Worse than communism?
Discursive anti-gender mobilizations in Lithuania

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Without doubt, anti-gender struggles in Lithuania are an essential part of a broader transnational tendency to promote tradition and religion over equality, to discredit the European Union as a place of moral decline, to criticize gender studies as an academic discipline etc. However, some aspects of anti-gender mobilization in this state are locally embedded and historically determined. The aim of this article is to analyze patterns of argumentation and implicit assumptions on the term gender *as a conceptual analogy of Communism. Hence, the the focus of this paper is on the following questions: how is the analogy between genderism and Communism constructed in the public discourse in Lithuania? Why is this comparison a successful strategy of anti-gender mobilization? The analysis is based on an intensive reading and an interpretation of selected texts that explicitly tackle the analogy between gender equality policies and Communism.*

Keywords: *gender, anti-genderism, communism, discourse.*

Introduction

Sexuality and gender have become issues that are continuously debated and often indicate highly affective political confrontations. Whether discussing gender studies being part of a curriculum at European universities, the introduction of homosexual marriage or the rising awareness of gender diversity in public, the protests are directed against post-essentialist conceptions of sexuality and gender. Moreover, anti-gender demonstrations are usually accompanied by expressions of heroic taboo-breaking and anti-establishment slogans.

The anti-gender struggles in Eastern Europe are without doubt a part of a broader transnational tendency to promote tradition and religion over equality, to discredit the European Union as a place of moral decline etc. However, some aspects of anti-gender mobilization in this region are locally embedded and historically determined. What may be perceived as an Eastern European particularity is that gender tends to be discredited as a totalitarian ideology, as exemplified by the statement made in 2014 by Polish right-wing politician Beata Kempa, when she famously compared gender equality politics to Marxism, Leninism and Nazism all at once (qtd. in Grzebalska 2015). The inclination to search for connections between so-called genderism[1] and communism[2] is present not only in Poland but in other post-socialist and post-Soviet European countries as well. In Germany, some fragments of the public anti-gender discourse refer to the former GDR and its "ideology" as a "negative Avantgarde and

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[1] This term will be discussed in the Chapter 1.
[2] This term will be discussed in the Chapter 2.

a shelter for social crisis" (Heft 2015). In Hungary, gender equality and the idea of emancipation is associated with forced societal emancipation as experienced in the socialist Hungary. Hence, right-wing organizations and activists use the anti-Communist attitudes for mobilization against "gender ideology" (Anikó 2015). These and other examples of the success of such discursive anti-gender mobilizations in Poland, Germany and Hungary confirm that the construction of analogy between gender and Communism is a powerful instrument, mobilizing various actors across Eastern Europe.

The lack of scientific literature on anti-gender mobilizations in the Baltic States, Lithuania in particular, inspires to find out more about the comparison of gender with Communism and its importance for campaigning against the introduction of gender equality policies in this country. Hence, the aim of this paper is to analyze patterns of argumentation and implicit assumptions on the term *gender* as a conceptual relict of Communism: how is the analogy between *genderism* and Communism constructed in the public discourse in Lithuania? Why is this comparison a successful strategy of anti-gender mobilization? The investigation in this phenomenon in the context of Lithuania would be beneficial in the following regards. First, research on the abovementioned mobilization strategy in Lithuania contributes to evaluating and understanding the legacy of the Soviet regime for contemporary social developments. Second, it addresses the relevance of the anti-gender tendencies in the country for the rest of Eastern Europe. Furthermore, an examination of this argumentative pat-tern enables us to situate the contemporary gender-opposition in a broader discursive framework and to reveal its interdependence with other threads of discourse.

The construction of analogy between gender, gender equality policies and the policies adapted during the state-socialist period in Lithuania is the focus of this paper. My aim is to grasp and analyze the direct references toward Communism made in the context of the term gender. As the basis for my investigation, I will rely on various fragments of the anti-gender discourse, in which the opposition toward gender-related topics is explicitly addressed in reference to Communism. The elements of discourse presented and discussed in this paper shall be primarily perceived as a collection of material or a *work in progress*, one which requires further elaboration and discussion. With this contribution, I aim to sharpen the glimpse on this particular pattern of argumentation, which is either completely ignored or barely discussed within the sci-entific literature.

The first chapter of this paper shall clarify the definition of *anti-genderism*, on which this paper is centered. The second chapter is dedicated to the discussion of selected material and the outcome of my analysis. In this chapter, I will concentrate on the three elements that are often per-ceived as analogic between *genderism* and Communism in the Lithuanian anti-gender discourse. In the last chapter, I will turn to the writings of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, their concept of the chain of equiv-alence, and I will discuss the discursive construction of analogy between *genderism* and Communism from a poststructuralist perspective.

Defining Anti-Genderism

Simone de Beauvoir's formulation on "the womanhood" has created the fundament not only for the second wave of feminism in the late 1960s but for the post-essentialist understanding of sexuality, too. This quote of Beauvoir is perceived to be one of the first philosophical attempts to distinguish *sex* from *gender* and to suggest that gender is an aspect of one's identity, which is not biologically determined but gradually acquired throughout one's life (Butler 1986). With the consistent application of this distinction to social science and to the everyday life of society, it is no longer possible to ascribe certain values or social functions of women to their natural, biological necessities (for example, being a mother), and neither can we refer meaningfully to natural or unnatural gender-related behavior: "all gender is, by definition, unnatural" (ibid.). Thus, "the manhood" and "the womanhood" are perceived, in the post-essentialist thought, as societal inventions and matters of a social agreement but not as naturally determined facts.

