mapping the Funding of the Global "Anti-Gender Ideology" Movement , 2020).

The collaboration of these organisations is also well illustrated by organised funding between the organisations. For example, Polish radical Catholic organisation Piotr Skarga has funded their smaller “brother” organisations, including the Estonian organisation called the Foundation for the Protection of Family and Tradition. Piotr Skarga has been characterised by journalists and Polish liberals as radical-right, ultra-conservative, and Russian-minded. It has also had disagreements with Polish church leaders, when it was caught selling medallions and pictures of the Virgin Mary to older people while claiming to stand for Christian values (Tamm, 2017). Piotr Skarga’s more radical branch, the Ordo Iuris foundation, is part of part of the large network called Tradition, Family, and Property (TFP) from Brazil, a radical and extremist Catholic organisation (Tamm, 2017). Both the French and Polish Catholic church has said that these organisations are pseudo-Catholic organisations and have distanced themselves from them (Tamm, 2017). Ordo Iuris has worked in Poland to ban abortion and consists of well-educated and conservative lawyers, and its political influence has grown dramatically in recent years (Kurasinska, 2018). After PiS gained power in Poland, it also strengthen the position of Ordo Iuris, which has in turn supported the ambitions of PiS in questions such as a complete abortion ban in Poland (Tamm, 2017).

In the United States, an analysis of publicly available information concluded that the total sum of their funding of US-based organisations associated with the anti-gender movement from 2008 to 2017 was more than 6 billion US dollars. More than 1 billion dollars was expedited overseas, around 174 million of that to Europe. In Europe, funding for anti-gender organisations comes from five different sources: from the United States for the purpose of strategic litigation, from billionaires and aristocratic networks connected to the Catholic Church, from Russian donors with close links to the Vatican and radical-right politics, from private donors or crowd-funding, where anti-gender actors use petitions to collect donations, for example, and from public funding in states such as Poland, Hungary, and Russia. What they all have in common is a normative agenda that emphasises life, family, and religious freedom. In addition, they use a patriotic agenda where they use ethno-nationalistic arguments (Mapping the Funding of the Global "Anti-Gender Ideology" Movement , 2020).

The ADF is also connected to Agenda Europe (Agenda Europe , 2020), which is known for using hateful language, such as using “sodomy” when referring to homosexuality (Natural Law, 2020) and “baby-killing” when talking about women’s reproductive rights and organisations defending them (Weatherbe, 2016). The ADF has applied for participatory status in the Council of Europe but has been denied. It has supported criminalising homosexuality, claimed that homosexuality is a choice and a disorder, supported the sterilisation of transgender persons (Amend, 2017), and a member of ADF has claimed that the “radical homosexual activist community has adopted many of the techniques used in Nazi Germany” (Stewart, 2020). The ADF has also publicly opposed the Istanbul Convention (The Istanbul Convention, 2017). It is also one of the partners of World Congress of Families (WCF), an international event organised by the International Organisation for Families (IOF) that aims to “to unite and equip leaders, organisations, and families to affirm, celebrate, and defend the natural family as the only fundamental and sustainable unit of society” (International Organisation for the Family, 2020). Although the WCF has also been characterised as a hate group and extremist, several ministers from European states, including from Italy, Moldova and Hungary, have participated in their conference.

Created in 2013, Agenda Europe is a Vatican-inspired professional advocacy group that brings together extremist Christian organisations around Europe from 30 different states. They aim to “restore the natural order” and if successful would remove human rights in subjects such as sexual and reproductive rights, LGBTI rights, and women’s rights. Today, Agenda Europe is the primary network organisation in Europe that works against reproductive rights, women’s rights and LGBTI rights (“Restoring the Natural Order”: The religious extremists’ vision to mobilize European societies against human rights on sexuality and reproduction, 2018). Their main argument is that laws should reflect the “Natural Law” that would, in turn, ensure human dignity. Human dignity for them has three sub-goals that are “first, the protection of ‘life’ from the moment of conception to natural death; second, the protection of ‘the family’ exclusively defined as the traditional, patriarchal and heterosexual family; and finally protection of ‘religious freedom’, specifically placing religious beliefs above the law by asserting the right of religious people to derogate from legislation on hate speech, discrimination and the provision of services” (Datta, 2019).

Agenda Europe has introduced several policy instruments, both nationally and internationally, and has been described as a network able to strategise and learn from one another like no other social movement. They have utilised several participatory democracy instruments, such as

petitions and referendums, that have then been implemented, for example, in Croatia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Romania, Spain, Poland, and also at the EU level. About 100 to 150 individuals and organisations are members of Agenda Europe, and they all share a Christian background, being Catholics, traditionalist Protestants, or Orthodox Christians. They have close personal and professional connections to the Vatican, the Holy See, and within the organisation members have different roles. The so-called “Luminaries” are the main strategists that develop strategies in specific policy areas that are then implemented at national level. This is the reason why very similar anti-abortion, anti-gender, and homophobic mobilisations and campaigns have happened in different states since 2013. The network also has so-called “Insiders” who work closely to influence European policy and donors, like European aristocrats, Russian oligarchs, climate-change-denying billionaires, and others (Datta, 2019).

In Estonia the anti-gender actors can also be divided into two – **the religious side, represented by the radical Catholic organisation known as the Foundation for the Protection of Family and Tradition**, and **the political side, represented by the nationalist radical-right party the Estonian Conservative People’s Party**. After Estonia joined the EU in 2004, what seemed to be an unlikely coalition between secular nationalists and Catholic intellectuals was forming, united at the time by the “homosexual problem”. The Estonian Conservative People’s Party grew out of nationalist radical circles such as the radio station Nõmme Raadio, weblog Syndicate of Common Sense, and the Estonian Nationalist Movement. It represents radical Eurosceptical views, is against migration, and sees LGBTI policies as a danger to the Estonian nation and demographics. Varro Vooglaid, a Catholic law student and the person who would later form the Foundation for the Protection of Family and Tradition along with Martin Järvi, started publishing anti-abortion articles in Estonia at the time of Estonia’s accession to the EU, and later widened his reached to opposing LGBTI issues (Velmet, 2019, p. 471). The Foundation for the Protection of Family and Tradition is a member of TFP and a member of Piotr Skarga, through which the Estonian organisation has received funding.

What started as a critique of the EU and the lack of nationalism in mainstream politics and media evolved into a critique of Pride Parades, as homosexuality was perceived as going against human nature and as being a part of moral decline. Pride Parades were also associated with liberal values of the European Union that were seen by these actors as undemocratic and imposed on Estonia (Velmet, 2016). Working together, these two separate social movements would use the arguments of the Global Right intertwined with Estonian nationalist linguistic fears (Velmet, 2019, p. 471), and would be the importers of “gender ideology” into Estonian

public debate and politics. Thus, also in Estonia, gender acted as the “symbolic glue” between groups that otherwise would not have ended up in a coalition. The rise of “gender ideology” in Estonia reflects both the developments in international Catholic movements that allow SAPTK to amplify the principles of TFP on Estonia, and also the rise of national Eurosceptics who further developed anti-Soviet arguments against the European Union. These movements were unified by their anti-communist views that were associated with the European Union and by how they perceive “gender ideology” (Velmet, 2016).

1.2.4.3. The Beginning of the Estonian Anti-Gender Movement

In this section I inspect the beginning of the Estonian anti-gender movement. The anti-gender movements take hold in regard to specific events or discussions around a concrete topic that allows the anti-gender actors to spread their ideology more rapidly among the public. Although the beginning of the movement is usually connected to a specific topic, the anti-gender ideology is used against a wider range of topics the anti-gender movement attacks while using the specific event or discussion to argue for their case and mobilise people.

The starting points for a more widespread acknowledgement among the public of the anti-gender movement vary from state to state, but are most commonly about LGBT rights, reproductive rights, sex and gender education in schools, gender itself (for example, gender violence, gender studies, and gender mainstreaming), mobilising in defence of religious freedom and democracy. In several states, the Istanbul Convention has erupted into a larger discussion around “gender ideology”. Anti-gender actors have successfully used strategic litigation, advocacy, social networks, protests, demonstrations, fake news, and participatory democracy tools, such as online petitions and referendums, to advance their agenda while using human rights language to make their agenda a better fit for the modern world (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2018).

As Paternotte and Kuhar note, their “repertoire of action includes demonstrations, stand-ins and sit-ins, petitions and the collection of signatures, litigation, expertise and knowledge production, lobbying, referendum campaigns, electoral mobilisation, party politics (including the establishment of new political parties), incitement to vigilance and ad hominem exposure campaigns in schools and hospitals. Anti-gender activists are extremely active on the web and take advantage of the possibilities offered by new information and communication technologies. Their online activities are multidimensional and go far beyond a mere informative function” (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 10).

On October 9, 2014, Estonia became the first post-Soviet state to adopt a gender-neutral cohabitation law (Editorial: It is time for Estonia to pass the Civil Partnership Act – UPDATED!, 2014) allowing two natural persons, of whom at least one is an Estonian resident, to sign a Registered Partnership Act (Kooseluseadus) to give their relationship legal grounds (Registered Partnership Act, 2020). As The Independent reported, both the society and the parliament were split on the issue of whether Estonia would choose a path towards Scandinavian liberal values or more conservative ideology from Moscow (McDonald-Gibson, 2014).

This act, in addition to allowing “adults of active legal capacity to enter into a registered partnership contract”, also allows one registered partner to adopt a child if the “other registered partner is a biological parent of the child” or if “the other registered partner was a parent of the child before entry into the registered partnership contract” (Registered Partnership Act, 2020). Although one of the most important milestones for LGBTI persons in their path for equal rights and equal opportunities, the passing of the Registered Partnership Act (RPA) also divided both the politicians and public on the issues, and can be considered as the event for Estonia that was used as the diffusion for the anti-gender movement in Estonia. As Jakobson, Saarts, and Kalev note: “The window of opportunity opened for EKRE in 2014, when Estonia adopted the civil partnership act for same-sex couples in 2014. That was a wake-up call for a more social conservative segment of the society, which lacked their own spokespersons and leaders at the time,” (Jakobson, Saarts, & Kalev, 2020, p. 23).

The Foundation for the Protection of Family and Tradition delivered almost forty thousand hand-signed letters to members of the parliament at the time, opposing the act and blaming EU-minded elites for supporting the draft law as well as demanding a referendum on the matter. In addition, the Foundation for the Protection of Family and Tradition organised candlelight vigil that was meant to symbolise the “death of democracy”, and made several conservative Christian arguments in their blog, where they argued that the draft law, the Cohabitation Act, is a “moral revolution” and goes against the “Natural Law” (Velmet, 2019, pp. 455-456). With these actions and claims, the Foundation for the Protection of Family and Tradition used several of the typical strategies and manifestations of the anti-gender movement.

As has been the case in other states, such as France, Romania and Croatia, LGBTI persons’ rights become the Trojan horse for the benefit of the anti-gender movement, led by the Foundation for the Protection of Family and Tradition, allowing them, in addition to same-sex

cohabitation or marriage, to start a discussion and fear in the society around “gender ideology”. Despite this development, the passing of the law remains an important milestone both for the LGBTI community as well as democratic society at large.

1.2.4.4. Cause and Circumstance Behind the Rise of the Anti-Gender Movement

In this section, I will give an overview of some of the causes behind the anti-gender movement. The aim of this section is not to give a comprehensive overview of the causes, as this is not the focus of this thesis, but to provide a general understanding that helps understand the connections between the anti-gender movement and other social issues. As researchers argue, the opposition against “gender ideology” is, at least partially, the result of the neoliberal order, in which gender equality and equal treatment issues have found their place, as well as anger over the socio-economic structures that have left many people feeling their needs and opinions have not been regarded by the political elites.

The movement against gender and reproductive rights has now been studied extensively (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018). This research shows different powerful actors joining forces to attack women’s rights and LGBTI rights, and are often combined with ideas from populism, racism, radical-right politics and parties, nationalism, religious fundamentalism, neoliberalism, or austerity politics. They often gather under an umbrella term of “Global Right”, which points to opposition by right-wing actors to different progressives causes and indicates an idea of the globalisation of US culture wars (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018).

As Kováts argues: “Gender provides the theatre for the struggle for hegemony in the Gramscian sense, and these mobilisations are rather the throes of a contest for redefining liberal democracy where ‘gender ideology’ embodies numerous deficits of the so-called progressive actors, and the adversaries of the concept react to these by re-politicising certain issues in a polarised language” (Kováts, 2018), emphasising that this struggle should not be limited to a fight between values, but a movement for a structural realignment of democracy (Kováts, 2018).

Based on research in England, France, Germany, and Hungary, more and more scholars are linking the different anti-gender movements from various states and seeing the crisis of the socio-economic order as one of the main causes (Kováts & Põim, 2015) (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018). Estonia joined both NATO and EU in 2004 by a highly supported popular referendum. Although this, as Aro Velmet argues, seemed to be a victory for liberals, it brought about a response from the marginalised moderate and radical nationalists that saw these developments as undermining Estonian sovereignty. The continuous dropping of birth rates, mass emigration

after the fall of the Soviet Union, and the economic crisis that followed all fuelled this sentiment. The critics felt that politicians had ignored these socio-economic problems and blamed them for what they saw as the decline in values and unnecessary liberalisation for issues such as poverty among children and the family values crisis (Velmet, 2019, pp. 455-456).

Nationalist neo-conservatism is a reaction to the neoliberal consensus; the discourse against gender studies and gender equality is an attempt to get precariousness and insecurity under control, and as feminist and LGBTI struggles have found a place in the neoliberal order, they are also made responsible for the damage it causes in the eyes of the anti-gender actors. Thus, the anger over socio-economic structures is translated to the cultural structures (Kováts, 2017). It follows that to counter the anti-gender movement one must reflect on the content of progressive politics, equality language, and the language of politics (Kováts, 2017). Kovats also emphasises that labelling the anti-gender movement fundamentalist does not help to understand the root causes of the anti-gender movement or counter it. It is important to see the link between the rise of the anti-gender movement and radical-right politics with the failure of progressive politics and market-driven democracies to deliver equality, structurally excluding many people (Kováts, 2017, pp. 183-185). Although poverty has decreased in the world, inequalities have increased and continue to do so.

