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Gender and the far right on the web: a comparative approach

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‘The negative consequence of the bottle between ideologies and the influence of extremely liberal views is the forefront of ‘gender ideology.’
(Dániel Z. Kárpáti, Jobbik MP - Hungary)

Introduction

Recent years have seen the rise in popularity of populist far right organisations, movements and parties. Issues related to gender and sexuality have been constantly present in the public discourse of far right populist political parties and movements. Most generally, these issues are framed with what Judith Butler (1990) calls a ‘heterosexual matrix’, (a sex-gender-sexuality tripartite system). Butler (ibid.) argues that gender is performative: no identity exists behind the acts that supposedly ‘express’ gender, and these acts constitute, rather than express, the illusion of the stable gender identity. This rests on Simone de Beauvoir’s idea that ‘One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one’; in other words, everyone is born with a sex in the anatomical sense, but a person acquires gender over time. By illustrating the artificial, conventional, and historical nature of gender construction, Butler attempts to critique the assumptions of normative heterosexuality: those punitive rules (social, familial, and legal) that force us to conform to hegemonic, heterosexual standards of identity.

As this chapter shows, for the far right gender is a natural and biological category, male and female genders are naturally compatible and gender roles assigned to men and women are a-historical and grounded in biological differences among men and women (Rener and Ule 1998; Jogan 2004; Jalušič 2001; Kuhar 2006; Kuhar and Švab 2013). Sexism as a social practice is used in the rhetoric of right-wing parties and groups to create a ‘we’ versus ‘the other’. *Sexist hegemony* encompasses practices of inclusion or exclusion of a person from material, cultural and symbolic resources on the basis of their gender.

Our analysis concentrates on the assessment of metaphors, symbols and narratives of right-wing populist groups for mobilizing antagonism in the field of gender relations and the way they use difference and inequality to their advantage by appealing to ‘national purity’, the ‘heterosexual family’, ‘nature and the roles it prescribes for men and women’ and ‘religion’. Although the far and extreme right in Europe varies from one country or region to another, ideologies of gender and sexuality appear to be central to these movements: issues such as sexism, homophobia, abortion,

‘proper’ family and ‘traditional’ gender roles mobilize right wing activism and the flow of their ideas. In this paper we look at the kind of gender and sexual ideology the far right promotes using the web, and demonstrate ruptures and continuities within far-right discourse by using examples from nine EU member states, namely Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Slovenia, and the UK. The chapter uses data gathered from the web sites of far right organisations in these countries plus the country reports compiled by the research teams of the RAGE project.

Construction of gender differences and inequality

The construction and legitimation of difference and inequality – based on biological or cultural arguments – is central for sexist practices within the far right. This chain of argumentation includes the production of knowledge with regard to allegedly ‘distinct’ roles for humans depending on their gender; thus human beings are classified on the basis of certain characteristics; such classification seems to influence far right party practices in different degrees and ways, depending on the way in which the ‘heterosexual’ matrix manifests itself in a given country and on that country’s welfare regime/model.

Starting with the DF (Danish People’s Party) in Denmark, a party under female leadership similar to FN (Front National) in France, the party is strongly supporting gender equality and is actively participating in relevant innovations. This effort is monitored via the official website of the party and the social media. DF’s equality spokesperson, Karina Aadsbøl, who was appointed as the new Chairman of the Parliamentary Equality in May 2016, while emphasising the importance of gender equality via the social platforms also underlined the existence of violence and repression in Denmark, as each day affects women of immigrant origin (Aadsbøl 2016). UKIP also supports gender equality and its online discourse includes numerous articles, blogs and newsfeeds relevant to the issue. Characteristically, Godfrey Bloom MEP of UKIP on a committee meeting in the EU on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality in 2013 commented referring to women: ‘Trust them. Why do you have so little faith in woman that they need political patronage. Trust them, have faith in them. It will pay dividends for you in the future’ (Bloom 2013).