The term *gender* is widely discussed and even disputed not only between social scientists and philosophers but also in the wider public discourse. In the anti-gender discourse, the derivative term *genderism* plays an important role. The term is vague and rarely defined. The main assumption behind the term *genderism* is that gender is binary: that is, that there are, or should be, only two genders, masculine and feminine, with the aspects of one's gender inherently linked to one's genetic sex or sex assigned by birth. However, from my perspective, *genderism* cannot be referred to as a scientific term, because it aims to diminish and deride the assumption of a socially constructed gender. While in the anti-gender discourse *genderism* is identified with gender equality politics, gender studies and gender-related issues, on the analytical dimension of this paper, I refer to *genderism* as a term used by anti-gender actors and do not share the associated normative assumptions.

The contrasting terminus *anti-genderism* is somewhat vague and imprecise, and it is important to emphasize its terminological limitations. On the other hand, the core meaning of this term has a strong descriptive potential: it is an "anti-attitude," a resistance against *genderism* and against everything that is implicitly understood under this concept (Hark, Villa 2015). It is important to note here that the term *anti-genderism* may not be identified with anti-feminism. In some way, *anti-genderism* is a historic novelty: anti-gender attitudes are not directed against male and female equality in political and socioeconomic spheres as they were in the anti-feminist movements, but they are directed against the academic concept, namely gender.

Anti-genderism refers to various issues, inter alia, the uselessness of gender studies as an academic discipline, gender mainstreaming as an ideological reason of a state or a lesbian world conspiracy, gender as an attempt by the elites to destroy the most essential fundaments of a healthy and happy society (family and heterosexuality) etc. Moreover, this term may refer to the both- and anti-gender movements or an anti-gender discourse. In the following, I would like to clarify the core elements of *anti-genderism* and any possible elaborations on its definition.

Christine Wimbauer, Mona Motakef and Julia Teschlade define *anti-genderism* as a discourse against gender equality policies and gender studies (Wimbauer et al. 2015). Indeed, one of the essential aspects of *anti-genderism* is the discrediting of Gender Studies as an academic discipline. *Anti-genderism* is characterized by a strongly positivist understanding of science, which emphasizes the importance of empirical data, knowledge gained through observation and natural science methodology. Hence, Gender Studies are claimed to be non-scientific, because studies on gender do not fit such an image of science. Instead, Gender Studies are perceived to be pseudo-sciences, ideology, religion, "hocus-pocus" that indoctrinate young students (Hark, Villa 2015). The "genderization" of European universities is, too, often thematized in the anti-gender discourse. This implies that Gender Studies occupy the professorial chairs of "real academics"; moreover, they attempt to ideologically occupy the academic system as such (ibid.). Here, the debate on the gender-neutral language is of specific importance. Finally, the debate is fueled by discussing the financial issues. Gender Studies are blamed to be completely useless and to waste tax payer money for the reason that they do not produce any scientific facts that would be relevant and universally understandable for society (ibid.).

Another thematic focus of anti-gender discourse, as identified by Wimbauer, Motakef and Teschlade, is the policy of gender mainstreaming. As defined by the UN, gender mainstreaming is "[…] a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality" (General Assembly 1997). Gender equality policies are, however, in the anti-gender discourse, perceived from a different perspective. The goal of gender mainstreaming and other policies related to gender equality is, according to Rosenkranz,[3] a radical modification of the human kind (Rosenkranz 2008). In a book written by Rosenkranz on gender mainstreaming, the author problematizes gender mainstreaming as a systematic, totalitarian, ideological project that has been established and supported by political elites. Furthermore, gender equality policies are, says Rosenkranz, introduced against the will of the people. On the example of maternity leave policy, she describes in how far the will of the people (in this case – the will of Austrian mothers) is violently disregarded by political actors. Hence, systematic misunderstandings (Hark, Villa 2015) that concern the essence of the term gender, gender studies as an academic discipline and gender mainstreaming policies are all essential aspects of *anti-genderism*.

Anti-genderism is closely related to religious beliefs and worldviews based on religious norms. David Paternotte (2015) identifies *anti-genderism* as a new religious mobilization strategy: "[t]he Catholic Church is rather responsible for the invention of a discourse and some of the strategies, which can be observed in multiple forms on the ground. It also offers a space for these intellectuals and activists to meet

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[3] Barbara Rosenkranz (born 1958) is an Austrian politician for the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), currently serving as the Minister of Building Law and Animal Protection of the State of Lower Austria. She advocates conservative worldviews and is actively engaged in the Austrian debate on gender-related topics like homosexual marriage, gender mainstreaming and family politics.

and exchange views and strategies, as well as an extremely powerful mobilization and diffusion network" (Paternotte 2015). With the example of the French protests organized by "Le Manif pour tous" and their increasing meaning for other European anti-gender protests, Paternotte shows how the ability to assemble citizens for protests enables the Catholic Church to (re)gain societal relevance and to be entitled to more power (ibid.). Demonstrations that are based on the Catholic pattern of argumentation against *genderism* may as well be perceived as the expression of a new social trend – to politicize the milieus that have not been political (i.e., politically interested or active) before (Teidelbaum 2015).

Having clarified the terminology of this paper, in the following chapter, I will discuss the particularity of Lithuanian *anti-genderism*, namely the discursive construction of equivalence between gender-related issues and Communism.

The Discursive Construction of Analogy between the Term *Gender* and the State-Socialist Past in the Public Discourse of Lithuania

> "Gender ideology is worse than Communism and Nazism put together."
>
> TADEUSZ PIERONEK, 2013

This quote of Polish Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek shows that the term *gender* is, in Eastern Europe, commonly perceived as one of the biggest troubles of humanity. Being perceived as worse than two totalitarian regimes, gender has become the issue of public controversy. Furthermore, the quote demonstrates that the Catholic Church is an essential actor in the public discourse. It systematically engages in demonizing European gender equality politics and ac-

tively participates in establishing an opposition between Christianity and the so-called *genderism*. However, the Catholic Church is not the only actor that takes part in this process. In the context of Lithuania, right-wing social organizations, like the Forum Vilnius,[4] Pro Patria or conservative public intellectuals play an important role in (re)establishing connections between *genderism*[5] and *Communism.*[6]

In the following chapter, I will discuss certain fragments of the discourse that reflect on the established analogies between *genderism* and Communism in the anti-gender discourse. The fragments of the discourse presented in this paper shall primarily be understood as a collection of material and a *work in progress* that requires further elaboration and discussion. The selected material involves three texts published between 2014 and 2016 in Lithuanian media that explicitly refer to the term *gen-*

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[4] According to the declaration of its foundation, Forum Vilnius is an organization of "patriotic individuals" who believe that "Lithuania is alive, Lithuania will wake up, Lithuania will rise and will exist for ages" (Forum Vilnius 2016b).

