

Political Struggles around »Gender«: Decentering Queer Feminism (?)

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ABSTRACT: *This article focuses on the recent struggles around the concept of »gender« in the context of the anti-gender(ism) propaganda of the incumbent Hungarian right-wing populist regime since the year 2010. The government's »war on gender« is discussed through the analysis of three legislative acts passed under the precarious conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim in their analysis is, on the one hand, to illuminate how a certain radical feminist discourse that self-identifies as a »gender critical« position has emerged, one simultaneously finding itself caught up in the official routine intimation of hate speech. On the other, it is to forge an intersectional position that may speak across this harmful internal division by shifting the critical gaze onto the shared enemy of hegemonic masculinity and to propose a trust-based queer solidarity.*

KEYWORDS: *Hungary, genderism, right-wing populism, hegemonic masculinity, queering solidarity*

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The past 13 years of rule by the current Hungarian regime can be seen as the normalization of hate speech, with the escalation of government attacks on the analytical category of »gender« in feminist scholarship and movements. The official stigmatization of the category as »dangerous ideology«—one that should, in consequence, be seen as a legitimate target of attack, as should anything that can be explicitly or indirectly associated with it too—has also invited feminist scholars and activists to understand the reasons for the success of this official propaganda. Part of this self-criticism has entailed an act of disidentification with queer scholarship for its alleged depoliticization of feminism and discrediting of the category of »gender.«

The current article is a critical study of the order of discourses of gender, exploring the relative but relevant differences within the advocated perspectives and their potential to serve the ideological purposes of labeling—regardless of the actual prodemocratic or illiberal declarations of the participants in the debate. The aim here is to point out the ways in which the self-critical feminist discourse has become caught up within the official rhetoric of fear. The focus is on how much the logic informing the »gender critical« argumentation has reiterated official hate speech instead of producing a space for its effective feminist

critiquing. I analyze and depict how the category of »gender« functions as the link helping articulate the misogynistic, homophobic, and transphobic ideologies forming part of a systemic attack by the Hungarian government, as seen specifically in three legislative acts passed under the pretext of COVID-19 emergency governance in the course of the past two and a half years.

More importantly, I trace gender's reiteration in the feminist discrediting of queer approaches and contend that it is indispensable for us, as feminists, if we are to assume a sufficiently different logic that intimates trust instead of hate. The possibility of such a shift is argued to depend on taking an intersectional approach to multiplicity, one that entails categorization practices drawing on making relative distinctions. The either/or principle informing absolute distinctions inevitably sees (sexual or gender) differences as absolute, with the critical feminist discourses of binaries (structural criticism against and over identity critique) playing into the hands of government propaganda—regardless of participants' actual intentions.

Official Anti-Gender Propaganda: Its Rhetoric and the Legislative Decisions Taken during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The concept of »gender« has become a heavily contested site of political investment by the current Hungarian right-wing populist regime during their three consecutive periods of rule over the past 13 years. In the three four-year periods of a FIDESZ-Christian Democratic Party coalition since 2010, »gender« has been fiercely disowned, while producing a right-wing populist anti-gender discourse of hate (Barát 2021a). The concept of »gender ideology« at the center of that discourse has rendered the analytical category of »feminist critique« virtually antithetical to its function, undermining the feminist politics of empowerment. Being labeled as an ideology takes place through the routine intimation of hate in government propaganda on two intertwined grounds. First, »gender« is invoked only to be relegated to the past through its connotation of »communism« in post-Soviet Hungary and, second, it is associated with »liberalism«—as attributed to a »hostile« European Union, the trope of the ultimate enemy of the Fidesz regime's ideal of »illiberal democracy« (Tóka 2014).

The association with communism goes back to the 1990s, when the right-wing opposition mostly outside parliament tried to discredit the newly emerging feminist voices in the print media (Barát 2005). Since the 2010s, meanwhile, such discrediting has reemerged, but now as locating the »ideology« in the EU's liberal values, and as arising explicitly from within government rhetoric. It conflates all forms of feminist thinking and their conceptualizations of »gender,« »queer feminism,« »trans-feminism,« »liberal feminism,« and »radical feminism,« accusing any feminist agenda of striving to gain power with the ultimate aim of undermining what government propaganda defines as the »Christian values« of the family—therewith, too, upholding a traditional femininity of reproductivity.