Similarly, Franz Obermayr of FPÖ (Austrian Freedom Party) in 2013, during an EU debate on impact of the economic crisis on gender equality and women’s rights described equality as the subjective perception of individuals in everyday life and supported the fight against unequal pay of women (EU parliament debate). Nevertheless, Leila Hadj-Abdou calls the approach of the Austrian FPÖ in regard to gender issues ‘feminist right-wing populism’ and argues that the party’s practices are highly contradictory: it on the one hand enforces male-domination in its own organisation structures and it

promotes the traditional gender-specific division of labour (FPÖ, 2011:131; Amesberger and Halbmayr, 2002:283; Sauer and Ajanović 2013). But on the other hand, it portrays the party as the pursuer of 'European values' and thus gender equality in Austria (Hadj-Abdou, 2012:45). Gender equality is by no means a political project of the right-wing groups in Austria. On the contrary, men and women are perceived as different by 'nature' in right-wing ideology and discourse (Goetz 2014). FPÖ tries to enforce a 'traditional' gender order and argues that feminist demands of gender equality are against women's own will (Sauer and Ajanović 2013).

As Kuhar et al (2013) highlight the 'heterosexual matrix' was also the starting point of the argumentation in the Family Code debate in Slovenia, used by its opponents. In this interpretation, both sex and gender (most often there is no distinction between the two) are understood as essentialist biological categories. As far as sex is distinguished from gender, the latter is understood as a 'natural' – although cultural in its essence – extension of biological sex. Male and female characteristic are biologically determined and so is their identity. In other words: they reject any post-structuralist interpretation of genders and any subversion of gender roles and identities is negatively connoted as 'social experimentation' (ibid).

Unlike the Austrian and Slovenian cases, Golden Dawn in Greece is a political party denying openly gender equality. Counting its support by voters in the 2012 and 2015 national elections, one may assume that there is also a societal backlash regarding gender equality in Greece and a return to the more traditional values of the past regarding gender roles and family. Golden Dawn promotes a certain kind of life style for women in accordance with the nationalist socialist ideals. As Lazaridis and Tsagkroni (2016) stress, a blog managed by the Women's Front of the Golden Dawn, called 'Ideological library of women's front' (<http://ideology-studies.blogspot.gr/>), denounces openly feminism and gender equality and explains that in our world today the values of family and motherhood have been substituted by other values of a lower quality. In this post, among others, it is written: 'We believe that Motherhood is a holly task', '...the value of Greek woman as Mother, Partner and Co-fighter', '... it is the duty of any real Greek woman to bring up her children, according to the role model of brave warriors relying on the ancient values of Hellenism which will honour our Homeland'. On its official website, the party hosts regularly articles on the role of Greek women and their importance throughout Greek history, often referring to them as a Greek Nationalist Mother, Wife, Sister and above all co-fighter supporting the party's cause (GD 2016).

Similar to the Greek case, the Hungarian far right party Jobbik Movement for a Better Hungary, although defining men and women as being equal and supporting the right of women to work outside the household, underlines that the most important job for women is motherhood (Félix 2015:65). True

Finns in Finland also underline the role of the women in society and the importance of the family, supporting relevant policies e.g. family policies. Timo Soini in his speech in 2015 praised the importance of women's rights not only as 'a human rights issue but also as an obstacle to the social and economic development' and emphasised that mothers 'play an important role in preventing radicalisation'. Similar statements and articles can be retrieved in the party's archive on their official website.

Intersection of Race, Gender and Religion

In terms of religion in the Nordic and Western European countries e.g. France, UK and Austria, the parties of the far right do not engage with strong religious rhetoric. On the contrary, the focus is more on the cultural differences religion creates between Christian and Muslim faith, including the gender issue and the role of women. FPÖ for instance has created a rhetoric on migration that includes two major participants, Muslims and Christians / Foreigners and Austrians. According to the DF in Denmark, people should focus on educating themselves instead of praying and thinking about God; they nevertheless highlight that the culture and society is built on Christian values and everyone has to respect that and live accordingly (DF 2016). In other words, immigrants, and especially Muslims, who pose a threat to the western society need to respect the Western values of gender equality.