[5] As already discussed in chapter 1, I will adopt the term *genderism* in order to avoid terminological ambiguity. Genderism is, in this paper, being used as a reference to the anti-gender discourse, but it does not involve the normative assumptions about the term gender.

[6] Communism (as originally defined by K. Marx and F. Engels) has never been established neither in the Soviet Union, nor in other states on the East side of the Iron Curtain. It is essential to draw attention to the fact that in the anti-gender discourse in Lithuania, no distinction is issued between Communism, state-socialism, Bolshevism, Marxist-Leninism etc. Instead, the period between the second World War and the end of the Cold War in 1991 is defined in an unprecise, derogatory manner – namely as Communism. The question whether such terminological unsharpness is a conscious strategy or barely a coincidence will not be examined in this paper, but it should be problematized. In the following chapter, however, I will refer to Communism as the state-socialist policies and politics of the Soviet regime that had been adapted in Lithuania between 1945 and 1991.

der or to gender mainstreaming policies in relation to the Soviet Union, state-socialism or Bolshevism. These texts discuss societal, political and economic challenges posed by the existence of the term *gender* and its introduction into political practices in the post-socialist states.

The selection of material was based on their public relevance and influence. The category of public relevance was assessed by an online document study including the most-read Lithuanian newspapers and magazines. I used the keywords "gender* + Communism + ideolog*" to select a sample of texts from which I chose three texts by applying the second category – public impact. Here I aimed to select the texts that were most influential to the public discourse by assessing how many different institutions referred to them. In contrast, the contextual texts that discuss the term *gender* or the so-called "gender ideology" were not considered in this article. Hence, the three selected texts include a public speech by Gediminas Merkys with the title "Radical *Genderism*: What Is It and What Is Waiting for Us?" ("Radikalusis Gender-izmas: kas tai ir kas mūsų laukia?"). Merkys is a well-known Lithuanian sociologist who defended his habilitation in 2000 at Šiauliai University, Lithuania. The speech was written in the context of Merkys's lecture in the Lithuanian parliament on December 19, 2014. The second text is a public petition against the Baltic Pride demonstration in Vilnius in 2016. It has been written and published by the already mentioned right-wing conservative organizations – Forum Vilnius and Pro Patria. The petition was published on June 11, 2016 in various webpages under the title "Public Appeal Concerning the Forceful Thrust of the Communist 'Sexual Revolution' and

Baltic Pride demonstration" ("Kreipimasis dėl komunistinės 'seksualinės revoliucijos' prievartinio brukimo ir Baltic Pride eitynių"). And finally, a text written by the influential Lithuanian philosopher, writer and journalist Daiva Tamošaitytė under the title "On the Nature of Ideologies and Their Harm" ("Apie ideologijų prigimtį ir žalą"). The article was published in the monthly literature and culture magazine *Metai* in May 2015.

My contribution aims to not only better understand the anti-gender discourse in Lithuania but to also draw attention to its existence and sharpen the view on this particular pattern of argumentation. This paper aims to grasp the function that this particular analogy fulfills between the mentioned terms. The following chapter is concerned with three assumptions that contribute to the construction of analogy between *genderism* and Communism. The first subchapter will discuss the construction of the term *gender* and Communism as ideologies; the second subchapter will elaborate on the analogization of the EU with the Soviet Union and finally, I will discuss the anti-gender assumption of human nature, which allows the analogy between *genderism* and Communism.

"Genderism and Communism Are Ideologies"

The anti-gender perspectives, which demonstrate similarities between the idea of socially determined aspects of sexuality with the unsuccessful social policies introduced in the Soviet Union, are common in the medial-public discourse in Lithuania. The anti-gender pattern of argumentation is in this particular discourse characterized, among others, by allocating both the term *gender* and so-called "Communism" to the

sphere of ideology.[7] The emphasized "ideological element" of both *genderism* and Communism is, in the usual case, ill-defined or remains undisguised. Originally, the term "Gender-ideology" has been firstly used in the Vatican: the Pontifical Council for the Family in 2000 declared the existence of a "gender-ideology" and advised to analyze and consider it from a critical perspective (Choluj 2015). The term has spread and been adapted across Europe, especially by various religiously motivated anti-gender actors. However, the questions on what this ideology actually is, and which ideological domains are influenced by this concept, are not issued. The text of Daiva Tamošaitytė discusses the often-neglected issue of defining ideology. Tamošaitytė writes:

> One should not be deceived by thinking that the new ghost currently roaming in Europe is just an unguilty worldview or a naive aim to improve the rights of the disadvantaged. Genderism has become an ideology at the moment when it consciously and after a long period of attempts has started to rule over the politics and law. And each ideology is developed to destroy the old world up to its base with an aim for – and this must be noted – the supremacy of one particular group[I] (Tamošaitytė 2015, p. 127, my translation).

The interesting metaphor of a "ghost roaming in Europe" may be perceived as an allusion to the preface of Marx and Engels's *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). While Marx wrote that "[a] spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism" (Marx, Engels 2002 [1848]), Tamošaitytė issues "the new ghost" in a different manner, namely as *genderism*. Such reference to Marx made by Tamošaitytė reflects on her perception of *genderism* as a "new communism" and their simmilar "demonic character."