As Kovats puts it: “It is in this context that conservative protest movements create a space for these people to vent their fears and insecurities, voice their anger and dissatisfaction with politics and claim a sense of agency and empowerment that European liberals and social democrats once promised – but failed to deliver” (Kováts, 2017). Although human rights activist are right to call out and criticise the anti-gender movement, liberal democracy for many has been an empty promise with little to offer (Kováts, 2017, pp. 183-195).

However, although understanding how to best counter the anti-gender movement is important, it is not the focus of this thesis.

2. METHODOLOGY

In this section, I outline the methodology of this thesis. My aim is to analyse the manifestation of the transnational anti-gender movement in Estonia by comparing the actions taken by the actors of the movement in Estonia and other states, bringing out the similarities in their strategies and rhetoric. I will also, using Critical Discourse Analysis method, analyse how the actors of the anti-gender movement use language to portray reality and construct conceptions of the social world (Kalmus, Diskursusanalüüs, 2020).

This research is qualitative. I will give examples of similarities in strategy and reasoning from the actors of the Estonian anti-gender movement and from the anti-gender movement of other states. Then, I will analyse the text examples of the Estonian anti-gender actors more closely by describing, interpreting, and explaining the text. The transnational nature of the anti-gender movement has been illustrated in various previous research (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2018). Thus, my aim in this thesis is to analyse whether and how this movement has mobilised in Estonia and if they have, using the same strategies as the anti-gender actors in other states, in order to add to the growing research and arguments that illustrate its transnational nature while also gaining more insight into the Estonian anti-gender movement.

2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

In this section I will introduce the methodological approach of Critical Discourse Analysis.

Discourse analysis scholars' study what people do with language and how they use it (Gee, 2018). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an analytical research method that focuses on the ways social-power abuse and inequality are produced, reproduced, enacted, legitimated, and also resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. As CDA, in addition to understanding social inequality, also aims to challenge and change it, it is also characterised as a social movement. CDA thus, as van Dijk puts it, is not just a discourse analysis method among others, but rather a discourse study with an attitude (van Dijk, 2015, p. 466).

CDA takes a multidisciplinary approach, and its primary focus is on social problems and political issues. It aims to both describe and explain discourse structures in social interaction and focuses on abuse of power. CDA understands that discourse is historical and ideological, and power relations are discursive; it argues that discourse constitutes society and culture. The connection between text and society is mediated, the analysis of discourse is interpretative and explanatory, and discourse is a type of social action (van Dijk, 2015, p. 467).

In addition, CDA bridges the gap between micro- and macro-level analysis. Micro-level analysis refers to language use, discourse, verbal interaction, and communication, whereas macro-level analysis refers to power, dominance, and inequality between social groups. However, in real-life interactions and experiences of people, these two forms are connected and act together. Sexist speech given by a powerful person illustrates the micro level. However, it is possible that this speech will then be turned into legislation that is harmful for women, which then represents the macro level. Even when this speech does not turn into any legal measure, it still normalises sexism and sexist speech, as people with power have more means to constitute social reality. Thus, words have consequences whichever way we look at it: they either lead to changes in legislation or help constitute a new normality (van Dijk, 2015, p. 468).

The central idea on discourse analysis is power, or, more specifically, the social power of particular groups or institutions. Van Dijk argues that groups have power if they are able to control other people or groups when they have privileges, such as access to force, money, status, fame, knowledge, information, communication, and other social resources. This power does not have to be absolute power, but can be constructed around some concrete situation, such as legislation, norms, or rules. It can also be perceived as “natural” and taken for granted, constituting “common sense” (van Dijk, 2015, p. 469). Thus, speakers of powerful groups seek to control knowledge, opinions, and attitudes of citizens, which includes access to control over public discourse and communication (van Dijk, 2015).

It is also important to understand that not all members of a privileged group may always hold power, but power is defined for groups as a whole (van Dijk, 2015, p. 469). For example, men as a group are privileged and hold more power than women do, but this does not mean that there are not men who do not hold power or women who do. However, regardless of these individual examples, the privilege of the group still holds, with the society keeping up sexist power structures where men have more power than women, and often power over women.

Controlling the contexts and structures of text is one of the most important and major forms of exercising power, as controlling text aids in controlling minds. Thus, such a discourse is a fundamental way to constituting dominance and hegemony (van Dijk, 2015, p. 472). Repeating an idea normalises it and eventually, even with prior resistance, increases the probability of people accepting it (Kahneman, 2011). Speakers of powerful groups may seek to control both specific knowledge and generic knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies through repeated political and media discourse, and through generalisation and abstraction, for example, regarding

immigration, terrorism, and the economy (van Dijk, 2015, p. 473). Thus, people or groups who hold control in media, politics, education, etc. are also more likely to hold the power of control of other people or groups (van Dijk, 2015, p. 473).

The anti-gender movement aims to control the minds of people through seeking to control knowledge, education, communication, and information, and through constructing their understanding of “natural” and “common sense”. If successful, the anti-gender actors are able to use this social power to construct legislation, rules, and norms according to their ideological views and dominate those who they do not accept.

2.2. Method

In this section I will outline the method of this thesis.

This thesis addresses three research questions:

1. Who are the main actors of the anti-gender movement in Estonia?
2. How has the anti-gender movement mobilised in Estonia?
3. Whether and how the anti-gender movement in Estonia is connected to the transnational anti-gender movement

I will first introduce some of the strategies and manifestations of the transnational anti-gender movement. This analysis is based on previous literature of the anti-gender movement on actions the anti-gender actors have taken in different states and strategies they implement transnationally. This part of the analysis forms the basis to inspect the Estonian anti-gender movement more closely, later on in the analysis.

I will then introduce the actors of the anti-gender movement in Estonia. As previous research has shown (Velmet, 2016) (Kováts & Põim, 2015), the anti-gender actors in Estonia have both the religious side represented by a radical Catholic organisation, the Foundation for the Protection of Family and Tradition, and the political side, represented by nationalist radical-right party the Estonian Conservative People’s Party, similarly to several other states. My aim with my analysis is to gain more insight into who these actors are. For both organisations, references to “gender ideology” are important, as this is the main signifier used by the actors of the anti-gender movement, as well as ties to the anti-gender actors from other states and similarities in strategies, rhetoric and imagery.

I will then move on to the main part of my analysis. By using CDA, my aim is to analyse the vocabulary, grammar, and structures of the text and speech delivered or used by the actors of the anti-gender movement. To do this, I will look for the signifier “gender ideology”, as this is the umbrella term for the anti-gender movement that can denote women’s reproductive rights, LGBTI rights and marriage/civil partnership equality, gender education and sexual education in schools, democracy (for example, freedom of speech), and the “umbrella” of gender (for example, gender mainstreaming, gender studies, the Istanbul Convention). The anti-gender movement does not target just one group or topic but uses the signifier “gender ideology” to attack a variety of topics related to women’s and minority rights. “Gender ideology” is also a signifier constructed by the anti-gender movement that had no meaning before it was made up and used by the actors of the anti-gender movement. As previously argued by other authors, gender acts as a symbolic glue to different anti-gender actors and provides a common enemy (Kováts & Põim, 2015).

My main data source will be articles produced by the actors of the anti-gender movement. The articles may be both written articles and speech by the anti-gender actors that are posted on news sites and thus turned into articles. The articles will be chosen by searching for the words “gender ideology”, “gender”, and “sooideoloogia”, which is Estonian for “gender ideology”, on the web portals *Objektiiv* and *Uued Uudised*, which belong to the Foundation for the Protection of Family and Tradition and the Estonian Conservative People’s Party, respectively, and thus are operated by the actors of the anti-gender movement. On *Objektiiv*, altogether 127 articles deal with “sooideoloogia”, 222 articles with “gender”, where “gender” is also displayed with words such as “genderism”, “gender-ideoloogia”, and when searching “gender ideology” on *Objektiiv*, 16 articles come up. However, “sooideoloogia” is the Estonian equivalent to “gender ideology”, and the web page is kept in the Estonian language. On *Uued Uudised*, 18 articles match the search “sooideoloogia”, 25 address “gender”, and there are no matches for “gender ideology”.

Out of these articles, the articles chosen for the analysis will first be those that deal with the Estonian situation and implementing the anti-gender strategies in Estonia. Although the anti-gender actors often reference and translate texts from other states as well or recount situation in other states, these articles will not be part of the analysis. The final articles also need to be those that are likely to have had a bigger impact on the public or the political elites. Thus, for example, these comprise those of political appeal by the anti-gender actors or articles that generated a larger response and have generated further discussion on news sites. Research has

also shown a strong collaboration between these web portals (Eylandt, 2016), as well as the operators, the Estonian Conservative People's Party and the Foundation for the Protection of Family and Tradition, themselves (Põim, 2019).

Out of these articles, two were chosen for final research: The Petition Against the Spread of "Gay and Gender Ideology" in Schools and an article that criticises the Istanbul Convention from Martin Helme, a member of the Estonian Conservative People's Party. Both are chosen, in addition to discussing "gender ideology", for their political relevance and, thus, for their ability to work both at micro and macro level and the possibility to lead to changes in legislation. The petition was also chosen because the topic of children was the most common theme among the initial search, and thus it indicated that the Foundation for the Protection of Family and Tradition considers the topic of children more important than some other themes related to "gender ideology". Since petitions are also aimed at changing legislation, it means it could create the possibility of legal changes according to demands in the petition. The text on the Istanbul Convention was also chosen for its political relevance in addition to referencing "gender ideology". The Estonian Conservative People's Party was the only Estonian parliamentary party not to vote for the convention that aims to tackle and end violence against women, and in this article, Martin Helme offers their reasoning for opposing the convention. As Estonia is a parliamentary republic, Helme's opinion could first lead to changes in legislation, but since Helme is also speaking from a position of power, his speech is able to normalise the anti-gender construction of what the Istanbul Convention is.

In the first part of the analysis, I will give an overview on what has been done by actors of the anti-gender movement in other states using the same strategy as the Estonian anti-gender actors. This means I will first analyse how inclusive gender and sexual education has been under scrutiny by the anti-gender movement, and then how the Istanbul Convention has been attacked by the movement transnationally.

The final articles will be analysed using CDA, by describing, interpreting, and explaining the text. Using Fairclough's analysis scheme (Kalmus, 2015) and by looking at the text, I will analyse what classification schemes are used in the text. Classification schemes help me understand from whose perspective or social position something is viewed. Classification schemes systematise reality in a particular way, based on an ideological view of that reality. Answering this question will also help to highlight the "voices" in the discourse and any potential confrontation between different groups. Identifying the actors, the speakers of the anti-

gender movement in Estonia, and their relationship to one another and to their counterparts in other states will help me understand the perspective and the social position of the speakers.

I will also see if the text has ideological connotations, and if any new words are used in the text or if there is rewording. New words indicate changes in society and shape its meaning and assessments. The use of new words or rewording also helps me assess cultural and ideological importance of the texts and words used. Inspecting the formal or informal use helps me understand the nature of the social situation, the degree of formality, and the status and position of the participants in the discourse. Understanding the expressive value the words contain is useful in evaluating the positive or negative judgment the author carries. This also refers to ideological classification schemes. As “gender ideology” is already a confirmed new word before this analysis, looking at this allows me to track how the term has gained cultural and ideological importance. Looking at the term “gender” allows me to see how the anti-gender movement has worked towards changing the meaning of this term.

In looking at grammar, my aim is to assess if there are significant forms of expressive modality in the text and whether the modality is subjective or objective. Using expressive modality indicates the degree of truthfulness and reliability to the reader, and it may make it seem as if there are not any other options. Subjective modality shows whose point of view the texts reflect. Objective modality is more ideological. Using objective modality makes it possible to present a personal opinion or unproven assertion as a universal truth. The anti-gender actors use terms such as “nature”, “natural” and “common sense” to express objective modality and give the impression that any other opinion is inevitably wrong, as they go against universal and fundamental truths about being human.

It is important to look at what logical or causal connotations are used as well, as submissive connotations may refer to causal relationships that are taken for granted and are, thus, ideological. In the context of the anti-gender movement, frames identified by Patternotte and Kuhar are useful in looking at the causal connotation the movement uses. The anthropological threat frame links “gender ideology” to the demographic crisis and blames abortion and LGBTI persons for the decline in birth rates. The endangered children frame is extremely common, and within it LGBTI persons are depicted as paedophiles and Marxism is associated with “gender ideology”. “Gender ideology” is depicted as an imminent threat to children. The new disguise of the left frame constructs an idea, where “gender ideology” is associated with the political

and economic “ideology” of socialism. The neo-colonial project frame is used to construct developments in gender equality and equal treatment as parts of ideological colonisation.

Looking at what the larger structures of the text are and in what order the sub-topics, causes, consequences, etc. are addressed and what is highlighted will also be part of the analysis. Here, looking at how “gender ideology” engages with the main anti-gender topics (reproductive rights, LGBTI rights, gender studies, etc.) in the Estonian context allows me to see whether “gender ideology” in Estonia is also used in volatile ways in various different and not necessarily related topics.

I will also assess if the text refers to assumption, if the assumptions are sincere or manipulative, and if the assumptions are polemical. I will see if there are conflicts with referenced text and speakers and attempts to engage with the local readers. My assumption is that the anti-gender actors may try to hide or hinder the strong Catholic connection and origin of the discourse, and, while still dispersing the same ideas, use language more suitable to the general public.

