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## **After resistance: Lessons learned from banning gender studies in Hungary**

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In October 2018, the Hungarian government's decree revoked license of a two-year study program in gender studies without giving any explanation and without having consulted with professional institutions nor the accreditation committee (Pető, 2018a). There were two universities in Hungary where this accredited Master's program was taught: at Central European University (CEU), a private university in English that receives no public funding since 2006, and at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE), a public university in Hungarian with public funding from 2017 (Pető, 2018b). The Hungarian government crossed the line when intervening in the field of education with an ideological agenda and its action evoked bad memories of communist censorship.

Gender recently became the centre of political debates. To explain how that happened, based on our analyses of situations in Poland and Hungary, together with Eszter Kovats and Weronika Grzebalska we came up with the concept of "gender as symbolic glue". Symbolic glue is a metaphor that is somehow able to tap into people's feelings of uncertainty about the world around them and direct them against equality issues. It also generates dynamic discussions. Gender works as a symbolic glue in different ways. First, the notion of gender is constructed in such a way that it becomes perceived as a threatening concept. The right has united separate contested issues and attributed them to the umbrella term of "the progressive agenda". And then there is the concept of "gender ideology", which is constructed by those who consider gender as a concept to demonstrate the failure of liberal democracy. The opposition to this so-called "gender ideology" has become a means of rejecting certain facets of the current social and economic order, from the prioritisation of identity politics over material issues such as labour conditions or housing to the weakening of people's social, cultural and political security. Secondly, the demonization of "gender ideology" has become a key rhetorical tool in the construction of a new concept of common sense for a wide audience, a form of consensus of what is normal and legitimate. It

is important to note that this social mobilisation against “gender ideology” and political correctness does not just demonise the worldview of liberal democracy and reject the human rights’ paradigm which has long been the object of relative consensus in Europe and North America. But the anti-equality movements also offer a livable, viable alternative centered on the family, the nation and religious values, as well as freedom of speech. This alternative to the neoliberal progressive narrative is widely attractive because it offers a positive identification of individual’s own choices, and it promises a safe and secure community as a remedy for individualism and social atomisation. Thirdly, the opposition to “gender ideology” is also a possibility for the right to create a broad alliance and unite various actors that have not necessarily been eager to cooperate in the past. That is why fighting against those forces who use the concept of gender and equality to mobilize hate and exclusion is an imperative not only for gender studies scholars independently. It is also an imperative to admit that we have lost a battle in this war. “Gender as symbolic glue” has an impact on those who have been attacked and it creates very clear fronts gluing together those who are victims of these vicious attacks, they stick together in collective resistance.

I am, nevertheless, optimistic because I believe that the lessons learned during the past years living, working and teaching in illiberal Hungary will help the fight for academic freedom. Previously scholars of gender studies were marginalised, even spatially: working in their offices in the attic or in the cellar of the university building. Now due to the anti-gender studies campaign, Hungary, a country of ten million inhabitants, became a country of ten million gender experts! Everybody seems to have an opinion about the course curricula and reading lists, learning outcomes or the labor market opportunities of gender studies’ graduates.

The first lesson learned in this struggle was the importance of networks, international contacts and press relations. Responding to media inquiries, prioritizing media outlets, explaining the complex situation for often unprepared and overworked journalists required time and special media skills we had to acquire. The second lesson was the understanding of the surprising weakness of European feminist

infrastructure. It was not major organizations, such as AtGender (European Association for Gender Research, Education, and Documentation) that collected signatures in support of gender studies programs in Hungary. It was a dedicated and politically savvy scholar, David Paternotte, who collected more than a hundred signatures from Masters' programs in gender studies across European Union. The European professional organisation of gender studies scholars and professionals, AtGender works well in "normal" times as it became just another fee paying professional organisation, which is organising academic conferences. But gender studies have never been and will not be just another profession especially not now. Therefore, AtGender failed to serve as a major lobbying and interest protecting tool during major crises partly because it defined its role in academic setting when academia is losing its lobbying power more and more. The quick and effective support came from established professional networks and institutionalized organizations; from feminist sociologists, historians, political scientists who quickly wrote protest letters (and organized letters sent by their universities) and signed petitions despite their own workload. And that is another lesson learned; that writing letters and signing manifestos is not enough. European professional organizations like European University Association and All European Academies issued statements calling for protection of academic freedom and gender studies but they all received the same standardized general answer from the Hungarian government. The protest and support letters are evidence that there are scholars and institutions that are resisting and despising the politics of the Hungarian government and its attack on gender studies but in practice their protest had little impact. The EU Commissioner whose portfolio is to protect academic freedom and European values ignored the event referring to education as national competency. (It is not an accident that this Commissioner, Tibor Navrasics who was appointed by FIDESZ party previously played an active role building up the present 'System of National Cooperation' (NER) of Hungary). Education is a national competency in Europe therefore the national governments can regulate it as they wish. When the nation state is captured by a small group then it can do whatever its members want regarding regulating education.

During the debate around gender studies it became obvious that feminist academics trained to describe and define social and political contexts, may be missing some essential political skills: how to think and achieve what can be and not only write peer reviewed articles about theories of resistance. The lack of political imagination beyond the feeling of upset and protest needs to be critically examined in the future. Constant reflection, deconstruction and analysis of what has happened and why cannot substitute effective strategizing about the future.

The ban galvanized students and young people to take action. Gender studies scholarship is not dead in Hungary. An increasing number of applications for the CEU Gender Studies Program, now moved to Vienna, Austria, demonstrates that gender studies are considered a “cool” discipline. We have lost the accredited program in Hungary but our gender studies community is facing this failure with dignity and united. The same courses are being offered in Hungarian at ELTE but they do not count towards a degree in gender studies. CEU continues to offer MA program in gender studies accredited by the State of New York. For the academic year of 2019-2020 more applications were submitted to CEU Gender Studies than ever before, unfortunately the students start their study program in Vienna as the Hungarian government does not accept the US accreditation.

The recent strike on 18th November 2018 at the universities of ELTE, Corvinus and CEU proved that gender is more relevant than ever. During this protest, professors of these three universities in Budapest discussed issues that previously were mostly ignored, such as incorporation of gendered perspectives in the curricula of various university courses, referencing female authors and promoting their work. What is this if not gender mainstreaming in the best sense of the word? These issues would not have been brought up had the government not banned a discipline of gender studies. The ban was a wake-up call for all of us to save not only the discipline but to fight for free academic research as such.

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Engenderings. Blog by LSE Gender Studies features several case studies as well as theoretical insights <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/>.

## **Genealogies of an Indigenous librarian: How nêhiyaw (cree) kinship laws might structure reciprocity in teaching research**

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When Indigenous researchers state their tribal affiliation, they are performing a rhetorical act of accountability. When I say that I am a Cree and Métis researcher and librarian, it’s not a fun fact about my genetic makeup; it’s not percentage-based identity or blood quantum politics. Researchers in Indigenous Studies, when they state their affiliation, are letting their audience know who they are responsible for and accountable to. This statement marks the communities that make this research possible.