In this passage, Tamošaitytė claims that *genderism* is an ideology. This claim is based on two assumptions. The first ideological element of *genderism* is, for the author, the appearance of *genderism* as an attempt to empower the disadvantaged. However, says Tamošaitytė, it is naive to understand it this way, because *genderism* is more than it claims to be. Second, Tamošaitytė clarifies ideology with an implication that it is consciously constructed by a particular social group in order to gain power over the rest of the society. Following this thought, ideology is an instrument of sustaining or establishing power. With such a definition of ideology, Tamošaitytė aims to establish a link between gender and Communism as if they were ideologies, or, in other words, gender and Communism are, in her text, perceived as the tools of a certain social group to hold and sustain its political power. Such an anti-gender problem diagnosis is troublesome in as far as it implies, that there is "something else" than ideology. By framing gender relations in this way, anti-gender actors position themselves as "anti-ideological." In this manner, it is implied that there is an "anti-ideological," objective, universal truth to be followed. Tamošaitytė also reveals such an universally valid aspect of the non-ideological sphere – "the old world." Such a social-religious foundation, pictured as

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[7] I am aware that there are multiple definitions and understandings of ideology. However, in the context of this paper, I refer to this term as a category in the anti-gender discourse.

[I] „Tad nereikia apsigauti manant, jog naujoji šmėkla, klaidžiojanti po Europą, yra tik nekalta pasaulėžiūra ar naivus siekis pagerinti nuskriaustųjų teises. Genderizmas ideologija tapo tą akimirką, kai, sąmoningai ir ilgai to siekus, ėmė valdyti politiką ir teisę. O kiekviena ideologija yra skirta senąjį pasaulį sugriauti iki pamatų, siekiant – ir tai būtina pažymėti – kažkurios vienos išskirtinės grupės viešpatavimo" (Tamošaitytė 2015, p. 127).

the "old world," involves, among others, a heterosexual family, a "human nature" as well as a personal relation to God and Christian ethics (Tamošaitytė 2015 p. 133). Ideology, as emphasized in this fragment, is the instrument of the destruction of the "old world." This expression refers to the systematic attempts to force the Lithuanian society to abandon religion, which was practiced by the Soviet Union. An example of such religious struggles against the Soviet Regime is the Hill of Crosses. It is a site of piligrimage where the practice of leaving crosses on the hill is practiced until now. The site took on special significance during the years of the Soviet occupation. By continuing to travel to the hill and leave their tributes despite the Soviet attempts to destroy this Hill of Crosses in 1963 and 1973, Lithuanians demonstrated their allegiance to religion and their religious heritage. Gender equality policies are, in the Lithuanian anti-gender discourse, perceived to be enforcing simmilar attempts of social destruction. The supposed problem of bringing imbalance between society and religion is often issued in the anti-gender discourse. Thus Tamošaitytė claims: "[s]o what else is in common, apart from the mendacity, between Communism and genderism? A fierce, almost pathologic hate for religion, even for the name of God, and everything which refers to the matters of spirituality. Fascinatingly identical are genderist arrows of hate turned to the institution of Christianity[II]" (ibid., my translation). Tamošaitytė's methaphoric language addresses the "arrows of hate." This metaphor refers to the martyrdom and death of Saint Sebastian. According to Christian belief, St. Sebastian was punished for his supposed betrayal by the Roman emperor Diocletian. He commanded Saint Sebastian to be led to a field and to be bound to a stake so that archers from Mauritania would kill him by shooting arrows. This act is perceived in the Christian tradition as representing the persecution of Christians. Miraculously, the arrows did not kill St. Sebastian, and since then he is perceived to be a Christian symbol of the defence against the plague. In art and literature, St. Sebastian is commonly depicted as tied to a tree and shot with arrows (see Figures 1 and 2).

The below depicted paintings show St. Sebastian as a young man who is suffering pain and is about to die. The body of St. Sebastian is tied with ropes to either a pillar or a tree, which shows and emphasizes his weakness, defencelessness, loneliness. His body is hit by many arrows of archers from Mauritania, which strengthens the image of suffering and pain in both paintings. The first painting presents the archers as middle-aged men in luxurious clothes who behave in a cold and indifferent manner toward St. Sebastian. The second painting does not include any signs that would identify how the archers look like or how they behave. In both paintings, St. Sebastian looks into the sky, which creates the image of him praying or talking to God. The nostalgic, wishfull look into the cloudy sky illustrates St. Sebastian as a religiuos person, a good Christian who trusts in the will of God.

The "arrows of hate turned to the institution of Christianity" that Tamošaitytė mentions in her statement are the same arrows that were meant to kill Saint Sebastian. Hence, in this manner, St. Sebastian becomes a symbol of the whole Christian

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II „Taigi ką bendra, be melagingumo, turi komunizmas ir genderizmas? Aršią, kone patologinę neapykantą religijai, net Dievo vardui ir apskritai bet kam, kas dvelkia jų išjuokiamu dvasingumu. Stulbinamai identiškai genderistų neapykantos strėlės nukreiptos tiesiogiai į krikščionybės instituciją" (Tamošaitytė 2015, p. 127).

Figure 1: **St. Sebastian** *by Andrea Mantegna, 1480, oil on canvas*

Figure 2: **St. Sebastian** *by Marco Basaiti, first half of the 16th century, oil on canvas:*

tradition, which is about to be destroyed. Following this thought, Christianity is understood (as discussed by describing Figures 1 and 2) as an unguilty, weak, defenceless sufferer who wishfully hopes for the help and the good will of God. This metaphoric comparison of St. Sebastian and contemporary Christianity implies that *genderism* consciously aims to persecute Christians and deny them their faith. The mentioned "pathologic hate" is identified with the indifferent, hateful behavior of the archers as pictured in the painting under Figure 1. Knowing that the motif (i.e., symbol) of this man stands for a peaceful

defence of the Christian tradition, the symbolic message of Tamošaitytė becomes even more clear: *genderism*, just like Communism, brings a plague to the society, and it is necessary to defend oneself against this malady. The analogy between gender and Communism as ideologies conceals, says the author, a conscious, systematic attempt to destroy the religious fundament of the society and the whole Christian religion itself.