Lastly, I will analyse the ideological and political implications of the discourse and see how it helps maintain or change existing systems of knowledge and beliefs, social and power relationships, and social identities.

The main aim of the analysis is to understand the anti-gender movement in Estonia, but also to highlight the transnational nature of the anti-gender movement. Thus, this research adds a piece to the research about the anti-gender movement(s).

3. ANALYSIS

3.1. The Strategies, Manifestations and Rhetoric of the Anti-Gender Movement

In this section I will give an overview of the strategies, rhetoric and manifestations used by the anti-gender movement. Different frames and strategies identified in this section often intertwine and are used together.

“Gender Ideology”

“Gender ideology” or “gender theory” are terms created by the anti-gender movement. The core aim of this construction is to deconstruct gender to reflect the theological understanding of men and women, and to gather different equality-related topics under one signifier. These terms have intentionally not been clearly defined and thus can signify different things. There are five main issues that the anti-gender movement attacks and that gather under the term “gender ideology”. They are:

1. Women’s reproductive rights;
2. LGBTI rights and marriage/civil partnership equality;
3. Gender education and sexual education;
4. Democracy (for example, freedom of speech);
5. The “umbrella” of gender (for example, gender mainstreaming, gender studies, the Istanbul Convention), (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018).

Anti-gender actors share a critique on gender, labelled as “gender ideology”, “gender theory”, or “(anti)genderism” (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 8). The mass protests in France by *Manif pour tous* against marriage equality in 2013 is often considered one of the key actions of the anti-gender movement (Kuhar & Zobec, 2017). Similar protests have occurred in many European states afterwards, such as in Spain, Croatia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Poland, Italy, and others (Kuhar & Zobec, 2017). The gender studies discipline has also been attacked in many states, with Hungary being inspired by Poland in their crusade against gender studies, and Poland by Russia and Israel. Now the discipline is in danger in Brazil. Slovenian anti-gender actors were inspired by Italian anti-gender actors, and Italians by the French (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 2). All these different events are connected by the anti-gender actors using “gender ideology” to create moral panic and mobilise people.

The anti-gender actors also use a “perverted elites” frame targeted at gender mainstreaming, where the anti-gender movement claims the aim of gender mainstreaming is to change men and women’s sexual identities (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2018). Gender mainstreaming is a policy tool to realise gender equality and tackle different gender inequalities in various policy fields and includes tackling gender stereotypes (What is gender mainstreaming, 2020). Anti-gender actors, however, see this as a strategy that aims to change the fundamental nature of men and women, which they see as fundamentally different. This connects to the idea of “gender ideology” being a colonialization project against nation-states led by international organisations.

The Istanbul Convention has been scrutinised by the anti-gender movement and seen as a Trojan horse for the “gender ideology”, although the convention aims to tackle violence against women. This has been more closely studied in Austria, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia (Affairs, 2018), but is present in many more member states of the Council of Europe. In addition, there have been protests in various states against LGBT+ rights and calls to change the constitution for marriage to only be between a man and a woman. If it seems these different topics are unrelated, this perception is true in a sense that the anti-gender movement gathers under the term “gender ideology” different and not necessarily related issues that they attack under the cover of these issues being part of “gender ideology”.

In short, what brings these different events together is that they are implemented under the “threat” of “gender ideology”. “Gender ideology” is at the core of the anti-gender movement and, since created by the actors of the movement, also acts as a significant characteristic of the movement.

“Nature”, “normality” and “nation”

The anti-gender actors also construct their ideas around of what is normal or common sense. The movement displays itself as spreading the word of common sense, rationality, and moderation, and of people, who only raised concern since things have “gone too far” within liberal democracies. “Nature”, “normality” and “nation” are the three so-called entry points for the anti-gender movement and also three main groups of utilisers of their agenda forming various networks and collaborations (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2018).

The anti-gender actors widely use an “against nature” frame, which claims that gender is not a social construct and presents this as “common sense”. This means they emphasise their understanding of nature or natural, normality and nation to claim that what they are doing is protecting the natural and normal human existence against liberals that have simply gone, in

their view, too far. As discussed in the section about gendered nationalism, what is perceived as natural and normal in human behaviour and existence is very much limited to gender stereotypical heterosexual (power) relationships and derives from Christian theology. However, in claiming it to be “common sense”, they try to defuse any counter arguments and construct a social reality where their view of “natural” and “common sense” is perceived as immanent and fundamental to humans.

Alternative “knowledge” production

One of the most important strategies of the anti-gender movement is the struggle over knowledge production, meaning over the legitimacy of academic work, particularly the field of gender studies. Gender studies is characterised as “gender ideology” and not scientific, and the field has been attacked in various states. With this, the anti-gender movement aims to be the alternative field of “knowledge” (Kuhar & Zobec, 2017).

The strategy of knowledge production also includes public schools and the topic of children, which will be more closely inspected in the next sub-section. In public schools the anti-gender movement aims to ban the teaching of inclusive gender and sexual education and replace it with religious teaching and courses about the traditional family. Children are perceived as without sexuality, although research has shown it is not so, and sexual education is seen as something that normalises homosexuality (Kuhar & Zobec, 2017).

In short, the anti-gender actors both construct new and “alternative knowledge” after which they aim to change school curriculum to fit this new “knowledge”.

The construction of “endangered children”

The anti-gender actors are active both at the national and transnational levels, using both old and new media as part of their strategy. To attain moral panic and legitimise their moral claim, they use an image of an innocent and endangered child that raises concern in the general public and attains media attention. This strategy is the spitting image of the early anti-gay demonstration in the United States, such as the 1977 “Save Our Children” campaign (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 11). In Poland, for example, a “spontaneous” parental mobilisation against “gender education” was orchestrated by conservative organisations, with the support of the Catholic church as part of a wider critique of “gender ideology” that is depicted to encourage hypersexualisation of children and paedophilia (Bouvard, De Proost, & Norocel, 2019).

Reproductive rights (abortion, contraception and reproductive technologies) historically were the so-called original starting points for a wider spread of the anti-gender discourse, and still remains at the centre of the movement's agenda, with various examples from European states trying to restrict women's reproductive rights. Sexual education with aspects of gender equality and homosexuality have evoked opposition, where alleged promotion of "sexual permissiveness" is framed as dangerous to children, as well as the term "gender" itself, both in school and more widely. Gender mainstreaming has been at the core of discussion in Germany and Austria (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, pp. 9-10).

Attacks on LGBTI persons often centre around same-sex marriage or civil partnership, and this also appears to generate the most attention from the public. Other issues are same-sex adoption, surrogacy, and reproductive technologies, where anti-gender actors claim they are protecting the interests of children. The "endangered children" frame is one of the most popular and probably also most effective frames used by the anti-gender actors. LGBTI persons are depicted as paedophiles and predators, and "gender ideology" is represented as aiming to encourage sex between and with children through gender and sexual education at schools, although the real and research-based aim and outcome of gender and sexual education is the opposite. Parents are called on to prosecute teachers if they talk about sex and gender at schools (Kuhar & Zobec, 2017).

In Poland, PiS developed a draft law that would criminalise sex and gender education and would offer family preparation courses instead for children in schools. The draft law would put teachers who offer gender education in prison (MEPs condemn criminalisation of sex education in Poland, 2019) and connected sexual education to paedophilia (Grzywacz, 2019). In 2020, PiS has started another attempt to make this law a reality in Poland.

Hiding the religious origin and cause

Although the anti-gender movement always involves religious actors, the public mobilised by the anti-gender movement often is not necessarily religious and may not be aware of the religious origin and aims of the movement. It is not uncommon for the anti-gender actors to hide or hinder their religious roots to appeal to a wider and more secular audience. In states such as France, where religious arguments are taboo in the public debate, *Manif pour tous*, an anti-marriage equality protest, and *Civitas*, who defends Christian Europe, emphasises the "anthropological unnaturalness" of gender ideology, instead of using religious arguments (Velmet, 2016).

Anthropological threat is a frame used by the anti-gender movement and presents the idea of a demographic crisis. It posits abortion and LGBTI persons as a threat to reproduction. “Gender ideology” is seen as an unnatural strategy to change what it means to be fundamentally human. Anti-immigration sentiments are also common (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2018).

Thus, although the motivation for protests against marriage equality come from their interpretation of Christian theology, it is then packaged inside the anthropological frame to appeal to the secular public and to take advantage of dropping birth rates in Europe and elsewhere. The core of the ideology remains the same where the traditional family is seen as the saviour and fixer of the demographic problem.

Populism

The democratic threat frame is also common among the anti-gender movement. They use populist strategies and rhetoric, claiming that the will of the people has been eroded by corrupt elites and that “gender ideology” is a new form of totalitarianism, even more of a threat than Marxism and fascism ever was and is. Some also claim that “gender ideology” is a new left-wing ideology born from the ashes of communism and its goals are to achieve socialism revolution by new means. The latter particularly resonates with post-socialist European countries that have experienced the terrors of soviet-communism. There, “gender theory” is often classified as a new Marxism (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 9). The new disguise of the left frame is also popular in Brazil, where “gender ideology” is associated with the political and economic “ideology” of socialism (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2018).

“Gender ideology” is also classified as a neo-colonial project, with international organisations such as the UN and the EU playing an important part and forcing less powerful states to accept morally problematic laws in exchange for resources (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 9). Here, the anti-gender actors also claim that “gender ideology” goes against freedom of speech, is heterophobic, and Christianophobic (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018). This therefore allows the anti-gender actors to make themselves seem to be victims of the “gender” conspiracy. The EU is also depicted as an “ideological coloniser”. This neo-colonial project frame sees “gender ideology” imposed by the EU on Africa and Central and Eastern Europe (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2018).

In short, by constructing of social world and “the people” that excludes for example LGBTI persons, the anti-gender actors can depict the cause for human rights as an “ideological

colonisation” of the international organisations. With that, the anti-gender actors give the false perception that citizens of nation-states do not need or want human rights and freedoms.

Self-victimisation

It is not uncommon for the anti-gender actors to use self-victimisation strategy by showing themselves as the protector of oppressed people, the silenced majority silenced by corrupt elites, lobbyists, and international powers (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 10). Self-victimisation allows the anti-gender actors to make themselves look to be struggling against the “dominant gender ideology” in the name of “the people”.

Self-victimisation is used together with other strategies and frames.

Religion

Although in some states the anti-gender actors hide their religious ties and aims, in states where religious arguments are a tool to mobilise the public, religion is also used as a strategy. The ecologist frame calls on people not to interfere with God’s design and sees “gender ideology” as problematic from the perspective of Natural Law or moral law, speaking for essential differences between women and men, their natural life, and heterosexuality. The against God’s design frame is also used as a strategy to attack hedonism and secularity, and posits Christian Europe against Muslims (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2018).

Colourful imagery

Moving away from the stereotypical conservative visual, the anti-gender campaigners use colourful, youthful, and festive looks during their demonstrations (see Image 1 and Image 2), with aims to build a more plural and secular image to appeal to the public, which does not associate this imagery with extreme conservatism, and aims to hide the religious and political origin of the movement. Colourful imagery has been associated more with liberal values and movements, such as the Pride Parades. In using colourful imagery themselves, the anti-gender movement aims to attract the younger and secular public.



Image 1 France



Image 2 Estonia

To conclude, anti-gender actors use different strategies and framing for the messages, including the image of innocent children, calling for “common sense”, and emphasising the “natural”. These strategies often intertwine with one another and different frames can be used to justify their actions. The anti-gender actors create politics of fear, moral panic, production of alternative knowledge, and self-victimisation strategies to appeal to the public and influence policy. These strategies are not “home-made”, but travel across borders transnationally and are guided by various transnational anti-gender networks.

3.2. The Anti-Gender Movement in Estonia

In this section, I inspect the Estonian anti-gender movement, its actors, strategies, and their transnational connections.

3.2.1. Actors

In this section I will give an overview of the main actors in the Estonian anti-gender movement: the Estonian Conservative People’s Party and the Foundation for the Protection of Family and Tradition.

3.2.1.1. The Estonian Conservative People’s Party – EKRE

The Estonian Conservative People’s Party (Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond, EKRE) is a conservative national party in Estonia that claims to unite people who stand for the nation-state, democratic principles, and the traditional values of society. Among their political promises is “to establish a limit on the import of foreign labour, in order to favour an increase in salaries in Estonia” and “repeal the Registered Partnership Act, and to constitutionally define marriage as a union between a man and a woman” (Conservative People’s Party of Estonia Faction, 2020). EKRE¹ is known for being anti EU, immigrants, same-sex partnerships, and feminism, and in addition, has targeted the media, much like US President Donald Trump and Hungarian President Victor Orban, and the so-called deep state (*süvariik*), which they claim secretly runs the country. Mart Helme, the president of EKRE, has also called Trump an inspiration (Gershkovich, 2019).

In Estonia, at the beginning of the anti-gender movement in 2005, on the Syndicate of Common Sense weblog belonging to national conservatives Mart Helme, a conservative politician, and

¹ For both the Estonian Conservative People’s Party and the Protection of Family and Tradition the author is using the Estonian abbreviations.

his son Martin Helme, then a journalist at the news portal Delfi, the father and son were broadcasted the views of “socially conservative nationalists”, who, in their views, were systematically excluded from the media. They argued there that LGBTI rights were a “perversion of national democracy on the one hand, and a foreign, failing European social experiment on the other”, that the LGBTI community, in “pursuing things such as marriage equality, ‘homo rights activists’ were, in fact, demanding special privileges from the ‘reasonable majority’”, and that “pride parades represented an affront to democracy, since they focused on the rights of couples who were ‘naturally infertile;” (Velmet, 2019, p. 472). In addition, father and son argued that with these pursuits LGBTI persons were taking attention away from real social issues, such as the demographic problem that included children born out of wedlock, low birth rates, and moral relativism. All of these issues were seen as fundamentally dangerous to Estonian sovereignty (Velmet, 2019, p. 472).