In this hate rhetoric, importantly, »feminism« is not even mentioned; rather it is substituted by »genderism.« Unlike in the 1990s when »feminism« surfaced in the wake of system change as the focal point of discussions, it is now actively silenced and disarticulated in official government propaganda against »gender«—as mediated through the affect of hate speech. This shift from »feminism« to »genderism« has resulted in the articulation of »gender« as now the »weapon of the LGBTQ lobby« in government propaganda and legislation, precluding the possibility to see sexuality and gender in an intertwined relationship of rel-

ative difference. This also serves to discredit critiques of the regime's misogyny and trans-/homophobia when using »gender« as the category of analysis here. More painfully, the government attacks have also resulted in the antagonizing of »progressive« feminism and queer feminism around the figure of the trans woman and LGBTQ activism—leaving trans feminism to still be accommodated, and accusing trans politics of entrenching neoliberal capitalism and women's rights (Barát 2021b).

An ubiquitous discourse of hate has seen the current regime's propaganda stigmatize a number of analytical categories since 2010, when the Fidesz-Christian Democrat coalition under the leadership of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán first came to power, gaining and maintaining a super majority in parliament, as noted, three times to date. One of the key categories discredited through the discourse strategy of stigmatization occurring during the formation and normalization of such (radical) right-wing political communication is »gender.« The stigmatization of the latter, specifically under the pejorative terms »gender ideology« or »genderism,« was forcefully brought to the fore in the context of banning the MA in Gender Studies in 2018.¹ The government's arguments were articulated explicitly only in response to a written question submitted by an independent member of parliament, who had addressed it to the secretary of state—the minister responsible for higher education and research—after the public announcement of this degree program.²

The four points made in the state secretary's reply, which have been widely recycled in the public discourse ever since, questioned the viability and academic status of the degree (Barát 2019). The alleged concerns about »viability« appeal to notions of »utility,« refusing to allegedly waste the national budget and the university's human resources in the name of the degree's unsustainability. The fact that the fee-paying option was banned at the same time exposes the ideological motivation behind the claim about the alleged low numbers of admissions to the degree program—a number that is defined in each program by the Ministry of Human Resources anyway. The concerns about status, on the other hand, argued that the degree does not constitute an academic discipline but an ideology like Marxism-Leninism and is therefore inappropriate for university education. Further, it was posited that the degree program's curriculum stands in contradiction to the government's concept of »human nature« (Barát 2019, 136). The so-called human nature evoked in the secretary of state's answer draws on an essentialist understanding of gender reduced to a biological binary of sexual difference. The coextensive relationship between sex(uality) and gender makes the latter a tautological repetition and unnecessary category at best. Or, if used against this »obvious« logic, »gender« is deemed a »secret hideous« code of nonnormative sexuality attributed to a so-called LGBTQ conspiracy at worst.

I see the banning of the degree as the articulation of a »war on gender« situated within the Orbán regime's broader »cultural war« that has been expanding further and further over the course of the past 13 years (Ágh 2016). This »cultural war« was officially announced by that name, and positioned as the focus of the regime's activities going forward, shortly after their third victory at the ballot box in 2018. This happened specifically at the summer university in Tusványos, Romania, that Fidesz has traditionally organized for the Hungarian minority youth since July 1990: »We need a new intellectual and cultural approach. Undoubtedly, we shall see great changes as of September.«³ The MA degree was its very first target. This strategic cultural war—aiming to replace the Hungarian cultural and academic elite and restructure their institutions with ones loyal to the regime—has rendered »gender« an empty signifier (Laclau 1996, 36 – 46) at the intersection of four narratives, with a particular figure targeted at the center of each (Barát 2020).