The anti-gender discourse in Lithuania issues gender equality policies and Communism as equivalents because they are both perceived to be "ideological." The

ideological dimension in this discourse is discussed in a twofold way. First, ideology is understood as an attempt of a specific group to establish its power in politics and law. Hence, the gender equality policies are identified with the political domination of the Soviet Union, because they are both perceived to be ideological in this sence. Second, ideology is perceived as an attempt to destroy the "old world" and to defeat Christianity. The analogy between *genderism* and Communism as ideologies is discussed based on their similarities in aiming for social and religious destruction.

"Genderism and Communism Are Similar in Their Ways of Implementation"

The anti-gender discourse in Lithuania is strongly influenced by the assumption that foreign actors are using symbolic violence and forcing the Lithuanian society toward *genderism*. The notion of verbal and symbolic violence is in the center of public discussions on the introduction of gender-related policies in Lithuania. During his public speech in 2014, Gediminas Merkys claimed the following:

> The radical gender ideology is being shoved to us by force, it is being shoved against the will of the majority of the citizens and electors. Traditional values are being despised, and the defenders of those are criminalized. Basically, a compulsive intervention into personal worldviews and spiritual values is now taking place. […] Let's remember

the historic analogies: who was doing it? Who had behaved this way? It was done by Bolshevism"[III] (Merkys 2014).

Merkys speaks about the "criminalized defenders of traditional values," which coincides with what has been previously discussed. The traditional values and Christianity are perceived to be in danger because of the introduction of gender equality policies. Furthermore, "the defenders" are in this passage claimed to be in the situation of St. Sebastian, who is believed to have been criminalized and, as many other Christians, punished with a long and painful death. Thus, the people that Merkys mentioned as the ones who sympathize with the traditional values are, in his statement, given the roles of the disadvantaged and the socially excluded. Shortly after Merkys mentions the "intervention into personal worldviews," which he perceives from a critical point of view. This statement addresses the supposed violation of the civil liberties and state intervention into the "private" sphere. The statement aims to defend the liberal idea of personal freedom, which the government cannot abridge. Merkys's statement reflects on the argumentative contradiction: human rights and personal freedoms have to be defended, but gender equality policies, which aim to ensure equal access to resources and opportunities regardless of gender, do not belong in the list of values that have to be preserved. Gender equality policies are, in the anti-gender discourse, often perceived to be not an instrument of emancipatory politics but rather a result of the authoritarian, top-down politics of "the elites." Hence, says Merkys, despite the perceived broad citizen resistance[8] against gender equality policies, the power is being

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[III] „Radikaliojo gender ideologija mums brukama per prievartą, brukama prieš daugumos piliečių ir rinkėjų valią. Tradicinės vertybės niekinamos, o jų gynėjai kriminalizuojami. Iš esmės vyksta prievartinė intervencija į asmens pasaulėžiūros ir dvasinių vertybių sritį. […] Prisiminkime istorines analogijas: kas tai darė, kas šitaip elgėsi? Tai darė bolševizmas" (Merkys 2015).

[8] It is questionable regarding how far does such resistance exist in the context of Lithuania.

violently enforced against the will of "the people." *Genderism* and *Communism* are thus prescribed a similar quality, namely that of an illegitimate establishment.

Another important aspect to note is that gender and Communism are perceived to be stimulated by "foreign powers." The discursive tendencies against gender emphasize the role of either the European Union or the Soviet Union in the process of systematically destroying traditional, national values preserved by the Lithuanian nation. The supposed symbolic, verbal violence and force by foreign actors are understood in a twofold way, namely as an ideological stimulation or as a financial compulsion. As discussed in subchapter 2.1., the material that reflects ideological constraint is in the anti-gender discourse, perceived as an essential aspect of gender equality politics. Following this thought, the media is perceived to play an important role in spreading this ideology and is viewed as a terrain for social struggles against the ideological indoctrination of the nation. The post-colonial pattern of argumentation is of special importance for the analysis in this paper. In his speech, Merkys problematizes colonialist approaches and activities of the "Western" media as attempts to "export the sexual perversion" to the young democracies of Eastern Europe. Thus, Merkys states the following:

> The biggest and our most beloved web-portal, which recently celebrated its 15th anniversary,[9] abundantly and enthusiastically writes about group sex, fisting […] and other sexual perversions. It is symptomatic: the founders and shareholders of this glo-

rious portal are not the representatives of *our* national business. They do not do this in their own lands, but for us, as if for Jamaican natives 500 years ago, they spill some cheap glass beads on our heads[IV] (Merkys 2014, my emphasis and translation).

To begin with, Merkys identifies some sexual practices as "sexual perversions." This statement may be understood as a fragment of *sexuality dispositif*[10] as defined by Michel Foucault (1978). In analyzing the claim from a Foucauldian perspective, the claim of Merkys appears to be an attempt to define what forms of sexuality are "normal" and socially accepted, and which ones are the "perverse" and socially excluded. Thus, Foucault comments of such discursive attempts to establish the "order of normality":

> [O]ne had to speak of it [sex] as of a thing to be not simply condemned or tolerated but managed, inserted into systems of utility, regulated for the greater good of all, made to function according to an optimum. Sex was not something one simply judged; it was a thing one administered. […] A policing of sex: that is, not the rigor of a taboo, but the necessity of regulating sex through useful and public discourses (Foucault, 1978 [1976] p. 24).

The categorization of mentioned sexual practices, as issued by Merkys, may be, from a Foucauldian perspective, discussed as a form of control, a normalization of human behavior, and it is closely related to power relations.