With this, several of the anti-gender strategies are visible, such as using children as a strategy, referring to “natural” and “perversion”, and using self-victimisation. In addition, a general populist claim of media not being impartial is also used. As Aro Velmet argues: “Helme’s nationalist-conservative project borrowed heavily from the discourse of the global Right, adopting the language of American culture warriors and republishing news of incidents of “gay EU totalitarianism” from places such as Sweden or Poland (Velmet, 2019, p. 473).

After growing into a political party in 2010, EKRE has been the biggest political force opposing the Registered Partnership Act that was passed by the parliament in 2014. During this period, EKRE increasingly started using the terminology of the Global Right, using terms such as “culture wars”, “gender ideology”, and “cosmopolitan liberal conspiracies .EKRE’s website, Uued Uudised, also translated and published several texts from international news sites such as Breitbart that “exemplified how liberal elites silenced conservative proponents of family values” (Velmet, 2019, p. 473). They increasingly started speaking about “the natural family” and the dangers of “moral relativism”, all reflecting the ideas of the Christian Right in the US and in Europe, in states such as Poland and France (Velmet, 2019, pp. 473-474).

EKRE has argued that they and only they represent the true Estonians and protect Estonia and Estonians against the corrupt elite and international organisations, mostly Brussels, who are projecting their values on Estonians without consent. EKRE has also threatened the judiciary and legislative mechanisms of Estonian democratic institutions. By representing extreme

nationalism, nativist ideologies and authoritarian tendencies, they are a perfect fit to the radical-right politics.

In the spring of 2019, after placing third at the parliamentary election, EKRE became part of the coalition government of Estonia, as the second largest party in the coalition. It was not the only possible choice for the government, and many people were surprised by this development, as the elections were won by the Estonian Reform Party, and Jüri Ratas, the prime minister at that time and also of the new coalition government, had promised not to work with EKRE's values (Koppel, 2018). Nevertheless, as both national and international newspapers reported, Estonia joined the radical-right club (Gershkovich, 2019) when Ratas offered EKRE five ministerial positions out of fifteen in the government, and, among other things, agreed to hold a referendum to define marriage as only between a man and a woman (Walker, 2019), much like in other states, such as Romania and Hungary. Ratas chose not to form a government with the Reform Party, with whom they share more values and are both in ALDE at the European Parliament, and, ignoring the warning from allies in Brussels, Ratas, as the Guardian reported: "arranged a conservative coalition including the far-right party, which has allowed him to stay on as prime minister" (Walker, 2019).

The Guardian also reported, when speaking about members of EKRE, that: "Madison is not the only EKRE MP to be curious about Nazi economics. Ruuben Kaalep, the leader of EKRE's youth organisation, Blue Awakening, said right-wing politicians "can't completely disown" Nazi Germany, which had certain positive elements. Kaalep is Estonia's youngest MP, aged 25, and in an interview at a chic restaurant not far from the parliament, he described his mission as fighting against "native replacement", "the LGBT agenda", and "leftist global ideological hegemony". The same thought was shared by Politico about another member of EKRE: "An incoming minister, Mart Järvik, once suggested the country's top politicians are 'secret Jews' and in a since-deleted Facebook post, warned female politicians that 'Mommies' time is over; daddies are home'. One of the party's leaders, 41-year-old Martin Helme, called for a 'white Estonia', making a slogan of 'blacks go back'" (Gershkovich, 2019).

The Financial Times reported on the loss of Estonia's golden image to the radical-right (Milne, Peel, & Khan, 2019), as did BBC News (Mackenzie, 2019), Freedom House (Puddington, 2019), and many others. During the first weeks and months of taking seats in the government, EKRE had thus managed to do serious damage to Estonia's reputation. Being a small state,

reputation is more vital to Estonia in international relations in comparison to bigger and more powerful states.

On their webpage they name the preservation of Estonia and Estonians as the highest political goal for Estonia. They say that only the Estonian people themselves can accomplish this, relying in freedom on their natural will to live, while developing friendly cooperation with other nations. Here, “natural” illustrated the claim for “restoring the natural order of things” (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018) and a populist claim to speaking from the point of view of “common sense” (Müller, 2018). As with populists across the globe, EKRE claims to be the only one to fight for Estonians, that they will not let Estonians be a slave nation, and that they will fight with the political forces who are destroying the Estonian economy in favour of international corporations and who approve of mass immigration and destroy the language and moral values of Estonians (EKRE 10 käsku, 2020).

Here, in addition to claiming to be the only ones to represent and speak for Estonians, EKRE also hinders on the self-victimisation strategy illustrated by Paternotte and Kuhar. Presenting itself as the true defender of the oppressed Estonians, the majority silenced by powerful elites and lobbies, against international powers as well as being the only ones to save national authenticity. As Paternotte and Kuhar argue, this is instrumental in hiding the religious and political origin of the anti-gender movement (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 10). While using false claims about immigration and international organisations and the role they play for Estonia, EKRE is by using a fear tactic in promoting their political agenda.

Some ideas and decisions reflecting the anti-gender ideology of the new Estonian government are already evident as of May 2020. In addition to the planned referendum, the political discourse among members of government around the roles of women primarily as mothers and child-bearers has been rising (Solman, 2020). This is also reflected in the policy of the Ministry of Interior as well as in other policy documents such as the “Estonia 2035” strategy. Additionally, in 2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave instructions to the Estonian embassies not to participate in Pride Parades internationally or sign international declarations that call for the equal treatment of LGBTI persons (Pihlak, 2019). However, these are just a few examples of changes in policy and to understand the complete implications to both domestic and international policy, a throughout policy analysis is needed. This analysis could also involve the analysis of the party Isamaa and see whether their ideology is also reflecting the anti-gender ideology.

3.2.1.2. The Foundation for the Protection of Family and Tradition – SAPTK

The Protection of Family and Tradition (Sihtasutus Perekonna ja Traditsiooni Kaitseks, SAPTK) is a Catholic Estonian foundation that aims, according to their website, and while “resting on Christian values”, to protect the family, moral law, human dignity and justice, the traditional society and European culture in all aspects of public life. Founded in 2011 (SAPTK, 2020) with a push and financial support from Piotr Skarga (Vedler, 2019), it is part of an international movement, the Tradition, Family and Property movement (TFP), and a network of similarly minded organisations known for their radical Catholicism. The network has been characterised by severe moralism, critique of the leadership in the Catholic Church, right-wing views, and views that oppose abortion, communism, and overall change in the society (Bruneau, 1974, p. 227).

The success of SAPTK in Estonia is significant since SAPTK carries a radical Catholic ideology while the majority of Estonians do not consider themselves religious and even less Catholic (Noppeid ajaloost: usk, 2016). Additionally, SAPTK is a small organisation, which indicated that with the support, both financial and ideological, of transnational networks, one does not need a lot of resources to construct new social problems in a society.

SAPTK represents some of the most conservative branches of Catholicism, leaning towards fascism (Löwy, 1996, p. 38), and draws from rigid interpretation of Christianity to justify their very conservative ideology (Power, 2011, pp. 85-105). TFP has also been said to have a chameleonic identity institutionally, changing their visage depending on the situation and who they are communicating with. It is both a national organisations as well as a transnational movement, sharing fundamental beliefs, goals, publications (Power, 2011), and funding that cooperates efficiently for their political and social agenda. TFP is radically anti-democratic and a monarchist organisation with whom SAPTK both shares a name and a logo. In its manifesto, which SAPTK has also translated into Estonian, it speaks about the history of assault by “forces of secularism and chaos” against which they propose a counter-revolution in the name of and defined as “the peace of Christ in the Reign of Christ, that is, Christian civilisation, austere and hierarchical, fundamentally sacral, anti-egalitarian, and anti-liberal” (Velmet, 2019, pp. 474-475).

SAPTK, the Estonian branch of TFP, feeds confrontation and spreads radical messages using misleading sources, otherwise known as the face news fabricators. The funding of SAPTK is not transparent. Postimees, who analyses SAPTK’s portal Objektiiv, a news portal that claims

to be honest and independent, came to a different conclusion and found that *Objektiiv* is leaving its readers with a misleading picture of the topics covered, such as leaving out pieces that show EU in a favourable way and instead focusing solely on foreign policy idols, states run by national democrats or leaders who favour rigid migration policy (Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban and the UK's Nigel Farage are most quoted during the analysis period). Most troublesome is the fact that *Objektiiv* cites right-radical websites known for dubious content throughout the world as its main sources. Breitbart, the site that spreads false information knowingly to mislead its readers and amplifies conspiracy theories, was cited the most (Mihkelson, 2018).

SAPTK also, similarly to EKRE, uses the self-victimisation strategy. On their webpage, one can read that European Christian cultural heritage is under attack, and that they, although with little resources and possibilities, are standing against this attack. Marriage only between a man and a woman that lasts forever and their children are, as SAPTK claims, the only natural environment for growth (SAPTK, 2020). They claim that they are standing against ideological dictatorship and protecting one's fundamental rights and freedoms, above all freedom of religion, speech, and belief (SAPTK, 2020).

SAPTK, without a doubt, can be credited for being the most important and successful importer of anti-gender discourse into Estonia. The movement started in the mid-2000s with anti-abortion advocacy and has been led by academic and lawyer Varro Vooglaid and journalist-teacher Markus Järvi. Their biggest "battleground" became the Registered Partnership Act that they opposed and claimed violates the "natural law". However, in the shadows of working against the implementation of the Registered Partnership Act, SAPTK expanded their "crusade against 'gender ideology' which encompassed everything from contraceptives to sexual education, again mirroring similar Catholic organisations elsewhere" (Velmet, 2019, p. 474). At the time, although belonging to several networks as illustrated in this section, SAPTK has tried to avoid clear links to Catholicism in their public argumentation by emphasising democracy and demography (Velmet, 2019, pp. 474-475), making use of the anthropological frame identified by Kuhar and Paternotte.

SAPTK's history shows the importance of transnational Catholic allies in both funding and ideologically. In the beginning of SAPTK's activities, it received funding from Polish conservative donors (Velmet, 2019, p. 474), such as Piotr Skarga (Tamm, 2017), and SAPTK's members participated in WCF meetings internationally. However, although SAPTK belongs to

Catholic networks such as TFP, it is different in the sense that it uses arguments emphasising national democracy and demography instead of using religious arguments in Estonia (Velmet, 2019, p. 474), similarly to France, where religious arguments would also not be well received by the public. Here, SAPTK shares a clear link with EKRE, and after the implementation of the Registered Partnership Act both groups have increasingly claimed to represent true democracy, lobbying for a public referendum with an aim to abolish the Registered Partnership Act. SAPTK has also characterised itself as a “true civil society” (Velmet, 2019, p. 474). In 2019, after joining the Estonian government, EKRE managed to get a referendum to the coalition agreement to define marriage as only between a man and a woman in the Estonian constitution. The referendum is planned to take place in 2021, right before local elections. It was evident that SAPTK welcomed these developments (Põim, 2019). EKRE has also invited Varro Vooglaid and Martin Järvi into the party, but they declined (Vedler, 2019).

SAPTK thus uses the anti-gender movement strategy that hides its religious aims, and their rhetoric is combined with terms of the “transnational right”, particularly “gender ideology” and “culture war”, and references are made to national sovereignty. In Estonia also, anti-gender actors have tied the alienation of the political elite from the people to the “gender ideology” and to communism, as liberal politicians have been accused of being communists (Velmet, 2019, pp. 475-476).

SAPTK has also had disagreements, to put it lightly, with all three of the main news sites in Estonia – Delfi, Postimees, and Estonian Public Broadcasting. In one instance, Martin Järvi called out a journalist to a real duel with real weapons. Varro Vooglaid has also criticised the Pope, disagreeing with the Catholic Church’s actions with helping migrants.

3.2.2. “Gender Ideology” in the Estonian Anti-Gender Discourse

In this section and by using CDA, my aim is to analyse the vocabulary, grammar, and structures of the text, speech, and symbols delivered or used by the actors of the anti-gender movement. When looking at articles on *Objektiiv* dealing with “gender ideology” (“*sooideoloogia*”), it sticks out that many of the articles deal with children, schools, and teaching “gender ideology” at schools and transgender children. In the case of EKRE and Uued Uudised, the attack on the Istanbul Convention stands out for its political relevance and since EKRE was the only member of the parliament that did not vote for the convention that aims to tackle violence against women.

The anti-gender construction of “gender ideology” as a social problem could lead to changes in both domestic and international policy with implications to women’s and minority rights and to the development of gender equality and equal treatment.

3.2.2.1. Overview of the Texts

The Petition Against the Spread of “Gay and Gender Ideology” in Schools

On the December 13, 2018, SAPTK delivered a petition against the spread of “gay and gender ideology” in schools (Vooglaid, 2018) to Minister of Education and Research Mailis Reps. In this section, I will give an overview of this petition.

In the petitions, SAPTK claims that Estonian schools and kindergartens are in danger of an increasingly widespread “gender and sexual education ideology” that is hostile to the “natural family”, spreads “homo- and gender propaganda” among other things through textbooks, and goes against “children’s natural moral cognition”.

With this petition, SAPTK insists that the ministry stop “gender ideology propaganda” and that schools and kindergartens systematically highlight the “natural family” and its ideals of faithful marriage, as well as the ideals of masculinity and femininity, fatherhood, and motherhood. They emphasise parental rights, survival of the Estonian people and culture, and their narrow understanding of the “natural family”.

Martin Helme on the Istanbul Convention

Estonian parliament voted for the Istanbul Convention on the June 14, 2017. EKRE was the only faction in the parliament who chose not to vote for the convention, which otherwise gained the support of both coalition and opposition members of the Estonian parliament (Hääletustulemused 14.06.2017 / 14:57, 2020).