The four narratives were first epitomized in the discourses around the banning of the MA degree, then reiterated in the three laws passed over the past two and a half years of the COVID-19 pandemic. The stigmatization of »gender« as the »hideous weapon of LGBTQ lobbyists« is indirectly articulated out of the meanings of the four identity categories these narratives mobilize. »Nonproductive, parasite intellectuals,« »Brussels-affiliated liberals,« and »Islamic male migrant terrorists« are all accused of threatening the »traditional Christian Hungarian nation«—both from »within« and from »outside«—by way of the alleged »financial and ideological support« of a »Soros plan« (see below)—this fourth narrative evoking the trope of the »hideous Jew« (Barát 2021b). The success of the stigmatization of »gender« hinges on its capacity to evoke the four, often contradictory tropes rendered in a chain of equivalences (Laclau/Mouffe 1985). As a result, each trope may emerge as a constitutive element of the meaning of the other three without their explicit mention, thereby effectively legitimizing and reinforcing the forceful rhetoric of hate. The most concerning effect of such rhetoric is the intensified normalization of a commonsense belief that the only »natural« response to (sexual or gender) difference is hate, routinely inviting the citizenry »to courageously wage a war against this alien enemy.«⁴

The logic that scapegoats any scholarly dissent criticizing the misogynistic gender politics of the Hungarian regime works as follows. The anti-intellectual revoking of the MA in Gender Studies as a »nonscientific and nonproductive« activity is intertwined with the discourse of anti-Semitism, through the original, fated location of the degree in question at the Central European University (CEU)—the target of an earlier legislative act. The amendment to the Higher Education Law in April 2017 changed retroactively the conditions for establishing foreign-university branches in the country.⁵ The government's hostile move was indirectly legitimized by a covert appeal to anti-Semitism through calling the institution »Soros University«—thereby scapegoating George Soros, the founder of CEU in 1991, who is of Hungarian Jewish descent. The anti-Semitism behind the Soros trope had already been established in the government's anti-migrant billboard campaign in 2015, establishing the notion of a »sexually violent male Islamist terrorist« sponsored and imposed on »us« by »Soros.« The country was flooded with blown-up photos of him maliciously grinning and staring down at »us« (Barát 2017).

Such a stigma has been ready ever since to be mobilized against anything attached to that name, as a way of »proving« the hostility of the targeted events and groups that are undermining »us«—by implication—, the Christian Hungarian nation. Furthermore, the liberal values associated with the »Soros« figure now embody all political ones seen to be in the way of the regime's so-called illiberal democracy, entailing in its foreign policy an opening to »the East.«⁶ Consequently gender, LGBTQ equality, as well as the recognition of refugees' right to seek asylum have come to be categorized as »liberal values,« ones argued to have been imposed on »us« by »Brussels« (»the West«)—only to undermine »our political and cultural sovereignty« through their attacks on »Christian values,« and as allegedly »financed,« as noted earlier, per a »Soros plan.«

The COVID-19 pandemic playing out since February 2020 would emerge within this established order of discourse. The pandemic has been used by the government as an opportunity to introduce a system of rule by decree that is not limited either in time or scope. Rather, it gives Orbán and his government the right to suspend the enforcement of certain laws as well as to introduce new ones under the pretext of a state of emergency. This centralized ruling would be then legitimized by the »moral mission of the state,« which allowed the government to successfully wield the power of stigmatizing »gender« in support of their most recent legislative measures against women and LGBTQ people. I argue that

the targeting of these two groups is not coincidental but rather an inevitable consequence of the foundationalist biological view of sex(uality) established by the »gender ideology« discourse.

The heightened legislative activity seen under the pretext of the pandemic saw three acts be passed: one introducing »sex at birth,« as the Hungarian government's very first pandemic emergency measure in March 2020; the parliament majority's »declaration« refusing the ratification of the *Istanbul Convention* in June 2020; and, the legislation on »pedophilia« in June 2021 in the alleged interest of child protection, which in fact criminalizes the public visibility of LGBTQ people in sex education unless parents agree on their inclusion in the curriculum, in television programs broadcast before 10pm, and in bookstores selling young adult literature representing relationships other than heterosexual ones unless they display a warning on the cover of the book in question. All three bills were submitted by the Christian Democrats, the minority party in the Fidesz-led coalition.

The deputy prime minister, who is also the leader of the Christian Democrats, submitted the following »resolution« to MPs. It was approved within 24 hours, with the coalition abusing its holding of a two-thirds parliamentary majority here. Ironically, the *Istanbul Convention* was signed by the same government back in 2014. Yet, in the meantime, in line with their misogynistic gender politics and homo- and transphobic sexual politics, the refusal to now ratify it singled out two reasons for that decision. Namely, the very concept of »gender« and the critical approach it entails as well as the ensuing arrival of further »migrants« in the country respectively:

We do not support the ratification of the *Istanbul Convention*, on the one hand, because it prescribes an approach based on the concept of »gender« when ratifying it and parliament does not wish to integrate into our national legislation either that concept or the gender perspective of the *Convention*. On the other, we also do not support ratification because the granting of refugee status on the grounds of gender[-based discrimination] is in contradiction with the political objectives formulated in the 36/2015 (September 22) Parliamentary Decision and the Hungarian legal context granting effective measures against illegal migration.⁷

The seemingly odd intersection of the anti-gender discourse and the Islamophobic anti-migrant one in the legislators' rationale is mobilized indirectly through invoking the very first legislative measure passed during the COVID-19 rule-by-decree period some three months before—which introduced, as noted, the concept of »sex at birth.« The latter, although never explicitly acknowledged in the official rationale given for the decree's passing, was in fact a response to the Constitutional Court of Hungary's decision in 2018 instructing parliament to rectify this gap in Hungary's legislation. That gap was exposed by a case concerning the issuing of an identity card to an Iranian refugee trans man, who successfully applied for refugee status in December 2015. He was granted that status on the grounds that he had been persecuted in Iran due to his (trans)gender identity.

Yet, the Hungarian authorities had refused to issue an identity card with the indication of his sex as »male« because in their understanding they lacked the jurisdiction to issue a new birth certificate to a non-Hungarian citizen. The Constitutional Court of Hungary argued that the right to change one's name follows from the Hungarian foundation law's defense of the inviolability of human identity and human dignity. Outrageously, the legislator decided to attend to the gap instead by introducing the »sex at birth« paragraph to »Act I of 2000 on the Registration of Citizens' Personal Data and Address,« which in fact now takes

away the rectifiability of the family register with respect to one's sex at birth from all citizens instead of bringing asylum seekers under the scope of Hungarian law too (Barát 2021a).

Given these changes, it is not surprising that the third decree of June 2021—which was in fact a set of legislative proposals—emerged as the explicit stigmatization of nonheterosexuality in the name of »defending our children« from »their propaganda.« It was submitted to parliament as a way to amend several existing pieces of legislation: the »Child Protection Act,« »Family Protection Act,« »Act on Business Advertising Activity,« »Media Act,« and the »Public Education Act.« All changes were passed, conflating nonheterosexuality with pedophilia and criminalizing the public visibility of nonheterosexuality as a form of illegal propaganda, trying to force members of the LGBTQI community to hide their sexuality around children. The government refutes all criticism of its decisions taken here by arguing that adult beings can »enjoy the freedom of intimacy,« therein drawing on the assumption that sexuality should start abruptly only at the age of 18.⁸

Gender-Critical Feminist Discourses in the Face of Government Propaganda

The most vocal feminist scholarly and activist response to the order of discourses regarding »gender ideology« has been to argue for the primacy of critiquing unequal relations within the political economy. In these individuals' understanding, this also requires the redefinition of »gender,« moving away here from any implications of »transgender.« Their effort to produce the »proper definition of gender« both within feminism and outside, for the unknowing public, is motivated by the hope that they can then successfully explain that the stigmatization of the concept in government propaganda is wrong for reasons of ideology—namely for the incumbent regime to be able to undermine feminism by conflating its gender politics with transgender activism.

In my reading, the »gender critical« discourse voiced by women who self-identify as »progressives« not only, ironically enough, reduces the complexity of the sociocultural moment of right-wing populism to the question of the »correct meaning« of »gender.« The proposed alternative gets caught up, further, in an essentializing logic of biologization, which rests on a referential binary relationship between reality and language (Barát 2021b). Such a move has nothing to say about the actual institutional conditions of the systemic discrediting of the concept under the 13 years of the contemporary regime. This is a paradoxical moment of critique, in that such »gender critical« efforts are voiced as if an inevitable either/or choice—one that is simply a matter of willpower.