The intersection of religion and gender creates another antagonism, namely the issue of traditional gender roles in Muslim communities vs. gender equality. An argument often put forward by extreme right activists is: Muslims do not fit in 'our' European culture due to different values (e.g. gender equality, respect for LGBT rights), different habits and customs (food, Christian everyday rituals) and different appearance and behaviour, such as women's body covering. The EDL (English Defence League) draws attention to the denigration and oppression of women in Islam, along with 'the molestation of young children, the committing of so-called honour killings, homophobia and anti-Semitism' (EDL Mission Statement, 2015). Thus, the 'male domination' (Bourdieu 1997) in Islam is seen as a paradigmatic illustration of the violent social links associated to this religion; authoritarian, submissive, led by inequality.

Several studies scrutinize gender equality debates which emerged around veiling practices of Muslim women in European Countries (see for instance Rosenberger and Sauer 2012). Usually lead by far right parties and Christian conservatives, embracing a debate against the oppression of women and linking this to veiling practices (Hadj-Abdou, 2012; Scheibelhofer, 2012) that is against western European values, within the last decade, regulation measures were undertaken for Muslim women to abandon their veils in public e.g. France and Belgium (nationwide) and Italy, Russia, Bulgaria, Spain and Switzerland (locally). In Austria the FPÖ's anti-Muslim mobilisation since 2004 has a focus on

veiled Muslim women. They are presented as victims of their patriarchal family as well as perpetrators as they are seen as unwilling to integrate e.g. 'Free women instead of forced veiling... No accession of Turkey to the European Union; No space for fundamentalists; For free and self-determined women' (Freie Frauen statt Kopftuchzwang) (FPÖ 2005) which was one of the party's election slogans of 2005. What is important to highlight at this point is the structure of the argumentation of gender (in-equality) with references to the threat of islamisation and a growing concern to protect 'us' from 'them'. As Hadj-Abdou (2012) highlights, this could be undertaken as 'symbolic policy' approach, in which far right populist rhetoric use gender equality in the context of veiling practices to legitimize the claimed restrictions in regard to immigration.

Another example where the intersection of gender, race and religion creates antagonisms between 'us' and the 'others' is that of Finland. Islamophobia is often a key factor in the criticism of Islam with a common argumentation built on the inequality of women. As noted by Aitamurto and Puurunen (2013) the online discourse of anti-immigration focuses its criticism on this gender inequality and often includes texts, which are rife with misogynist undercurrents. In their work they underline that as the term 'flowerhats' reveal, the ones promoting multiculturalism are usually implicitly portrayed as women and therefore, it is not surprising that in one of his blogs Halla-aho wrote that he would prefer that the inevitable rape victims of migrants would rather be these 'green-leftist' women (ibid; Halla-aho 2006). In an anthology *Mitä Jussi Halla-aho tarkoittaa* (What Jussi Halla-aho means?, 2010),¹ Sakari J. Hankamäki links the alleged women's yearn for dominance to the Finnish migration politics arguing that as Finnish women blackmail benefits from men with sex, they aim to have more male migrants in Finland in order to have more leverage (Hankamäki 2010; Aitamurto and Puurunen 2013).

It is interesting that religion plays a smaller role in the writings of younger representatives of the FP. Even though they usually acknowledge Christianity and Lutheran Church as an important part of the Finnish tradition and identity, the freedom of religion seems to be equally important value for them² (Aitamurto and Puurunen 2013). As a part of the criticism of Islam they also argue that religion should be one's personal matter and that religion or people's religious feelings do not need any special protection in legislation (ibid).

Intersections of gender, family and sexual orientation

¹ The anthology as such contains several insightful articles by various scholars, politicians and social activists and actually the majority of the writers are criticizing rather harshly Halla-aho and other 'migration critics'.