EKRE had opposed the convention from the beginning, and its reasoning remained the same for the most part throughout the proceedings. In an article on Uued Uudised in 2016, Martin Helme introduced their main reasons for opposing the convention that aims to tackle and end violence against women (Helme, 2016).

Helme claims that the aim of the Istanbul Convention is not to tackle violence against women at all, but is instead “violence against children”, “common sense”, and what is “natural”. The convention is tied to “gender ideology”, mass immigration from Africa to Estonia, and is depicted as dangerous to Estonian sovereignty. He ends the article by claiming that “men

protect women and not convention”, allowing him to appear chivalrous while not doing what he can as a member of the parliament to end violence against women.

3.2.2.2. Comparison with Other States

The Petition Against the Spread of “Gay and Gender Ideology” in Schools

In many states, the image of “the innocent child” is at the centre of the anti-gender discourse to create “politics of fear” (Kuhar & Zobec, 2017, p. 35). In many European states, similarly to SAPTK, public schools have been under attack by the anti-gender actors for teaching “gender ideology”. In France, “concerned parents” organised an online petition against an animated film that shows two male fish in love. In Italy, textbooks that addressed the diversity of families were withdrawn from some public primary schools. In states where religious education is more important and the Catholic Church is more prominent, such as Poland and Croatia, the anti-gender movement has reacted to what they see as dangerous to the Church values and teachings, and to their construction of the “natural family”. Additionally, in Croatia, the anti-gender movement started a debate around health education, that included inclusive gender and sexuality education, claiming the sex education affects students negatively and increases teenage pregnancies. Still, talking about gender equality and homosexuality remain the most common targets of the anti-gender actors in schools (Kuhar & Zobec, 2017, pp. 36-38).

In Austria, with close cooperation between political parties and pro-life activists, a petition was organised that protested gender-sensitive language and sexual education at schools. In Germany, some anti-gender actors promoted home schooling to fight against “gender ideology” and secure parental rights of parents over their children and weaken public interference in what they perceive as private matters (Kuhar & Zobec, 2017, p. 38). In Poland, the anti-gender actors have taken a most radical strategy. For the third time, in 2020 PiS developed a draft law that would criminalise sex and gender education and instead would offer family preparation courses for children in schools. The draft foresees that anyone teaching children inclusive gender and sexual education would face prison time of up to five years. The third attempt comes at the time of the COVID19 epidemic, where any protests are forbidden due to health risks and the disease spreading. During the previous attempts, the draft law has mobilised protesters against this development (Poola parlament kaalub abordi ja seksuaalhariduse keelamist, 2020). With protests being forbidden, this may mean an easier road for Poland to criminalise inclusive gender and sexual education.

In addition, there have also been “spontaneous” parental mobilisations against “gender education” in Poland that is, as they claim, part of “gender ideology”. The protests were orchestrated by conservative organisations that are supported by the Catholic Church as part of the wider critique of “gender ideology” that is depicted to encourage hypersexualisation of children and paedophilia (Bouvard, De Proost, & Norocel, 2019). School textbooks have been the target of Polish anti-gender actors as well. A textbook that included ideas about feminism and gender equality was interpreted as promoting masturbation and forcing boys to wear dresses. The textbook is seen as dangerous to “innocent children” who are being confused by the textbook about “natural gender roles” (Kuhar & Zobec, 2017, p. 39).

In Hungary, school textbooks were criticised for promoting “gender ideology”. In France, identical concerns were raised, and similarly to Estonia, the Ministry of Education was attacked for speaking about the distinction of sex and gender in high school textbooks. In Slovenia, likewise, the parliament discussed promoting “gender ideology” in schools without the consent of parents, and the Minister of Education was pressured to present the use of such textbooks (Kuhar & Zobec, 2017, pp. 38-39). The opponents argued that “gender ideology” is “aimed at the re-education of children in accordance with ‘gender theory’, which does not recognise the existence of natural female and male sexes,” (Kuhar & Zobec, 2017, p. 39).

In addition to targeting textbooks and making petitions, the anti-gender movement organised protests against inclusive gender and sexual education. In France, anti-gender actors protested the plan of the Ministry of Education to introduce gender equality curriculum to schools. The anti-gender movement mobilised parents with mostly working-class backgrounds not to let their children attend school in protest of this plan. Italy, inspired by their French counterparts, organised a similar event. In protests of “gender ideology” in Italian schools many children remained home from school.

With all these cases, the anti-gender movement uses the figure of an “innocent child”, claiming that “gender ideology” is doing a disservice to the development of children and with severe consequences by blurring the traditional ideas about sexes. Additionally, they claim that sexual and gender education is a promotion of “sexual permissiveness” through encouraging hypersexualisation of children (Paternotte & Kuhar, *Disentangling and Locating the “Global Right”: Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe*, 2018, p. 10), all of which is untrue. The “child in danger” figure is a common element in the anti-gender discourse, based on fear, and able to mobilise masses of people, especially parents. As Kovats argues: “The connection of these two:

gender as an intrigue of lobbies which have infiltrated transnational organizations, and as an ideology that threatens our children, makes of ‘gender’ an enemy, an illegitimate claim which needs to be eradicated,” (Kováts, 2017, p. 177).

“Gender ideology” is the trademark of the anti-gender movement. With these examples, the similarities in strategies and rhetoric of the anti-gender actors from various states that attack inclusive gender and sexual education are clear.

The Istanbul Convention

In many states the target of the anti-gender movement has been the Istanbul Convention. The Istanbul Convention, adopted by the Council of Europe in 2011, is the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and is the “first legally binding instrument in the world creating a comprehensive legal framework to prevent violence, to protect victims and to end with the impunity of perpetrators. It defines and criminalises various forms of violence against women (including forced marriage, female genital mutilation, stalking, physical and psychological violence and sexual violence),” (Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence : explanatory report, 2020).²

In Poland, the debates around “gender ideology” started in 2012 (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018) with opposition to the ratification of the Istanbul Convention that Poland signed in December of that year. The Istanbul Convention served as one of the starting points for the Polish anti-gender movement. Then Minister of Justice Jarosław Gowin criticised the Istanbul Convention and called it a carrier of “feminist ideology”. This was supported by the Church and other right-wing politicians who saw the convention as dangerous to traditional family as masculinity and femininity were defined cultural rather than biological in the convention. The end consequences of the convention were tied to human-animal relationships, “gender ideology”, and homosexuality that were all “undermining natural principles of life,” (Kováts & Põim, 2015, p. 88). However, although the political anti-gender actors opposed the Istanbul Convention, they still claimed to be dedicated to end violence against women (Kováts & Põim, 2015, p. 90).

² The convention also tackles gender stereotypes and calls upon states “to promote changes in the social and cultural patterns of behaviour of women and men with a view to eradicating prejudices, customs, traditions and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women or on stereotyped roles for women and men” (Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, 2014).

In Slovenia and Bulgaria, anti-gender campaigners also argued that the Convention would have “gender ideology” as the official state ideology. Spain has also experienced similar discussions (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018), although the Istanbul Convention has no such ideology and “gender ideology” is never mentioned in the text. In Croatia also, protesters gathered against the Istanbul Convention, calling it the convention that is secretly introducing “gender ideology” into the Croatian legal and educational system.

As of May 2020, Slovakia is still to ratify the convention, despite pressure from the EU, but has instead in 2014 define marriage as a union between a man and a woman in their constitution. Opponents of the convention, of whom many are Roman Catholics, argue that is in contradiction to the Slovak constitution and sees the convention as an ideological document from the UN (The Slovak Parliament Rejected the Istanbul Convention, 2020).

Orban, the prime minister of Hungary, a state that also has not ratified the convention, has used a tactic of distraction and claimed that the best way to combat violence is through stopping migration, giving him the possibility to claim that he and the government are doing a lot to protect women from violence, while not doing much to really stop it. In addition, a member of the parliament Dora Duro abstained the ratification of the convention by stating that “that because it did not contain the protection against the biggest domestic violence, abortion, ” (Kováts & Põim, 2015). In May of 2020, the Hungarian parliament is still opposing the convention and claim it promotes “destructive gender ideologies” and “illegal migration”, and women already have all the necessary protection under Hungarian legislation (Hungary's parliament blocks domestic violence treaty, 2020).

“Gender ideology” has found its way to the European Parliament as well. The number of members who oppose the Istanbul Convention has been rising in the recent years. Similarly, to domestic politics, the convention is connected to “gender ideology” and to feminist and LGBTI lobby. As Zacharenko points out: “the increase in opponents of ‘gender ideology’ in the European Parliament comes mainly from the strong performance by Matteo Salvini’s Lega, Nigel Farage’s Brexit party, Jarosław Kaczyński’s Law and Justice, Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz and Marine Le Pen’s Rassemblement National – groups which have little in common in terms of their origins and programmes, aside from their opposition to these issues,” (Zacharenko, 2019).

These are just a few examples of the anti-gender attack on the Istanbul Convention. The discussions around the convention in the framework of the anti-gender ideology have been present in many member states of the Council of Europe, including the ones that have

successfully signed and ratified the convention. The similarities in rhetoric and strategies clearly indicate the implementation of the same ideas in different states by different political powers to oppose the Istanbul Convention and frame it as part of international lobby and “gender ideology”.

3.2.2.3. Othering

In this section, I will inspect the classification schemes used in the texts to allow me to understand from whose perspective or social position SAPTK and EKRE are speaking. I argue that both SAPTK and EKRE are using “othering”, and while claiming to speak for Estonians, for “common sense”, and for the survival of the Estonian nation state, are excluding many Estonian people who do not fit their ideological view of what these things are. With that, the anti-gender actors are constructing their own “people” for whom they struggle against the “dominant gender ideology”.

Throughout the petition, SAPTK is constructing the idea that “gender ideology” is destroying the ideals of family, marriage, masculinity, and femininity, and all these are essential to the survival of the Estonian nation-state. This sentiment is, for example, used here:

“We demand that gender and homo ideology is kept away from schools on the one hand, and on the other hand the ideals of marriage and the family and their underlying values and virtues are honoured in kindergartens as well as in schools”, (Vooglaid, 2018).³

Here:

“Ideological ambitions that run counter to this principle should be kept away from educational institutions, starting with ambitions to fundamentally redefine the nature of family and marriage,” (Vooglaid, 2018).

Here:

“With the introduction of this ideological program the number of divorces, broken families and single-parent children, as well the spread of abortions, sexually transmitted diseases and pornography, and sexual and gender identity disorders has exploded. During the last decade with the intensifying of ‘gender ideology’ that denies the natural cohesion of biological sex and gender identity also the number of children and young people interested in so-called gender reassignment has expanded in the past ten years grown dozens and even hundreds of times.” (Vooglaid, 2018).

And here:

³ The original texts are in Estonian and the translation are made by the author of this thesis.

“If we really want to create preconditions for the survival of the Estonian people and culture and resist the tendencies that promote their destruction, then in spite of the dominant ideology, we must be able to also at the national level to ensure that respect for family and marriage and the underlying moral ideals are uncompromising.” (Vooglaid, 2018).

With these statements, SAPTK is using “othering”, which means that while speaking about families and Estonians, they are only speaking about particular families and particular Estonians, while excluding others, such as LGBTI persons, but also, for example, single parent families and divorcees. SAPTK is thus creating their own “people” for whom they are speaking for and whom, in their opinion, they represent the will of the people and “the others” who are not considered as belonging to that group.

“The others” are seen as problematic for spreading “gender ideology” and destroying the “elemental moral principles” and the “natural cohesion of biological sex and gender identity”. Thus, to “restore order”, “the others” need to be removed though excluding the mention of them from schools. As LGBTI persons and other families that do not represent what the anti-gender actors consider to be the ideals of family, masculinity, and femininity, SAPTK demands that the mention of different families should be taken out of textbooks and the topic should not be discussed in the classroom. SAPTK is thus aiming to first construct group belonging among those they see as “us” and separate them from “the others”, after which the aim is to dominate “the other” in the name of “the people”. With that, SAPTK is constructing social problems around “gender ideology” with the aim to exclude and include people.

As “gender ideology” is seen as an attack on the “natural family”, this is also connected to the sovereign nation-state of Estonia, particularly the construction of the social problem of the declining birth-rates and the anxiety over demographics. With that, the anti-gender actors see having children as a fundamental and a necessary part of sexual relationships, and a responsibility of women to their nation-state. LGBTI persons, same-sex couples and abortion are depicted as social problems as all these hinder the “production of children” and thus, constitute a social problem for the anti-gender actors. In Estonia, these arguments work particularly well due to the country’s history of occupation and a small population of just a little over 1,3 million people.

Othering is used by EKRE as well, in claiming that:

“Rather, the Convention restricts our sovereignty and freedom of action to resolve issues at national level considering the local circumstances and is a substitute for real help to women in difficult situations. Joining some agreement makes it possible to talk about how good its supporters are, how much they care

about women and take care of them, and in the shadow of this talk it may not come visible, that there are no real actions and there will not be – no need, we have a convention!” (Helme, 2016).

And:

“Will this convention help to provide a single counsellor in women's shelters, create a single police patrol to prevent domestic violence? Of course not. However, it will further reduce the number of men in our society who grow up with a clear knowledge: women are protected by men, not by conventions!” (Helme, 2016).

In this statement, EKRE is making it seem as if they are speaking from the perspective of the Estonian sovereign nation-state that, as they claim, has no need for conventions. Moreover, EKRE is dividing people into two groups – “the others” who have chosen to support the convention, but without any “real action”, and they, “the men”, who are the real protectors of women, as “women are protected by men, not by conventions”. Although having just not voted for a convention that aims to tackle and end violence against women, EKRE is trying to turn the tables and accuse others of not helping to protect women, although having done exactly that themselves.