For successful feminist mobilization, goes their counterargument, we need to turn to the structural conditions of women's inequality under capitalism instead of certain »identity politics of recognition only.« That is, while accusing trans activism of undermining the feminist agenda by misappropriating the term »gender« to mean »gender identity only,« the progressive position vindicates the very power of the word. However, that stance—reducing trans discrimination to a matter of purely consequential acts of signifying, and as such »only« a form of cultural injustice (if at all)—has partly played into the hands of the government's »anti-gender« propaganda. The progressive logic entails exploiting class inequality to advance transphobic discourses in defense of their understanding of »real« feminism and the »appropriate« category of gender. As a result, both the government and the progressive feminist positions have become entangled in the ideal of a traditional femininity of reproductivity that hinges on the resurgence of thoroughly biological sexual difference. This is, in fact, a regressive political stance, one leaving hardly any room for challenging

the foundationalist government notion of men's and women's fundamental difference, and thus eroticizing gender relations of unequal power.⁹

My point is not about disavowing the contradictory nature of any position or the possibility of escaping altogether the dominant discourse. It is, rather, about the dangerous political consequences of the entanglement of the progressive feminist discourse with government propaganda—what can be called the »spectatorial sports of self-destruction among harmed collectives [this time, that of the different feminist approaches] in the public sphere while reiterating the complex order of hegemonic entitlements [of heteropatriarchy]« (Berlant 1996, 243). This conveniently diverts the critical gaze away from the ultimate beneficiary of gender- and sexuality-related entitlements and privileges: hegemonic masculinity. Consequently, in a situation where »gender«—our key concept to expose heteropatriarchy—has become the site of merciless contestation, focus should turn instead to hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005, 2014) as the bearer of agency. Instead of fighting each other, then, we should do battle rather with hegemonic masculinity and explore how it responds to losing its anchoring ground of a fear of femininity, which it hopes to put back in her place—namely that of procreation.

In building solidarity, our job does not—at least initially—consist of pursuing reasoning that exposes the contradictions in the misogynistic and transphobic logics of authoritarian power. As argued earlier, the very objective of government propaganda is to build and mobilize the empty signifier of the »enemy« at the intersection of multiple, contradictory discourses. That is, it thrives on contradictions. They are integral to the formation of the affect of fear, shoring up nationalism, misogyny, xenophobia, anti-Islamism, and transphobia for mobilizing the citizenry under the »guidance« of the intensified rhetoric of hate in defense of some kind of ethnonationalist understanding of »we the people.« The anti-gender discourse enunciated from a position of authoritarian power by an ever-radicalizing right-wing populism can only be toppled if we seek and build alliances across differences and mobilize through a different affect: in short, that of trust.

However, the appeal to a »gender critical« stance in feminism is an act of accentuating our differences in the name of an »authentic« definition of »gender« while trying to secure one's own disciplinary boundaries. Essentializing difference is the strategy of hate employed within government propaganda, an effective means of othering anyone who is not exactly like us. This cannot be considered a fruitful countermove in the face of the enormous sense of precarity delivered to us on a daily basis by the regime. Rather, we should build a coalition for transformative action and move toward a solidarity that intimates the aforementioned affect of trust. Acknowledging the importance of trust-based solidarity will not preclude difference in promising a certain »sameness«: establishing a space for trusting the other / others is not only oriented to the act of agreeing but to disagreement as well, therewith accepting discomfort as a productive place to start from. I think such a dialectic understanding of »trust« can bring about a politically effective contingent feminist solidarity, one that cuts across the current divisive boundaries between feminist and trans positions.

As long as we understand that masculinity for its hegemonic hold today turns on its cis-ness, as is the case in the introduction of »sex at birth« to the Hungarian legislation on citizens' registration, we can open up space for working out a coalition. Such a moment may create the possibility for debate, which is not only pleasurable but necessarily painful—while ultimately also productive. This would help move the struggle beyond its anchoring in a thoroughly biological »sex,« as yielding unearned privileges. This is not to say that where the respective discourses of the Hungarian government and »gender critical« progressives find alignment is necessarily programmatic on the part of the latter; yet, even

if coincidental, it is still very harmful. The latter reality lies in the impossibility of substantiating the important claim that a woman's body should not be available as a commodity to be bought by photographers or media, nor should it be owned by her »lawfully wedded husband«—only herself. Fighting against gender-based violence in the name of a woman's entitlement to her body cannot be effectively supported by an appeal to the innateness of absolute sexual difference.

We cannot make the government, for instance, ratify the Istanbul Convention, which the parliamentary majority »invited« it to avoid doing in June 2020. This is precisely because, according to the current government's logic, »gender« does not make sense: the distinction between men and women is already grasped by biological sex and so insisting on the use of the term is merely the »gay lobby's« interest in making those boundaries fuzzy in disguise. Social injustice is not going to be any less material or structural in nature if it is not anchored in the notion of biologically given sex. Nor should gender identity be reduced to trans men's and women's identity, as if to be an act of purely linguistic claiming that refers back to some »materiality«—there is, indeed, a sense of collective identity involved in feminist struggles against inequality in the political economy as well.