² However, Halla-aho, who admits that he is not especially religious person, still accuses the Finnish Lutheran Church for being too liberal, because it does not 'hold on to its basic teachings' and explicitly state that Islam is heresy from the viewpoint of Christianity (Wiik 2013: 9).

Despite the issue on veiling practices of Muslim women discussed above, there is little literature on how far right populist parties and movements construct 'their others' on the basis of gender, family issues and sexual orientation. As part of this discourse foreign men are accused to harassing native girls and disrespecting the integrity of women. Hence, migrant men are perceived as aggressive perpetrators and a threat to our European girls and women. The official website of FPÖ hosts often posts reflecting the increasing of violence in relation to mass immigration emphasising that 'it is no wonder that our women and girls, victims of imported violence are defenceless in many areas of the city' (Strache 2016). Additionally, in 2016 the party launched a video alerting the asylum-seeking immigrants to 'keep your fingers off our women'. The video features Armin Sippl launching a guide to 'how to interact with our women' by shoving a blonde mannequin into view and underlining what is allowed and what is not. The video continues by showing Sippl using an airplane model to indicate that those who won't behave properly will be sent back home (Sippl 2016). The video flickered a series of negative comments but nevertheless the party supported the making of the video by emphasising its necessity.

Similarly, in Bulgaria, Ataka's 'othering' discourse includes apart from ethnic minority groups, homosexuals and women who fail to comply with the patriarchal matrix of the party's nationalism. Having said that, although in its official manifesto the party mentions the demographic crisis and the growing number of immigrants and high birth-rates of Muslims, it mainly focuses its rhetoric on nationalism and welfare chauvinism without references to women or gender issues (Ataka 2005). Having said that, numerous narrated cases have been reported in the party's website, figuring women as victims of immigrant attacks and therefore women and what they represent e.g. motherhood, family, patria need to be protected by the aggressive invaders, that is illegal, violent and criminal immigrants (Ataka 2014). The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance in its report on Bulgaria 2014 includes several incidents of harassment and violence against the Muslim community h e.g. among others hate speech 'against Muslim women with headscarves, painting the walls of religious schools and mosques with the slogans Death to the Turks and Bulgaria for the Bulgarians; desecrating and setting fire to mosques' (ECRI 2014).

Issues related to gender and sexuality have been constantly emerging in the public discourse of populist political parties and populist movements in Slovenia too. Heterosexuality is seen as a 'natural' extension of both genders and for that reason, heterosexuality is the only natural, normal and justifiable form of sexuality (Kuhar et al 2013). Other forms, primarily homosexuality, are at best tolerated (however, homosexuals should not have the same rights as they deviate from the natural norm), but are also persecuted – symbolically, culturally, politically and legally. In other words: the typical forms of populist discourse, springing from the patriarchal ideology, have been present in the

Slovenian public sphere in similar manners as elsewhere in Central-Eastern Europe (Kuhar et al 2013; Kuhar and Takacs, 2007; Kulpa and Mizielinska, 2011; Kuhar 2011). For Kuhar et al (2013) in the past twenty years there have been three important events related to sexism and homophobia which attracted a lot of public and media attention and were framed with populist discourse par excellence. Two of them ended up with a public referendum. These events are (1) an attempt to abolish the right to abortion (1991, briefly emerged again in 2006), (2) a successful attempt to prevent single women from artificial insemination (2001) and (3) a failed attempt to modernized the Family Code (2009 – 2012) in a way to extent the definition of the family to all forms of biological and social parenting and to put heterosexual and homosexual partnerships on equal legal footing (ibid).