Othering is central to the populist and anti-gender ideology, where people are divided into different groups: the “pure people” represented by the populist leaders and the “corrupt elite” against whom they struggle (Landau, 2018). SAPTK and EKRE, by constructing their own “people” and by excluding all others, are able to claim that they are speaking for the Estonian people with an aim to ensure the survival of the Estonian nation-state, while spreading their own ideological understanding of who counts as members of the group and who does not. The threat of populism lies with their claim that they are the only legitimate carriers of the people’s will, while in democracies no one has such privileges, as voters make different choices and, thus, different political forces are legitimate to govern a state. This claim, however, allows the anti-gender actors to undermine the rights of LGBTI persons and others, who they see as not belonging to the group, while claiming to do it for the “people” and in the name of the “people”.

3.2.2.4. The “Gender Ideology”

In this chapter, I will inspect the use of the term “gender ideology” in the texts. The main aim of this section is to illustrate how SAPTK and EKRE are constructing the social problems of “gender ideology” while deconstructing “gender”.

As discussed in this thesis previously, “gender ideology” is a term constructed by the anti-gender movement. The use of new words has an ideological connotation and thus indicates a

change in the society. With “gender ideology”, the anti-gender movement aims to discredit the sex and gender distinction, which is the research-based understanding of sex and gender for decades and part of regular policy. Calling the sex and gender distinction ideological allows the anti-gender actors to claim that how gender is understood is not research based, but nothing more than an ideology, made up, and that it has no connection to real-life facts. With this, the anti-gender movement is not only deconstructing gender, but undermining and attacking knowledge production while creating “alternative knowledge”.

Deconstructing gender is at the heart of the anti-gender movement. As we have seen in the section on the beginnings of the anti-gender movement, it started with the sex and gender distinction, where gender was recognised as a social construct by the United Nations. Today, we can read on their webpage that: “Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context” (Concepts and definitions, 2020).

For the anti-gender actors, gender is not socially constructed, but predetermined and fixed by God or a biological fact. Thus, what they aim is to deconstruct gender to fit their conception of gender, where men and women have distinct characteristics, roles, and desires given by God or predetermined by their sex. The anti-gender actors are thus claiming that “gender ideology” is changing men and women’s gender and sexual identities, which is in contradiction with God’s design. In Christian theology, God created both the natural life and the moral law; thus, in the eyes of the anti-gender movement, these two are inevitably intervened. For the anti-gender movement, moral law is written into natural life, heterosexuality, and essential differences between women and men.

EKRE echoes this sentiment here:

“The bigger problem, however, is that between the right and necessary principles contained in the Convention are embedded the completely crazy and radical goals of feminist ideology, which is the most direct attack on traditional family, gender roles and people's natural identities,” (Helme, 2016).

EKRE is deconstructing gender by claiming that “crazy feminist ideology” is attacking the “natural family, gender roles and people’s natural identities”. With that, EKRE is thus claiming that gender is not socially constructed, but gender roles are part of each person’s natural, fundamental identity and anyone who says otherwise is perceived as radical.

As identified by Kuhar and Patternote, the anti-gender actors actively use the “against nature argument”, where “gender ideology” is depicted as going against the “natural family”, “traditional family”, destroying the “fundamentals of being human” and what is “human nature” or “natural human moral” and so on. Anti-gender actors are constructing a social reality where “gender ideology” is destroying nation-states. This construct is supported by the idea that as “gender ideology” allows homosexual relationships and relationships not based on gender stereotypes, both of which go against the “true purpose” of romantic and sexual relationships, which is to produce children. To summarise, such reasoning constructs a social world where the only stimulus for romantic and sexual relationships is to have children, and if this is not the end game of such relationships, then these relationships are unnatural.

In referring to the Estonian constitution that states that family that is fundamental to the preservation of the state and that society is under the protection of the government, SAPTK writes:

“At the same time, ideological ambitions that run counter to this principle should be kept away from educational institutions, starting with ambitions to fundamentally redefine the nature of family and marriage, and ending with efforts to disfigure children’s gender identities and seeding confusion in this regard,” (Vooglaid, 2018).

EKRE is using the same construct to claim that “gender ideology” is attacking the “natural family”:

“The bigger problem, however, is that between the right and necessary principles contained in the Convention are embedded the completely crazy and radical goals of feminist ideology, which is the most direct attack on traditional family, gender roles and people's natural identities,” (Helme, 2016).

With this, the anti-gender actors are claiming that “gender ideology” is fundamentally redefining what family, marriage, and roles of men and women mean, making them unnatural. The sentence clearly implies that there is a fundamental and natural way of being a family and forming a marriage, and, as we know, they are referring to a marriage between a man and a woman and their children. However, if this form of family is the only possibility, as they claim, and it is so fundamentally and by nature, then it should follow that any other options are inevitably impossible. If there is only one type of “natural family” that is so by nature and the

idea of family is not culturally constructed, then there should not be anything to worry about for the anti-gender movement. Only if families are *not* determined by biology or nature, and are indeed culturally constructed and changing over time, only then does it become problematic for the anti-gender actors who *wish* that there were only one type of family and that they can define what it is.

This idea is further discussed by Harari, who argues that: “Culture tends to argue that it forbids only what which is unnatural. But from a biological perspective, nothing is unnatural. Whatever is possible is by definition also natural. A truly unnatural behaviour, one that goes against the laws of nature, simply cannot exist, so it would need no prohibition. No culture has ever bothered to forbid men to photosynthesise, women to run faster than the speed of light, or negatively charged electrons to be attracted to each other” (Harari, 2011, pp. 164-165). He continues by explaining that our ideas of “natural” and “unnatural” do not come from biology, that is from nature, but from Christian theology, according to which God created nature and each part was created for a particular purpose and are thus meant to be used only for that aim (Harari, 2011, p. 165).

However, although the ideas of what a family is are socially constructed, have changed over time, and will continue to do so, the aim of the anti-gender movement is to make it seem as though this is not the case and there indeed exists a “natural family”. In addition to using strategic communication and petitions such as those observed now, this is evident with attempts to define what a family is in the law. Such attempts, both successful and unsuccessful, that are aimed at changing the constitution to define marriage as only between a man and a woman can be found in many states as a result of the anti-gender strategies in those states, as has been shown in previous sections of this thesis.

In Estonia, the current government (2020) has agreed to hold a referendum to define marriage as only between a man and a woman in the year 2021. This has been one of the most important ideological promises to EKRE and is another trademark of the anti-gender movement. It remains to be seen if the attempt will conclude in changing the constitution, but the anti-gender actors will at least get the opportunity with their current coalition partners. For now, however, with the adoption of the Registered Partnership Act in 2014, the state has recognised both homosexual and heterosexual couples as families, which is in accordance with the so-called facts on the ground.

The idea of only one type of family, excluding not just same-sex couples but also, for example, single-parent families, is echoed in other parts of the petition as well. For example, here:

“We know from the experiences of Western countries that the introduction of human and sexual education that denies elemental moral principles and is in contradiction with the reality of human nature, has not given good results,” (Vooglaid, 2018).

And also here:

“In schools and kindergartens, the natural family and its underlying ideal of a fruitful marriage as well as the ideals of masculinity and femininity and fatherhood and motherhood would systematically be highlighted,” (Vooglaid, 2018).

Here, the social construct of “human nature” is again evident, as well as gender identity and gender expression being predetermined and ideals to be highlighted. Similarly, to “natural family”, SAPTK is constructing the idea of “human nature” that is being transformed by “gender ideology”. SAPTK’s understanding of “human nature” is based on a Christian theological construction of what it means to be fundamentally human. This, however, is presented as universal truth.

In this paragraph, SAPTK is also discrediting the research-based distinction between sex and gender and although surprisingly using the distinction themselves, is claiming that the “natural cohesion” of the male sex is to having a man’s gender identity and the female sex to having a women’s gender identity. With this, the anti-gender actors are deconstructing how we understand gender.

The “natural family”, in addition to not being homosexual and with men and women representing clear distinct roles and identities, is also depicted in connection to a “fruitful marriage”. With this sentiment, SAPTK assumes that *all* heterosexual couples and families want to and are able to have children, neither of which is true. Moreover, for the anti-gender actors the true purpose of sexual relationships is to produce children and, thus, if this is not the case, these relationships are not seen as moral.

SAPTK is also portraying itself as spreading the word of “common sense”. In emphasising “common sense”, they try to defuse any counter arguments. However, what is “common sense” is very difficult to define. Although the phrase “common sense” is used all the time, what counts as “common sense” and the opposite of that is very different for different people. “Common sense” does not refer to, for example, scientific knowledge, which we could say is the truth. Instead, “common sense” seems to presume an innate understanding of something that for a

particular person is self-evident. The trick is, however, that things are usually not self-evident and “common sense” has different content for different people. Additionally, “common sense” often stems from and is aligned with masculine logic and men’s (or privileged groups’) truth claims, who are able to impose their own values and interests as “truths” through the idea of “common sense”. However, it is very difficult to contest knowledge that holds the status of “common sense”.

In addition, the anti-gender actors are also targeting knowledge production and offer alternative knowledge that is built around what they call “natural family” and its fundamental rights and virtues. Often, in referring to Natural Law, the anti-gender actors argue that anything that is in contradiction with the Natural Law or their understanding of “natural family” and “fundamentalism of being human” is unnatural and thus unacceptable. SAPTK echoes this notion several times in the petition, including here:

“We turn to you regarding a concern about the fact that the spread of sexual education ideology is becoming more and more common in Estonian schools and kindergartens that is impossible to agree with and accept,” (Vooglaid, 2018).

Here, SAPTK is using objective modality by claiming that it is “impossible” to agree with “sexual education ideology”. Although SAPTK does not speak for everybody and expresses *their* opinion on the matter, they do not say that it is impossible for them to agree with this but express a sentiment where any other options are excluded. Using objective modality is more ideological than using subjective modality and makes it possible to present a personal opinion or a group opinion as universal truth. With this, SAPTK can give the impression that what they are claiming is the only possibility and the objective truth. The idea of spreading the “objective truth” against “deceitful” “gender ideology” is also echoed here:

“It is from these convictions that the petition that we are handing over to you today is derived and we demand that gender and homo ideology is kept away from schools on the one hand, and on the other hand the ideals of marriage and the family and their underlying values and virtues are honoured in kindergartens as well as in schools. Children must be guaranteed the opportunity to grow up morally as healthy as possible in an environment where their self-esteem and worldview are not poisoned by ideological lies. Otherwise, we are back as if in Soviet times – albeit the lies, which are instilled in children at schools have transformed, they have become significantly more insidious and thus much more dangerous than before,” (Vooglaid, 2018).

Here, SAPTK is using the same argumentation as EKRE in claiming that “gender ideology” is morally unhealthy and deceitful and “poisoning” the “natural family”. As with EKRE, the aim

is to convince that gender is not socially constructed, but rather predetermined and thus should not be “poisoned by ideological lies”.

In addition, SAPTK is using another anti-gender strategy in constructing the idea that “gender ideology” is connected to communism, Marxism, or the Soviet times. This causal connotation is particularly popular and successful in post-Soviet states, where the fear of communism is still present. In post-Soviet states, “gender theory” is often classified as a new Marxism (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 9) and as a new left-wing ideology born from the ashes of communism, with goals of achieving socialist revolution by new means. While many still remember the brutal rule of the Soviet Union and struggle for independence, the fear of communism has also been passed on through generations and constructed again and again in the political discourse. Although homosexuality was forbidden in the Soviet Union and gender stereotypes prevalent, SAPTK is using the fear of communism and constructing a social reality where “gender ideology” is similar to communism and has similar aims. This allows the anti-gender actors to transfer the fear of communism to the fear of “gender ideology”. The connection to communism is not supported by any arguments or facts but posited as a matter of fact and taken for granted.

3.2.2.5. Moral Panic

The construction of moral panic is also illustrated throughout both texts. Creating moral panic is a common strategy of the anti-gender movement. Stanley Cohen argues that moral panic is constructed when “a condition, episode, person, or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests,” (Cohen, 2002). In the case of the anti-gender movement, “gender ideology” becomes the condition that, as the anti-gender actors claim, threatens the principal societal values and interests. “Gender ideology” is blamed for being responsible for societal moral decline, spreading ideas that are dangerous to children and the society at large.

To support their claim, SAPTK gives several examples of moral decline and constructed a causal connotation between “gender ideology” and moral decline that is taken for granted and posited as self-evident and not supported by argument:

“Everywhere in Western society in the last half century in parallel with the introduction of this ideological program the number of divorces, broken families and single-parent children, as well the spread of abortions, sexually transmitted diseases and pornography, and sexual and gender identity disorders has exploded. During the last decade with the intensifying of “gender ideology” that denies the natural cohesion of biological sex and gender identity also the number of children and young people interested

in so-called gender reassignment has expanded in the past ten years grown dozens and even hundreds of times – without bringing the longed peace and happiness to these children,” (Vooglaid, 2018).

Do we really think that men, women and children had better lives a hundred or a thousand years ago? Some might, but there are certainly those who do not; thus, to estimate the effect and reasons or their moral value or, for example, the contentment and happiness of individuals, we need to look further than divorce and single-parent families. “Gender ideology” is presented in a causal relationship with moral decline. What *is* moral decline is depicted as self-evident, and the rising number of transgender people and single-parent families as inevitably bad and part of moral decline. All these things, however, are based on how the anti-gender actors view morality or moral decline, and thus the causal connotation is socially constructed and ideological.

The aim of these actors is to create moral panic in the society in order to create a public reaction and to mobilise people. In the case of targeting inclusive gender and sexual education, parents have often been mobilised as I have shown in the previous sections. In the case of the current petition, the aim is to create moral panic to justify a call for action:

“We also know from Western experience that the struggle to change kindergartens and schools with the adoption and dissemination of an ideology that is hostile to family-based life approach and thus distorts the natural moral cognition of children is threatening to become much more serious in Estonia.” (Vooglaid, 2018).