An allusion to the colonization period is created in the passage by referring to "Jamaican natives" and "cheap glass beads."

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[9] The mentioned portal is an established Lithuanian online newspaper, ranked as the second mostly visited news web-page. The portal belongs to the Estonian media group Eesti media.

[IV] „Didžiausias ir mūsų visų mylimas portalas, neseniai skambiai atšventęs 15 m. jubiliejų, gausiai ir

entuziastingai rašo apie grupinį seksą, fistingą […] ir kitas seksualines perversijas. Simptomiška: šlovingojo portalo steigėjai ir akcininkai – ne mūsų nacionalinio verslo atstovai. Savo krašte jie to nedaro, bet mums, nelyginant Jamaikos čiabuviams prieš 500 metų, paberia pigių stikliukų ant galvos" (Merkys 2014).

[10] The term will not be discussed in detail because of the limited space of this paper.

During the colonization period, Europeans exchanged glass beads into gold, because the beauty of glass was perceived by the natives as more valuable. The metaphor of "glass beads" refers to European gender equality politics. The text of Merkys speaks about the changing values of the EU, and it criticizes the "sexual perversion" having become "a value in itself" (Merkys 2014). In this context, the symbol of "glass beads" refers to the process of colonization, which also involves the colonization of values. Hence, the Lithuanian society is supposed to be tricked by the EU for exchanging traditional values into the "glass bead" of sexuality. The European Union is perceived in this context as a contemporary colonial power that aims to export its own "sexual perversion" to Lithuania. The supposed sex-colonialization of Lithuania by the European Union is presented as an analogical example in comparison to the Soviet Union and its Sovietization politics during the state-socialist period in Lithuania. Sovietization politics included a mostly involuntary adoption of Soviet institutions, laws, customs, traditions and the ideal picture of the "Soviet way of life," both on a national level and in smaller communities. Moreover, this term is applied to grasp the mental and social changes within the population of the Soviet Union, differently called the "Homo Sovieticus." The process of European integration in the anti-gender discourse is identified with the historic experience of involuntary adaption of the Soviet policies. Thus, the conservative organization Forum Vilnius claims to have "won back our freedom not for this, and we will never accommodate ourselves with the fact that […]

totalitarian but differently packed Marxist-Leninist Bolshevist ideas, which deny a free individual of one's mind, consciousness and dignity, would return to Lithuania[V] (Forum Vilnius 2016, my translation). The construction of allusion between the European Union and the Soviet Union is hence based on the imagination that gender is a "newly packed" orthodox Communism. This certain anti-gender stream of discourse constructs both *Communism* and *genderism* as a "negative avant-garde" (Heft 2015), as a shelter and source of moral disarray caused by the increasing sexual perversion of the old members of the EU.

The anti-gender discourse in Lithuania argues that the Lithuanian society is being value-colonized by the EU and establishes the analogy between European gender equality politics and the policies adapted by the Soviet Union.

"Genderism and Communism Have Similar Aims, Namely to Experiment with Human Nature and to Change It"

The anti-gender voices from politics, journalism, activist groups and scholars are resplendent with claims regarding the "dangerous relation" (Forum Vilnius 2016) between the term *gender* and the state-socialist practices in the Soviet Union. The third aspect identified as analogical between gender equality policies and Communism is their exclusively scientific approach to human nature and the attempt to experiment with it. This is a complex claim that shall be discussed shortly.

The identification of gender with Communismin in the anti-gender discourse relies on the claim that the behavior and characteristics of a human being are determined by human nature. The concept of human

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[V] „Atsikovojome savo laisvę ne tam ir niekada ne-sitaikstysime su tuo, kad į Lietuvą […] grįžtų totalitari-nės, tik kitaip įpakuotos, laisvo asmens protą, sąžinę ir orumą paneigiančios marksistinio-lenininio bolševizmo idėjos" (Forum Vilnius 2016).

nature is closely related to conceptions of "woman's nature," which historically have been used to deny women full moral standing and their equal political rights (Tuana 1993; Fausto-Sterling 1985). Feminists across the world have repeatedly revealed the philosophical conceptions of human nature as male-biased, essentialistic and naturalistic. Hence, feminist theorists have made a strong statement that the philosophical conception of human nature has throughout the ages been a point of origin of women's subordination. Also the distinction of the terms *gender* and *sex* is closely related to the critique on the essentialist understanding of human (i.e., a woman's) nature. Feminist scholars claimed that gender as a social construct is not necessarily linked to the facts of biology: sex is a matter of biological (i.e., natural) determination, while gender is a social construction.

Anti-gender actors perceive this concept from a different perspective. Human nature is a natural order of societal cohabitation. This refers to the traditional concept of family as a heterosexual partnership with an exclusive access to physical reproduction. Furthermore, human nature is, in this discourse, closely related to religion and an intuitive need of a human being to rely on, trust and pray to God. The concept of gender is situated in an analogy with Communism for the following reason: gender, just like Communism, refers to scientific facts and aims to deconstruct the fundament of the human existence, namely the human nature. The following passage from Tamošaitytė's text illustrates the commonly adapted pattern of argumentation in the anti-gender discourse:

> In contemporary Europe, we observe a scaring transition that repeats the insane (modified) idea of Communism and National Socialism: there is no God, because a human being […] is its own fundament. One can construct a human being by referring to the achievements of science and often ungrounded results of young researches and their interpretations – with philology and eugenics earlier, and later with gene-engineering, social gender theories and the like. At this place, the similarities between Communism […] and feminism (and the deriviating from it genderism) are obvious[VI] (Tamošaitytė 2015, p. 127, my translation).