Additionally, gender and the far right in Europe is, in many cases, linked to the rhetoric against LGBT rights or rights on reproduction and biotechnology and even education (sexual and equality) (Kováts and Põim 2015). In France for instance, for the FN, gender is not an issue on the party's agenda whilst it strongly opposes gay rights and same-sex partnerships as does NPD (National Democratic Party) in Germany. NPD additionally stands for well-being of pure German families, rejects migrant families and adoption rights for LGBT couples (see NPD 2015), opposes sexual education in schools and stands against gender equality; at the EU level they voted against the Tarabella report on progress on equality between women and men in the European Union³.

While examining the online discourse of the Front National, one can notice this pattern of rhetoric reflecting the opposition against gay marriage. A characteristic example is the letter from Marion Maréchal-Le Pen in 2013, deputy of Vaucluse at the time, to Jean-François Copé, president of UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) referring to the bill on adoption and gay marriage that was passed on 12th of April of the same year. While expressing her concerns, Le Pen emphasised that: 'this bill generates a true civilization of upheaval by disconnecting the filiation of the natural laws of biology, knowingly depriving an orphan of father and mother, making the love the sole criterion of marriage, opening the way, for the recognition tomorrow of other forms of unions required by other minorities' (Maréchal-le Pen 2012). The website also hosts opinions and statements from other political actors e.g. Alain Avello, Secretary General of the initiative of Collective Racine, criticising the idea of teaching 'gender theory' in schools, a decision that would affect children as early as kindergarten years, praising homosexuality or even transsexuality, of sex education up to encourage masturbation which would be provided towards younger children (Avello 2014). FPÖ's representative, Georg Mayer, also in reference to education and gender, in an article posted on the party's official website commented on the report on empowering girls through education in the European Union of the Socialist deputy Liliana Rodrigues from the Committee on Women and Gender Equality Rights; he argued that this 'is considering to be a massive intervention in the national education system and the

³ See European Parliament Report in <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A8-2015-0015+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>, last accessed April 2, 2016.

curriculum design and regulation of education in families’ and continued by criticising the exposure of primary school children with sensitive issues such as sexuality in general, and manipulation with a variety transgender and intersex ideologies’ (Mayer 2015).

In Germany, the youth organisation of NPD launched a campaign in 2013 of ‘Condoms for foreigners and selected Germans’ followed by a delivery of contraception to particular postal addresses (Blum 2015). As Blum (2015) emphasises, NPD is a party known for its homophobic and xenophobic rhetoric, supporting the concept of ‘racial purity’ and therefore rejecting mix-racial and same-sex families (see also NPD 2013).

Role of the family

‘Family’ has a major significance in the programmes of far right parties and women are referred to this as belonging to the family, nevertheless, without strong explicit references. In Austria both, the FPÖ and the BZÖ further perceive ‘the family’ as a ‘core unit’ for the reproduction of society (BZÖ 2010:10) – a concept derived from National Socialism, which represents an exclusive understanding of what constitutes family (Sauer and Ajanović 2013). FPÖ’s strong support for the value of the family, is often expressed in various articles hosted in the party’s official website e.g. statements on supporting policies aiming at reducing poverty in families (Kassegger 2015). At the same time, the party underlines that in terms of family issues the changing gender relations is a main problem of our society. In Italy, AN’s ([Alleanza Nazionale](#)) political programme put emphasis on traditional values of family and the sovereign territorial integrity of the nation (Gregor, 2006:66). The party’s rhetoric revolves around the central role of the family as the basic social unit, within the framework of Catholic morality and proposes anti-abortion policies combined with programmes to support families in need and incentives for families that care for elderly and disabled members (AN 1995, Tsagkroni 2015).