“Gender ideology” is depicted as “hostile to family-based life” and “distorting the natural moral cognition of children”. In addition, the paragraph emphasises that these “dangers” are becoming more and more current in Estonia, and thus indicates that this needs a strong reaction from the public and the parents. The public is thus warned of “the dangers of the West” that if, not clearly resisted by the Estonian public, would soon also roam in Estonia. SAPTK has constructed an imagined danger that threatens Estonian children. Although the petition is constructing and calling for moral panic, it is also a result of moral panic itself, where the signers have given their signatures in fear of societal moral decline.

As have their counterparts in other states, with the petition, SAPTK is pressuring the ministry and schools not to address some topics at schools, such as same-sex families, sexual education, homosexuality, and the social construction of gender. These topics are seen as the essential part of “gender ideology”.

The aim of the petition is to pressure the Ministry of Education and Research to demand schools to exclude any mention of what SAPTK considers “gender ideology”, as can be seen here:

“Estonian schools there should not be the breeding ground for family and marriage hostile ideology; homo- and gender ideology must be eliminated from study materials,” (Vooglaaid, 2018).

With the exclusion of these topics, anti-gender actors try to gain control over knowledge production and steer what children can and cannot know in accordance with their ideological understanding of what is morally correct. The moral claim is based on the Catholic understanding of morality that derives from the Natural Law. Thus, as other religions and ideologies, it is not based on facts and scientific research, but on the opinion of one group. The aim, however, is that this group, the anti-gender movement, can dictate what others can and cannot know as well. Thus, knowledge is not intended to be free, but controlled by a specific group of people. As was argued by van Dijk, power is often constructed around some concrete situation, and can also be perceived as “natural” and taken for granted, constituting “common sense” (van Dijk, 2015, p. 469). The speakers of powerful groups seek to control knowledge as this allows them to (almost) control the minds of people (van Dijk, 2015).

To control the hearts and mind of children, SAPTK is claiming that existing textbooks that include the topics of homosexuality are lying to children:

“As you know, school textbooks are already in use in Estonia, where children are lied to as a full-fledged family could also be made up of homosexuals. For example, in Humanities textbooks made for 2nd grade, meaning 8-year-olds, there is a beautiful, colourful picture of a family made of two lesbian women. In the 6th grade Social Studies textbook, among different family forms together with and equivalent to a male and female family, ‘families of two men and two women’ are also included. Such an ideological message ignores the basic fact that not all households are a family, that is a unique combination of complementarity and cohesion between a man and a woman and intended to have and raise children, and deserves as an ideal special respect, support and protection of society,” (Vooglaaid, 2018).

As was discussed in the previous section, the idea of what a family is, is socially constructed. It can be and is constructed in religion as well; thus, when SAPTK refers to the ideals of masculinity and femininity and the “unique combination of complementarity and cohesion between a man and a woman”, they refer to the social construction of the Catholic Church of what a family is. As was discussed in this thesis, with the writing of Pope John Paul II, the Catholic Church deconstructed their idea of the relationship between men and women and what it means to be a man or a woman. “Women’s nature” is formulated in shifting from women being subordinate to men to women being complementary to men (men exist in relation to

women and women is relation to men). In the Pope's vision, heterosexual love and family were the foundation of personal morality, social cohesion, and social order. Traditional family would naturally provide the structure around which a sustainable society could be built, and which both communism and liberalism had decided to set aside in the name of atheism, institutionalised equality, and hedonistic freedom (Velmet, 2016).

This social construction is seen as the ultimate truth and, thus, deserving of special respect from the state and the society. The Catholic background, however, is not mentioned and the ideas are presented as self-evident and as a matter of facts. Family as a complementary relationship between a woman and man is seen as a "basic fact" and, thus, as we have seen previously, SAPTK is using objective modality while expressing a subjective understanding.

3.2.2.6. Self-Victimisation

Anti-gender actors also use self-victimisation by showing themselves as the protector of oppressed people, the silenced majority oppressed by corrupt elites, lobbyists, or international powers (Paternotte & Kuhar, *Disentangling and Locating the "Global Right": Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe*, 2018, p. 10). Both EKRE and SAPTK echo this view. For EKRE, it is a convention of the United Nations, the Istanbul Convention, that allows them to use self-victimisation:

"Human haters are on the move again. On this occasion, we are presented with the Istanbul Convention, which, according to the advertising text, should help reduce violence against women, but in reality it is violence against children, common sense and naturalness. But as you try to explain it, you are immediately hit with poisonous swearing and slander of one of the most furious segments of the tolerant rainbow-colored coalition, and sensible arguments are buried under radical feminist slogans multiplied by hysteria that have nothing to do with real life. But the arguments against the Istanbul Convention are compelling," (Helme, 2016).

Firstly, the Istanbul Convention is an international act and EKRE thus represents the anti-gender construction of international powers as "corrupt elites" that go against the will of "the people" in the name of whom EKRE is struggling. Supporters of the Istanbul Convention are depicted as "human haters" and thus as enemies, as "the others", who are not sensible and instead use "poisonous swearing and slander". With such enemies, EKRE is constructing themselves as heroes, who, in spite of the danger of "radical feminists", who hold back nothing to fulfil their aims, are standing against this ideology. "The enemy" and, thus, any contact with them, is constructed as unpleasant. This means that EKRE is depicting themselves as victims having to fight off "gender ideology" and as heroes for willing to do that against such unpleasant enemies.

SAPTK also hints at the self-victimisation strategy by constructing themselves as standing against a powerful, dominant, and criminal ideology for the survival of the Estonian nation-state and the Estonian people:

“If we really want to create preconditions for the survival of the Estonian people and culture and resist the tendencies that promote their destruction, then in spite of the dominant ideology, we must be able to also at the national level to ensure that respect for family and marriage and the underlying moral ideals are uncompromising,” (Vooglaid, 2018).

As we have seen with populists, SAPTK has constructed the idea of “the people” for whom they struggle against the “dominant gender ideology”. However, who counts as “the Estonian people” seems to be limited to their understanding of what it means to be fundamentally human. This excludes, for example, LGBTI persons and probably feminists, and depicts culture as something constant that needs to be saved or preserved. However, the opposite is true, as LGBTI persons with an Estonian passport are also, as a matter of fact, Estonians, and culture, including Estonian culture, has never been constant, but always changing and evolving. Culture is not something that is given, but rather constructed by each person.

3.2.2.7. Politics of Fear

Politics of fear is also used by both SAPTK and EKRE. With their petition, SAPTK demands that:

“If we really want to create preconditions for the survival of the Estonian people and culture and resist the tendencies that promote their destruction, then in spite of the dominant ideology, we must be able also at the national level to ensure that respect for family and marriage and the underlying moral ideals are uncompromising,” (Vooglaid, 2018).

The anthropological frame threat, that presents the idea of demographic crisis due to abortion and LGBTI people, is evident here. “Gender ideology” is seen as an “anthropological revolution” that aims to destroy traditional and natural gender roles of women and men, and is thus destroying the fundamental aspects of human nature by forced transformation. It therefore sees the developments in women’s rights, gender equality, and equal treatment not as separate causes for freedoms and human rights, but as a dominant ideology that attempts to radically transform interpersonal relations, nation-states, nations, and societies, as was argued by Aro Velvet (Velmet, 2016). With their petition, SAPTK is urging people by using politics of fear that seek to install the fear of imagined dangers while making minorities or other social groups into enemies, in order to stand against this revolution.

For EKRE, danger is again constructed through the idea of Estonian sovereignty and imagined dangers from international organisations:

“Rather, the Convention restricts our sovereignty and freedom of action to resolve issues at national level, given the circumstances here, and is a substitute for real assistance to women in difficult situations,” (Helme, 2016).

The Istanbul Convention is depicted as undermining the sovereignty of the Estonian nation-state, while producing no real assistance to women who suffer under violence. Estonian participation in this convention is seen as unnecessary and violence against women best resolved at the national level. Moreover, the convention is constructed as not only not helpful, but international legislation as hindering the settlement of the issue at the national level. Thus, the Istanbul Convention is not just unnecessary, but dangerous to the sovereignty of nation-states and to the protection of women.

The Istanbul Convention and sovereignty is also connected with immigration:

“Exactly half of the one billion Africans and one billion Muslims have the right to become refugees under the Istanbul Convention without any reason other than that they are women from the third world,” (Helme, 2016).

According to EKRE, the Istanbul Convention would allow a million Africans and Muslims entrance to Estonia. No such thing has happened in Estonia or any state that ratifies the Istanbul Convention, but EKRE, by using politics of fear, is constructing a causal relationship between the flow of Muslim immigrants and signing the Istanbul Convention. The fear of billions of migrants is transferred to the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. Although the danger is imagined, it allowed EKRE to depict themselves as standing for the sovereignty of Estonia and against the crisis of migration, while depicting “the others” as agents of international organisations who have no mind of their own.

3.2.2.8. The Rights of Parents

In this section I inspect how the anti-gender movement emphasises the rights of parents in order to advance their agenda and discredit inclusive gender and sexual education. The anti-gender actors emphasise the rights of parents to bring up their children according to their values and beliefs:

“Schools should also follow the strict respect provided for in § 27 (3) of the Constitution that states the principle that parents have the right and the obligation to bring up their children, and take care of them,” (Vooglaid, 2018).

And they must do so without “(gender) ideological” influence from the state:

“The emphasis on this principle is all the more important given the recent efforts under the slogan of sexual education and humanities, to bring more and more ideological education into schools and even kindergartens, which denies the primary rights of parents deriving from the natural law to act as guides in the worldview of their children,” (Vooglaid, 2018).

Here, to support their claim, SAPTK refers to § 27 of the Estonian constitution that speaks about the rights of families and to the Natural Law. Both are problematic. § 27 of the Estonian Constitution states the following:

“§ 27. The family, which is fundamental to the preservation and growth of the nation and which constitutes the foundation of society, enjoys the protection of the government.

Spouses have equal rights.

Parents have the right and the duty to raise their children and to provide for them.

The protection of parents and children is provided by law.

The family is required to provide for its members who are in need”

(The Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, 2020).

As we can see by reading the constitution, it says nothing about families necessarily being heterosexual, consisting of a man and a woman, or deriving from ideals of masculinity and femininity, motherhood and fatherhood. The constitution only states that family, without defining it, is under the protection of the government. Not only that, the Constitution also states that spouses have equal rights, clearly echoing a feminist and gender-equality sentiment, in contrast to SAPTK’s anti-gender discourse that sees men and women as fundamentally different. Although equality does not exclude difference, it also does not imply fundamental differences between spouses. The spouses are also left gender neutral, meaning the constitution does not say the spouses can only be a man and a woman.

But that is not the impression that SAPTK wants to give with their interpretation of the constitution. While referring to the constitution, SAPTK gives the impression that it states that there are fundamental differences between women and men, special rights for marriage, and for families to be formed of heterosexual couples, all of which are false. However, impression matters, and in its references to the constitution, SAPTK tries to imply that what they are claiming is something that Estonians have already agreed upon, so much so that it is written in the republic’s constitution.

In addition, SAPTK also speaks in the petition about parents' rights over their children to guide their worldview. However, the Constitution says nothing about the parental right to be guides in developing their children's worldview. The constitution states the obligation of parents to take care of their children and the protection of both parents and *children* by the law. Of course, parents undoubtedly do shape the worldview of their children in accordance to their own belief system. However, this is not a right provided by the law.

On the contrary, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasises, in addition to parents, the role of the state in protecting the rights of the child. The convention emphasises that children are human beings the same as adults and thus have all the same rights as their parents. The convention does not see children as subjects to the law, then, as is written in the petition, but as holders of rights. This means that no one, even the parents, has the right of ownership over a child. Like adults, children are different, with different interests and needs. In contrast to the petition's text, the law does not state that some needs, interests, or worldviews are better than others, but instead that each person, including a child, has an equal right with others to decide their own needs and interests. In addition, the convention emphasises that rights and obligations go hand in hand, that we must remember that all adults and children also have the same rights as we do, and that we all have the right to equal treatment under the law (Children's and youth rights and responsibilities, 2020). In addition, we should remember that LGBTI rights and the rights of children go hand in hand. LGBTI persons do not wake up LGBTI when they reach adulthood. Thus, when we ensure that LGBTI persons have the same right in the petition as others and are able to live free of violence and bullying, we also ensure that children have this right.

However, upon reading the petition text closely, SAPTK does not only refer to human laws, but also to the divine. The reference to Natural Law is subtle, but nevertheless clear. The term "Natural Law" that refers to the Bible is used as an adjective (*loomuseaduslikku*) to likely hide the religious meaning of the term. For most Estonian, Natural Law probably does not mean much and as most Estonians are not religious, references to religion could be counterproductive. Thus, as we have seen with the example of other states, such as France, where secular thought is more prominent, in Estonia also SAPTK chooses not to use clearly religious vocabulary, but instead emphasises other ideological things, such as the nation-state and natural family to spread their discourse. What connects both of these, however, is that both the Natural Law and nationalism refer to authority.

The petition also implies that there is a consensus among parents on what is the best education, the right way to bring up their children, and what are the worst things for their children. This idea is echoed throughout the text, including here:

“For example, in the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States, but also in Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands, such filthy and immoral sexual education programs have been introduced in schools, that their implementation would bring about parental revolution in Estonia,” (Vooglaaid, 2018).

With this sentiment, SAPTK may be probing future actions against inclusive gender and sexual education and aims to mobilise parents for protests. In addition, Western states are shown as producers of “gender ideology”. This sentiment is also echoed by EKRE:

“Do you think that the common sense of the teachers and the reluctance of the officials of the Ministry of Education will save us from this? Think again; the courage of citizens to face an attack of tolerance is already rare in the public sector. Wait for the criminalization of hate speech and we have a quiet era. And look for news from Sweden or the UK, where non-stereotypical gender roles are being introduced at every level of education and boys are being forced to wear skirts and girls to play boys' games in kindergarten. It is difficult to imagine a more brutal twisting of children's personalities, and if anyone should protest, the answer is quite right: the convention is binding!” (Helme, 2016).