The only viable way out of that impasse is to accept the fuzziness, the relative boundaries drawn between categories. That can be achieved by »queering masculinity.« Jack Halberstam (1998), for instance, argues against masculinity owning »maleness« and for the importance of other, nonhegemonic forms of masculinity instead. Examples are female masculinities of gender indeterminacy without the cis-male body, such as trans men or drag kings, as they can help generate social change.

Solidarity through the Intimation of Trust

In addressing the importance of acts of affect in working out solidarity, I draw on Sara Ahmed's (2004, 209) tenet that our political activities have emotional dimensions to them. These emotions then shape the ways we feminists inhabit the world with other feminists, what we say and do in the name of feminism. In short, emotions do things; they are acts. Hence, a feminist position that is caught up in the intimation of fear and hate helps reiterate the dominant discourses of stigmatization vis-à-vis »gender« being »trans ideology«—despite one's best intentions. This is what Lisa Duggan and José Esteban Muñoz call »an act of political complacency« (2009, 280). Intimations of trust—seen as the intertwined dynamic of agreeing and disagreeing—could take us beyond pitting ourselves against each other, making us proactive instead of only reactive.

The solidarity mediated by the affect of trust does not, then, necessarily require deliberation on sameness. The dialectic of trust serving to create space to agree and disagree is something organized internally by plurality and open-ended in nature. In this regard, it is very similar to Judith Butler's ethics of cohabitation—understood as an ethical binding that arises from the precariousness of bodily life, »[it] emerge[s] from the social conditions of political life, not from any agreement we have made or from any deliberate choices. [It] is necessarily committed to the equal value of lives« (2012, 150). In other words, this dialectic conceptualization of trust that is proposed here is not homogenous but entails rather enduring insecurities and ambivalences.

The ongoing negotiations taking place across constitutive differences could be imagined in terms of Clare Hemmings's suggestion that a transformative feminist politicization »begins from experiences of discomfort without generalising these as shared by all subjects or

as the basis of transcendence of difference« (2012, 158). Hemmings argues for the possibility of a feminist politics that begins from lived experiences of discomfort, without assuming that participants' positions should be imagined within a framework of reciprocity or of a sameness transcending all of their respective differences:

Dissonance has to arise if a feminist politics is to arise [...]. This may be a productive basis from which to seek solidarity with others, not based in a shared identity or on a presumption about how the others feel, but on also feeling the desire for transformation out of the experience of discomfort, and against all odds. (ibid., 158; italics in the original)

Hemmings' position in acknowledging the indispensability of discomfort is partly inspired by Ahmed's work, who herself argues for the possibility of feminist solidarity even if we do not inhabit the same social locality of contentment: »There is solidarity in recognizing our alienation from happiness, even if we do not inhabit the same place (and we do not). There can be joy in killing joy. And kill joy we must, and we do« (2010, 87). In other words, Ahmed's invitation is for us to see how feminist critique and intervention have historically been concerned with inhabiting possibilities other than the forms of hegemonic happiness women are expected to desire. Examples here are: the Hungarian government's propagandistic heteronormative marriage and giving birth to children (and the accompanying myth of domestic life); desiring biologically grounded sexual difference, as the progressive feminist position would have it; or, all the promises articulated in the incumbent regime's rhetoric and policies.

Ahmed, in fact, puts possibility and chance (the »hap«) back into »happiness«; in my reading, that allows for having »happenstance« be part of solidarity once more, with difference becoming integral to the latter's formation. It is this insertion of »happenstance« that substantiates Ahmed's (2004) argument that our political activities are not purely rational but have emotional dimensions to them as well. Integrating the moment of disagreement into »trust« precludes imagining its normative, teleological meaning as but a space of sameness, one wherein participants should strive toward homogenized promises—including the progressive feminists' heteropatriarchal desire to exclude the »QTI« letters and willingness to acknowledge only »LGB« people.¹⁰ More importantly, this perspective could, at the same time, subvert the routine perception of those individualizing institutional relations of power that reads feminists »as being unhappy, such that situations of conflict, violence, and power are read as about the unhappiness of feminists rather than about what feminists are unhappy about« (Ahmed 2010, 583).