The idea behind such a statement is that by refering to social science concepts or philosophical ideas, humans turn away from the single existing truth (as discussed above), namely "the old world," the traditions and the perception of religion and God as the single sources of knowledge. Here the gap between the measurable natural-scientific fact of sex and the social-science concept of gender is especially vivid. Anti-gender voices in all three of selected texts refer to the concept of gender as an "anthoropologic and social engineering" that aims to create a new human being, to experiment with it and to finally create a new society. Such a pattern of argumentation clarifies that anti-gender actors propose a clear problem diagnosis, namely that together with the introduction of gender equality policies in Europe, the binary gender system is being destabilized. The suspected ideological moment of *genderism* that aims, says

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[VI] „Šiandienos Europoje matome baugią slinktį, kuri tarsi atkartoja komunizmo ir nacionalsocializmo (modifikuotai) beprotybės pagrindinę idėją: Dievo nėra, nes žmogus […] yra savo paties pagrindas. Žmogų galima konstruoti, remiantis mokslo laimėjimais ir dažnai nepagrįstais dar jaunų tyrimų rezultatais bei jų interpretacijomis – anksčiau filologija ir eugenika, vėliau genų inžinerija, socialinėmis lyčių teorijomis ir panašiai. Šioje vietoje komunizmo […] ir feminizmo (bei išvestinio genderizmo) panašumai akivaizdūs" (Tamošaitytė 2015, p. 127).

anti-gender argumentation, to undermine existing social structures, allows for an analogy with *Communism*. Forum Vilnius explicitly describe this analogy:

> The currently implemented anthropologic and social engineering in the Western states, i.e., the experiment of the creation of a new human being and a new society, is based on this ideology [genderism], which collides with common sense and scientific knowledge. It is the continuation of the unsuccessful attempts of the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century – Soviet Communism and German National Socialism – to create the project of a 'new human being of the future'[VII] (Forum Vilnius 2016).

Both the claims of Tamošaitytė and Forum Vilnius propose that the so-called "project of social engineering" is an essential aspect connecting contemporary gender equality policies with Communism.

Interim Conclusion

The analysis of the selected material has shown that anti-gender discourse in Lithuania is supported by the construction of analogy between *genderism* and Communism. *Genderism* is usually identified in the discourse with gender equality policies, Gender Studies or gender mainstreaming. Furthermore, Communism refers to the actual social experiences or Soviet politics (i.e., policies, political decisions) implemented in Lithuania during the state-socialist period. Moreover, the text analysis has revealed that the anti-gender discourse

in Lithuania is supported by three main patterns of argumentation, which have been discussed in the previous chapter.

The term "ideology" is the first aspect that is instrumentalized in order to establish the connection between the two concepts, namely *genderism* and Communism. The results of the text analysis have shown that the anti-gender pattern of argumentation problematizes similar characteristics of "gender-ideology" and "Communist ideology." Hence, such similar characteristics are, inter alia, an attempt of ideology to rule over the politics and law, to establish the dictatorship of one particular group, to destroy the so-called "old world."

Second, the analogy between gender equality policies and Communism is constructed by comparing the supposedly colonial behavior of the European Union with the oppressive politics of the Soviet Union. Here the argument of violence and force is of specific importance. While the policies of the European Union are perceived on the dimension of ideology and media, they are compared with the actual militaric activities of the Soviet regime. The EU is, in the Lithuanian anti-gender discourse, blamed for "exporting its own sexual perversion" to the young democracies of the Eastern Europe; moreover, the aspect of the EU's financial power is often mentioned but rarely elaborated in detail.

Finally, it is necessary to mention that the construction of the analogy between *genderism* and Communism is based on the assumption that these phenomena have the same goal. Such a perceived common aim of *genderism* and Communism could be defined as the creation of a new society. Following the anti-gender pattern of argumentation, it becomes clear that such an aim to establish a different society is closely

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[VII] „Šia sveikam protui ir mokslo žinioms prieštaraujančia ideologija [genderizmu, D. B.] yra grindžiamas Vakarų šalyse šiuo metu vykdomas antropologinės ir socialinės inžinerijos, t. y. naujo žmogaus ir naujos visuomenės kūrimo, eksperimentas. Jis yra XX a. totalitarinių režimų – sovietinio komunizmo ir vokiškojo nacionalsocializmo – nesėkmingai mėgintų įgyvendinti projektų sukurti „naują ateities žmogų" – tęsinys" (Forum Vilnius 2016).

related to other often thematized processes. The experimentation with and the denial of "human nature," social engineering, denying the findings of natural sciences are perceived to be signs of an ideological destruction of societal fundaments, which supposedly prove the connection between *genderism* and Communism.

Having investigated the patterns of argumentation of how the analogy between the two concepts is constructed in the anti-gender discourse in Lithuania, I would like to turn to the second essential question of this paper, namely to what function does such an analogization have, and why is it important to adress this phenomenon? The following chapter shall refer to these questions by discussing the theoretical approaches of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Lacalau.

Gender and Communism as a Chain of Equivalence

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe perceive society as constituted discursively. This implies that political identities and societal power relations are compounded and constructed within the field of a discourse. The processes of hegemonization (in the sense of Antonio Gramsci) plays an important role in a temporary fixation of those identities and power relations and in making them appear as a quasi-natural social reality. Mouffe and Laclau proceed their theory of discourse from the assumption that meanings cannot be ultimately fixed. For this reason, the field of the discourse is constantly filled with contradictions and ambivalences. The impossibility of an ultimate fixation of a certain meaning within a discourse implies, say Mouffe and Laclau, that constantly changing partial and temporary attempts of fixation are socially necessary. Such temporary, partial fixations

are, in their theory, perceived as a fundament for controversies over social relations and identities. Hence, Mouffe and Laclau define discourse as follows: "any discourse is constituted as an attempt […] to arrest the flow of differences" (Laclau, Mouffe 1985, p. 108). Consequently, a discourse is a partial attempt to accomplish a certain order within the instable variety of meanings. Furthermore, in order to analytically differentiate between various dimensions of a discourse, Mouffe and Laclau introduce the differentiation between "moments" and "elements." With "moments," they describe all differentiations that partially fixate and secure a specific meaning within a certain discource. The field of "the discursive" is overcrowded with meanings; thus, the meanings that also exist in other discourses are defined as "elements" in their theoretical approach. The practices that establish a connection between the elements in the way that they also change their meaning is called "articulation" in the works of Mouffe and Laclau. With the distinction of "elements" and "moments," the definition of a discourse becomes more precise: „[t]he structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call discourse" (ibid., p. 105). A discourse is hereby an attempt to fixate the meaning of the elements and to transform them into the moments of a discourse.