Also here:

“In other words, forget that Estonia itself can decide what is or is not in our study programs. History, Estonian language and literature – free yourself from extremist feminist doctrines! Parents do not want it? Doesn't matter, an international agreement is binding! Kids don't want to? Who cares, the sacred event of men's hatred has always been more important than tolerance for children and feminists building a new and better tomorrow,” (Helme, 2016).

Western states are depicted as states where “gender ideology” has “gone too far” and where children’s “natural identities” are twisted by “gender ideology”. In Western states, parents have already lost their rights over their children to conventions, but Estonia still has a chance to “bring about parental revolution”. Western states are constructed to be immoral and thus not places to follow, but rather the opposite. International conventions are depicted as mistakes by Western states and dangerous to parental rights.

With these sentiments EKRE is both showing itself as savours of children and Estonian nation-state as well as aiming to mobilise the public against “gender ideology” and any international influence. Influence from other states or international organisations is often depicted negatively and dangerous to sovereign nation-states. However, just because knowledge, ideas or practices originate elsewhere, does not make them automatically at odds with national politics and

culture. Although the anti-gender movement is trying their best to depict the human rights cause as an “ideological colonial project” of international organisations, the fight for gender equality and equal treatment is done for all women, minorities and others suffering from oppression in all states.

4. CONCLUSION

In this section I introduce the main findings and conclusions of the analysis. The aim of this thesis was to inspect the transnational anti-gender movement through the Estonian case study. By looking at the strategies and texts written by the anti-gender actors, the aim of this study was to first illustrate the similarities in strategies and rhetoric of the anti-gender actors from different states and, thus, demonstrate the transnational nature of the movement and the fact that the anti-gender rhetoric and strategies are imported to Estonia and not home-made. The main part of this study was dedicated to analysing the Estonian anti-gender actors, their strategies and rhetoric through inspecting the text written by these actors in regards to inclusive gender and sexual education and the United Nations convention to tackle violence against women and domestic violence, the Istanbul Convention. The texts were analysed by using the Critical Discourse Analysis. I also introduced the strategies and manifestations of the anti-gender movement, that formed the basis to analysing the Estonian anti-gender movement.

The analysis shows that the anti-gender movement has mobilised in Estonia and is in line with the transnational anti-gender movement. The actors of the Estonian anti-gender movement, a radical-right political party, the Estonian Conservative People's Party (EKRE), and a radical Catholic organisation, the Foundation for the Protection of Family and Tradition (SAPTK), have imported the anti-gender ideology to Estonia. While EKRE has been the biggest political force opposing the Registered Partnership Act, it is SAPTK, more than anyone else that can be credited for being the most important and successful importer of the anti-gender discourse to Estonia by constructing "gender ideology" as a social problem in Estonia.

This is significant since SAPTK carries a radical Catholic ideology while the majority of Estonians do not consider themselves religious and even less Catholic (Noppeid ajaloost: usk, 2016). This means that SAPTK has been able to spread the anti-gender ideology and mobilise the public by not making their religious roots and ideology obvious and by not referring to religious texts. However, the core of their claims still proceeds from their understanding of Christian theology and the teachings of the Catholic Church. The theological references are just subtler but still present. Instead of clearly referring to the Natural Law, SAPTK is very much aware of the public they are speaking to, and thus, "gender ideology" is tied together with the ideas of Estonian sovereign nation-state and the demographic crisis, both of which as construction of social problems are already parts of the Estonian political discourse. This has allowed SAPTK to build their case on top of social problems, that have already been constructed

and brought into the public's consciousness. As was argued by Shawki, the pre-existing social structures and constructions, the general political climate and political conditions and their compatibility with new ideological constructions help the spread of particular social movements and ideologies (Shawki, 2013, pp. 138-139).

SAPTK's success is also significant due to the small size of the organisation. This indicates that with the support, both financial and ideological, of transnational networks and partners, a few people can import and construct new social problems in a society. This is also probably the reason why SAPTK's influence may be disregarded and the full impact and potential for future action not considered significant by decision makers working on gender equality and equal treatment. Awareness raising on the fact that with SAPTK we are not dealing with just a small Estonian organisation, but a transnational network of like-minded organisations with a long history of working against women's and minority rights is vital in this regard.

The analysis shows that, like their counterparts in other states, Estonian anti-gender actors have and are constructing the idea of "gender ideology" with an aim to undermine the distinction between sex and gender, the socially constructed nature of gender, and aim to replace them with their understanding of the "natural family", masculinity and femininity. The anti-gender actors oppose the understanding of the social construction of gender, hence the term "gender ideology", that refers to the English distinction between sex and gender (Velmet, 2019). Although the actors of the anti-gender movement use gender as a core signifier of their discourse, it does not signify the same meaning used by researchers, activist or policy makers. However, by using the human rights language and similar vocabulary to Gender Studies, the anti-gender actors can depict "gender" and all action to develop women's and minority rights and gender equality as ideological.

By deconstructing gender and constructing "gender ideology", the anti-gender actors are depicting their understanding of family, the roles of men and women, and morality as matter of fact and as the objective truth. The Christian theological construction of what it means to be fundamentally human is presented as universal truth not as a way of constructing social reality. Within this framework, the anti-gender actors through discrediting the social construction of gender, also undermine the rights and identities of transgender persons or others who do not confirm and identify with their narrow understanding of what it means to be a man or a woman or any gender. This discredits the long work for women's rights, gender equality and equal treatment of all persons, particularly those of transgender persons.

The findings show that the anti-gender actors use “othering” to construct their own “people” in the name of whom they struggle against “immoral gender ideology”. “Othering” is a core characteristic of populism. For the anti-gender actors, populism offers both the content and the packaging of their messages. “Gender ideology” is depicted as a “direct attack on traditional family, gender roles and people's natural identities”. In the anti-gender discourse, protecting “the natural family” is a central theme. In this discourse, men and women are seen as fundamentally different, and through that, as complimentary to each other through their *opposing* masculinity and femininity. Gender is thus constructed in opposing binary terms, where only men and women who meet the right “qualifications” are considered as “the family” or as “the people”.

These constructions allow the anti-gender actors to not just express this opinion through words and influence the public opinion, but as the anti-gender actors are also members of the parliament and the government, introduce these constructions into policy, legislations, the development plans and strategies of the state as well as express this view in international organisations. As the aim of these policies is, in Peters and Besleys terms, the social exclusion and inclusion of people (Peters & Besley, 2014), this means a setback for women’s rights, gender equality and minority rights. The implications would be long term as strategies are developed across government cycles. In addition, the implications are both domestic and international as political decision makers not only influence and shape the policy at home, but also internationally. It is not just in national governments and parliaments where the anti-gender ideology has been spreading. The same political forces are also bringing “gender ideology” to international organisation, and for example, in the European Parliament the number of members who oppose the Istanbul Convention has been rising in the recent years (Zacharenko, 2019). As was argued by van Dijk, words have consequences either through leading to changes in legislation or they help constitute a new normality (van Dijk, 2015, p. 468).

Some ideas and decisions reflecting the anti-gender ideology of the new Estonian government are already evident, such as the upcoming referendum that aims to define marriage as between a man and women in the Estonian constitution, the constant emphasise by some members of the government on women’s roles as primarily mothers and child-bearers that is also reflected in the policy of the Ministry of Interior or the instruction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Estonian embassies not to participate in Pride Parades internationally or sign international declarations that call for the equal treatment of LGBTI persons. However, to understand the

complete implications to both domestic and international policy, a thorough policy analysis is needed.

The anti-gender actors also create moral panic, where “gender ideology” is blamed as being responsible for societal moral decline, while what is moral and immoral is based on the anti-gender actors’ understanding of morality, and thus the causal connotation between “gender ideology” and moral decline is ideological and constructed by the anti-gender movement. For Cohen, moral panic is constructed when “a condition, episode, person, or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests,” (Cohen, 2002). For the anti-gender actors, “gender ideology” is the condition that threatens their view on the principal societal values and interests.

In addition, by aiming to exclude inclusive gender and sexual education from schools, the anti-gender actors try to gain control over knowledge production and steer what children can and cannot know in accordance with their ideological understanding of what is morally correct and should be accepted in a society. What is morally correct in their view is depicted as “common sense” and “natural”. Although this is not explicitly said in the texts reviewed, morality is understood through the Catholic Churches construction of morality. In this view, both the physical world and morality are created by God and, thus, morality is not perceived as socially constructed, but concrete moral principles as innate parts of what it means to be fundamentally human.

The anti-gender actors seek to control knowledge production, opinions, and attitudes of children and other citizens, which includes access to control over public discourse in educational facilities (van Dijk, 2015). SAPTK is demanding that the Ministry of Education and Research would ban the mention of LGBTI families in school textbooks and, thus, the anti-gender actors target knowledge production, where *they*, not experts or scientist, can determine what children can learn. The end goal is to offer “alternative knowledge” that is built around their construction of the “natural family” and its fundamental rights and virtues. This means that for the anti-gender actors, knowledge is not intended to be free, but controlled by a specific group of people. By seeking to control knowledge production, the anti-gender actors are aiming to control the hearts and minds of citizens (van Dijk, 2015).

The constructions around “common sense” is a larger theme in the anti-gender ideology and among the central reasonings. The reasoning behind the construction of social problems allows the anti-gender actors to depict their actions as “self-evident to any reasonable person”. As was

argued by van Dijk, power is often constructed around some concrete situation, and can also be perceived as “natural” and taken for granted, constituting “common sense” (van Dijk, 2015, p. 469). However, “common sense” presumes an innate understanding of something that for a particular person is self-evident, but what counts as “common sense” is different for different people. In addition, “common sense” often stems from and is aligned with masculine logic and men’s (or privileged groups’) truth claims, who are able to impose their own values and interests as “truths” through the idea of “common sense”.

“Gender ideology” is also seen as dangerous to the sovereign nation-state. As Velmet argues, “gender ideology” is depicted as the global “anthropological revolution” of international organisations where the developments in women’s rights, gender equality, and equal treatment are not as separate causes for freedoms and human rights of all persons, but as an interconnected attempt to radically transform interpersonal relations, nation-states, nations, and societies (Velmet, 2016). This “anthropological threat” is seen as dangerous to Christian Europe (Velmet, 2016) and used to construct the social problem of the demographic crisis where LGBTI persons and abortion are depicted as the cause for declining birth-rates and as a threat to reproduction of nation-states (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2018). This is particularly evident with the Istanbul Convention. The convention is seen as the carrier of “gender ideology” and as an “ideological colonialization project” of international organisations against nation-states. Interestingly, although the anti-gender actors as members of parliaments have often chosen not vote for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, the same actors at the same time proclaim their commitment to tackling violence against women and domestic violence (Kováts & Põim, 2015, p. 90). This rhetoric was also used by the Estonian anti-gender actor, Martin Helme, in an identical manner to his counterpart in Poland. With that, EKRE is trying to turn the tables and accuse others of not protecting women, although having done exactly that themselves.

As “gender ideology” is seen as an attack on the “natural family”, this as well is connected to the question of sovereignty through the declining birth-rates and the anxiety over demographics. With that, the anti-gender actors see having children as a fundamental and a necessary part of sexual relationships, and a responsibility of women to their nation-state. LGBTI persons, same-sex couples and abortion are depicted as social problems as all these hinder the “production of children” and thus, constitute a social problem for the anti-gender actors. In Estonia, these arguments work particularly well due to the country’s history of occupation and a small population of just a little over 1,3 million people. However, in this social construction, the individual rights or happiness of persons is disregarded, while the preservation of nation-states

in the form they once were is seen as substantial. In this view, citizens exist *for* their states, not the other way around, where states are created to provide aid and stability to the citizens.

In addition, “gender ideology” is connected to communism that allows the anti-gender actors to transfer the fear of communism to the fear of “gender ideology”. As argued by Paternotte and Kuhar, the fear of communism works particularly well in Eastern European, post-Soviet states (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 11). While many still remember the brutal rule of the Soviet Union and struggle for independence, the fear of communism has also been passed on through generations and constructed again and again in the political discourse. Although there is no connection between communism and developing women’s and minority rights and neither was an objective in the Soviet Union, this construction still allows the anti-gender actors to use the fear of communism and tie it to “gender ideology”. Thus, in Eastern European states, soviet-communism *is* often part of the “gender ideology”, but has nothing to do with the real struggle for equal rights, freedoms and opportunities.

The case of Estonia shows the effectiveness of transnational networks of social movements. While the number of anti-gender actors in Estonia has been small, the financial and ideological support of these transnational networks means that a few people can use the rhetoric and strategies developed by others and implement them into the local political discourse and construct social problems locally. This is done by bridging the anti-gender ideology with the pre-existing social structures and construction, and the political climate to appeal to the local public. However, when in power, the anti-gender actors are able to influence both domestic and international politics and policy, and thus, help constitute a social world where women’s and minority rights are not regarded internationally. Thus, transnationalism of social movements works both ways, transnational networks influence local movements, that in turn influence the policy of international organisations.

Although this thesis covers a variety of topics related to the anti-gender movement and tries to offer examples of anti-gender acts from various states and anti-gender actors, more research is required to grasp all aspects of the transnational anti-gender movement and understand the connection and collaborations of different anti-gender movements in different states. An interstate research project, where researchers fluent in national languages that would map the strategies, manifestations and rhetoric of the anti-gender movements, would help grasp the full nature of the movement internationally or regionally as well as highlight the similarities and differences between national anti-gender movements.

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