The concerns that I encountered when proposing for the first time the intimation of trust—namely in response to my talk (Barát 2021c) at the annual national gender/sexuality conference »Possibilities of Resistance and Cooperation« of the University of Szeged, Hungary, in 2021—were about losing sight of the particular interests of women as well as of gains achieved if the trans woman is seen as »one of us.« Keeping that anxiety in mind, what I have tried to underscore in the current article is how the solidarity of trust is organized by plurality. It is conceptualized in such a way as to allow for the recognition of differences, namely when seen as a dynamic space of both agreement and disagreement. Trust requires working around such differences. Chandra Talpade Mohanty's (2003) intersectional position argues, in this vein, that the lived lives of women are intertwined out of historical similarities and differences, being in a complex relationality with one another necessitating a solidarity other than the Western ideal of »sisterhood«—one that should be, rather,

transversal. To be caught up in the rhetoric of fear counts as accepting the false happiness of a foundationalist reproductive femininity instead of inhabiting other, transformative possibilities of fuzziness through the intimation of trust. Therefore, I would encourage us to embrace Ahmed's perspective and understand that she is not celebrating unhappiness; rather, she invites us to assume the position of feminist killjoys and to challenge the current rhetoric of hate in right-wing propaganda.

Notes

- 1 The ban was simply announced through Decree No. 188/2018 (X. 12.), published in the *Hungarian Gazette* without any debate. It was a massive abuse of centralized power, violating academic freedom left granted even in the new constitution, in spite of all autocratic changes introduced in the revised version thereof (renamed as »fundamental law«) in 2011 (Barát 2019).
- 2 See: <https://www.parlament.hu/irom40/14056/14056-0001.pdf> (last accessed August 22, 2022).
- 3 All translations from the Hungarian original are by the author herself. See: https://nepszava.hu/3003117_orban-uj-korszakot-es-kulturharcot-hirdetett-tusvanyoson (last accessed August 22, 2022).
- 4 For a detailed analysis of the regime's ongoing strategy of generating »enemies,« see: Nemzettudat, identitáspolitika és nemzetpolitika a mai Magyarországon. [Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung – Policy Solutions], (2019) Budapest: Political capital and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.
- 5 Though the infamous »lex CEU« was struck down by the European Court of Justice in the meantime, the decision could not change the situation and CEU is now located in Vienna. The judgement was announced on the University's website in October 2020: <https://www.ceu.edu/article/2020-10-06/landmark-judgment-lex-ceu-struck-down-european-court-justice> (last accessed August 22, 2022).
- 6 For discussion of the »Orbánization« of Hungary, see Wilkin (2018). He addresses the tension between liberal and illiberal tendencies within the global context, meaning both in the EU and beyond. He explains how such a system fosters anti-Enlightenment values as well as other divisive policies and propaganda based on ethnonationalism.
- 7 See: <https://www.parlament.hu/irom41/10393/10393.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1MXwzCwhrac85QAUry-Z8b0NWRwbf6-Z8A-QOKb4NjKKFwmweNuRMtdOv0> (last accessed August 22, 2022).
- 8 For a detailed discussion of the content of the changes, see European Sources Online (2021): <https://www.europeansources.info/record/hungarian-law-banning-provision-of-lgbtqi-content-to-minors/> (last accessed August 22, 2022).
- 9 This failure most painfully manifested when the current government, using its two-thirds majority in parliament, blocked the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in May 2020, in the very context of a global rise in reports of domestic violence during the pandemic. The same regime had signed it without reservation back in 2014 (see the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) report published in 2020). As a result, feminists have lost a powerful legal instrument for preventing and combating violence against women, especially in intimate relationships.
- 10 See the most recent formulation of the »progressive« feminist position on the independent media news platform atlatzo.hu (Transparent). The article criticizes members of the opposition for embracing unconditionally trans and queer people's cause in the face of the Hungarian government's so-called pedophile law instead of siding with »gender critical« British feminists in the debate first started by J. K. Rowling (Kiss and Feró 2022). See: <https://videkicsajok.atlatzo.hu/jk-rowling-a-nemvalto-ovodasok-es-a-magyarorszagi-valasztasok/> (last accessed August 22, 2022).

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