The family is seen as the main agency responsible for the transmission of moral values and civil rights, and as representing the future of the country. Similarly, PdL (*Il Popolo della Libertà*) explained that the policies such as those covering tax rules for pension funds, nursery provision, employment contracts etc., will be approached in such a way as to prioritise support for the family and the children who are the future - the face of solidarity, security and hope (PdL 2014). For far right populists the family would include a man, a woman (and their children), an understanding of family which neither allows same-sex marriage nor the right of same-sex couples to adopt children. In contrast and as mentioned before, the FPÖ portrays itself as the guardian of ‘real values’ which need to be protected from ‘Islamic values’ – a culture which is perceived by them to welcome ‘oppression of women and homosexual people’ (FPÖ 2008:22). Hence, this example further evidences their highly

contradictory approaches by which on the one hand they (ab)use the call for ‘European values’ – in the context of gender equality and sexual orientation – to claim restrictive immigration measures and on the other hand by discriminating against same-sex families – they themselves constructing ‘others’ on grounds of sexual orientation (Sauer and Ajanović 2013).

As seen above, women are perceived as mothers, playing an important role in reproducing the nation and therefore many far right parties support and encourage women to have more children in order to protect the country and the culture against the threat of the increasing number of Muslim population. In this context, although abortion is not a key argument in such parties, rhetoric against abortion can be traced in their discourse. For example, while most of the French far right looks now on catholic models of family and socialization, Marine Le Pen tried to bring innovations claiming her support for abortion on demand till the 22 week of pregnancy. In Italy on the other hand, the FN (Fronte Nazionale) programme, a party that is coherent with Catholicism, strongly opposes abortion that is defined as ‘a mass extermination that has cost millions of innocent lives to the Italian people’. Additionally, abortion is also described as a ‘holocaust’: ‘A Holocaust called ‘ABORTION’. More than a billion of innocent victims in the last hundred years in Europe, more than all the wars fought in the last century, this is called the abortion holocaust! As justification of this, many lies: self-determination of women, individual freedom, ideological pluralism, but do we speak of a Human life or do we talk about an object?’ (Forza Nuova San Nicola 2009). The use of the term ‘holocaust’ in this context has a precise function: defining abortion as ‘the greatest holocaust of the twentieth century’ or even ‘the only holocaust of the twentieth century’, implicitly supports the idea that other Holocausts either never happened or were certainly minor (Campani 2013).

Concluding Remarks

Since the beginning of 20th century the western societies have experienced a variety of transformations regarding gender, gender from the women’s liberation movement to the evolving interest for research in gender studies, the women’s representation and the discourse on gender equality (Rashkova and Zankina 2015). Meantime, since the 1980s there is a growing success of far right parties and movements across Europe, that created various studies on this phenomenon (see Mudde 2007; Betz 1998; Hainsworth 2008; Eatwell 2000; Rydgren 2005). Having said that, there is still limited research regarding how far right parties deal with gender equality in their discourse.

Unambiguously, far right parties across Europe, have established themselves as primarily opposing multi-culturalism and being in favour of welfare chauvinism aiming to protect the national culture and heritage against the threat of the ‘other’ and of Islamisation. On the issue of gender equality, the rhetoric of far right parties is rather limited and the majority of online discourse focuses on

newsfeeds reporting violent acts against women from migrant men, praise of the woman and the importance of motherhood as the centre of the family or anti-homosexual and religious speech following the western Christian tradition. As Akkerman and Hagelund (2007) note, regarding cultural diversity, immigration and citizenship policies in Norway and Netherlands, issues such as gender equality and women's role provide an alternative understanding of the boundaries of cultural diversity in relation to multiculturalism e.g. the example of the regulations of banning the Muslim headscarf where a confrontational scheme of violation of gender equality is being used. More specifically, the comparative research of RAGE project showed that the threat of Islam and the Muslim minority is reflected by sub-frames emphasising the role of Islam against Western liberal democratic values and principles such as freedom of speech, gender equality, freedom of sexual orientation, tolerance towards other religious beliefs and the like. The same main frame also refers to cultural and value differences between Islam and the West, which are considered unbridgeable and endangering the social cohesion and solidarity that hold European societies together.

While gender in relation to Islam and Muslim minority is a common approach by the majority of the far right parties, different patterns of discourse can be identified separating them in two major groups: generous welfare state support models e.g. Nordic countries with social democratic welfare models with generous and highly redistributive benefits which until recently did not depend on any individual contributions, and where the level of decommodification has been high, and more extreme and conservative models e.g. Greece characterised by lack of a right to welfare and a strong breadwinner model of welfare or Bulgaria who leaped from full employment, heavily subsidised foods and rents, relatively high wages of workers and the provision of free or cheap health, education and cultural services, to lack of a right to welfare (Esping-Andersen 1990; Deacon 2000; Ferrera 1996; Katrougalos and Lazaridis 2003). In the first case the argumentation of the discourse would include gender equality claims, whereas in the second and third cases woman would not be examined individually but rather as the centre of the family and motherhood as the means to protect the national identity of the country. For instance, Siim et al (2013), regarding the Danish case and the Danish People's Party, note that the party's self-representation is structured on democratic and liberal values e.g. freedom of speech, gender equality and individual freedom, principle long connected with the Nordic societies whereas in Golden Dawn's case motherhood is highly applauded along with specifically structured gender roles in family and society followed by a denial on gender equality (Lazaridis and Tsagkroni 2016). While examining in more depth these two approaches, a controversy arises: on the one hand, there is a support of gender issues, with far right discourse supporting the rights of 'Muslim women' who are victimised by 'Islam' and on the other hand there is a discourse that presents women's principal role as mothers and protectors of the heterosexual

family, values implying that women are undermined in comparison to men. When it comes to LGBT rights regarding same-sex marriage and adoption by same-sex couples, the majority of far right parties are strongly opposed something that provides a further explanation of why the discourse of gender and family is weakened as important topics in the parties' debates.

For Sauer and Pajnik (2014) the critical frame analysis of populism online places 'gender' as a minor frame in the far right parties' rhetoric studied in the RAGE project, with only three case distinguishingly engaging with the issue: Italy, Denmark and Greece. As seen above, in Italy 'gender' is linked to the debate against abortion, in Denmark it is the 'feminist elite' which is perceived as not representing the 'real women's struggles' and their 'false' gender equality claim is further seen as a threat (to men) and finally Greece where gender equality is perceived as a threat to the heterosexual family (Sauer and Pajnik 2014) and hence to 'national identity and sovereignty of the country', which is similar in Bulgaria.

Looking back to the model of secularisation and the argument that western societies and the values they represent e.g. democratic rights, freedom of speech and gender equality are threatened by Islam and the increasing Muslim population, the discourse of far right parties focuses on how to protect 'us' from 'them' and 'our' values from the threat they pose to 'us'. In this case, the West represents progressive values in contrast to Islam that represents the backward. Nevertheless, as commented above, this approach is rather contradicting with the results of the discourse on issues of gender equality and LGBT rights of far right parties e.g. their homophobic and sexist discourse.

To sum up, the main frame of gender, including gender equality and women's rights vary from opposing feminist ideas and protection of the Christian morals and values to the protection of the Muslim women rights which are being victimised by the discriminating Islam. Moreover, the construction of 'us' as an identity stands against the 'other' that can be an internal enemy e.g. feminists or homosexuals or an external enemy e.g. Muslim immigrants who are perceived as internal enemies whose 'deviant' lifestyle is viewed as threatening the national order. Henceforth, 'us' represents the national element, the values and cultural heritage of a country in relation the 'other' external enemy whereas 'other' on internal grounds could be interpreted as 'us' against the 'established political elite other' or even in relation to the political sphere. Therefore, the debate on gender equality in the far right populist rhetoric is vastly controversial as on the one hand feminist or the call for gender equality are perceived as a threat (to men, 'good morals', the family etc.) while on the other hand gender equality is demanded for the 'Muslim women' who are constructed as victims of 'the Islam'. In other words, gender equality is something the far right populist discourses only demand in reference to the constructed 'other' while in reference to the 'we' group it perceives it to already be achieved or already 'too much'. Certainly, references to gender issues are an instrument used for the construction of 'the (Muslim) other'.

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