In order to grasp the societal function of the analogy between gender equality policies and Communism, it is necessary to discuss the term "hegemony"[11] and its importance in the theoretical approach of Mouffe

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[11] The term "hegemony" in Gramsci's theory is closely related to other terms, like "civil society," "integral state," "organic intellectuals," "historic bloc" etc. However, the limited space of this paper does not allow a discussion of these concepts, even though they would be necessary for a better understanding of the term "hegemony."

and Laclau. Following Antonio Gramsci's theory, hegemony is to be understood as a form of political power that functions as a consensus and an agreement on the dimension of morality, culture and ethics (Opratko 2012). Hence, hegemony is the ability of the ruling class to morally and intellectually lead the society by establishing its own interest in the manner of the "collective will" (Demirović 2007). While Gramsci proceeds on the assumption that society is structured by preexisting social classes, Mouffe and Laclau criticize such economic essentialism. The specifics of Mouffe's and Laclau's interpretation of Gramsci's theory is that they adapt Gramsci's contribution on a very high niveau of abstraction (Opratko 2012). From a poststructual perspective, they define hegemony as an expansion of a specific discourse toward dominating the horizon of social order (Glaze, Mattissek 2009). Therefore, a discursive controversy over the establishment of a certain social reality is an important hegemonial process. The discursive creation of a new, partly instable (because of its inner contradictions) social reality is a hegemonial act. The moment of hegemonial power is noticable in such discursive controversies: the implementation of a specific hegemonial discourse is closely related to the marginalization of alternative social realities.

Mouffe's and Laclau's theory of discourse enables to conceptualize the constitution of constructed individual and collective identities without recoursing on the essentialist notions of identity. The identity is in their theory thus conceptualized as an "articulated set of elements" (Laclau 1990, p. 32). It follows that identity is a contingent and temporary structure that involves different elements and thus creates a continuation

and affinity within the chaos of possible social realities. Not only Mouffe and Laclau but also other poststructuralist thinkers like Lacan (1973) and Stavrakakis (1999) emphasize the role of the *privileged signifiers* for the process of identity building. Thus, *privileged signifiers* establish themselves as nodal points and temporary fixate meanings. Furthermore, *privileged signifiers* build chains of equivalence that contribute to the establishing of a certain social reality. A good example of such a chain of equivalence consisting of a privileged signifier and nodal points is the patriarchal discourse (Glasze, Mattissek 2009). The *privileged signifier* – "man" is in this discourse perceived in an equivalence with "rationality," "football," "physical strength."

The process of identity-building is characterized by a complementary *logic of difference* and a *logic of equivalence* in Mouffe's and Laclan's theory. Difference and equivalence are therefore the essential logics of the "social" and function as poles that generate and stretch the field of discursivity (Opratko 2012). The praxis of articulation (namely the formation of individuality, as discussed above) happens in the following context. Discourses are constituted in the process that aims to establish the relation of equivalence between certain elements. Hence, this means that the differences between single meanings are abolished (ibid., p. 137). The chain of equivalence, evolving in this process, erases the differences between the signifiers and refers to the single common aspect – identity. Following this thought, "the unity of the object is a retroactive effect of naming it" (Laclau 2005, p. 108). The theory of discourse, and the concept of the chain of equivalence in particular,

enables to conceptionally sharpen the idea of imaginary communities. Because of this reason, this concept is especially relevant in analyzing the discursive construction of analogy between gender equality policies and Communism.

A collective remembrance of experienced historical conflicts, the idea of a common language, common interests and values define the commonality between elements of social reality. This commonality of identity enables the distinction from "the outside" and creates a certain picture of community. A community is constituted through the common identification with the above-discussed nodal points. In the context of this paper, *genderism* and Communism may be interpreted as the signifiers that build the chain of equivalence. A discursively constructed chain of equivalence establishes the intuitive similarity between *genderism* and Communism and deletes the differences between the two concepts. The function of such a chain of equivalence is twofold. First, it contributes to the establishing of a coherent society with clearly defined elements that belong to and that are excluded from it. This aspect refers to the antagonistic establishment of boundaries. Second, the construction of equivalence between *genderism* and Communism is closely related to the question of hegemony and power relations. Following this thought, the enforcement of a certain hegemonial discourse is related with the marginalization and suppression of an alternative social reality. In the context of this paper, it means that the ongoing discursive anti-gender strategies in identifying *genderism* with Communism are attempts to prevent a social transformation and the establishment of a different social reality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of selected material has confirmed that the anti-gender discourse in Lithuania is supported by the construction of equivalence between *genderism* and Communism. The ill-defined term "ideology" plays an important role in instrumentalization, establishing a connection between *genderism* and Communism. Second, the analogy between gender equality policies and Communism is constructed by comparing the supposedly colonial behavior of the European Union with the oppressive politics of the Soviet Union. The EU is, in the Lithuanian anti-gender discourse, blamed for "exporting its own sexual perversion" to the young democracies of the Eastern Europe. This pattern of argumentation is also applied while discussing the state-socialist approaches toward gender equality. Finally, the construction of an analogy between *genderism* and Communism is based on the assumption that these phenomena have the same goal. Such a perceived common aim of *genderism* and Communism could be defined as the creation of a new society. The experimentation with and the denial of "human nature," social engineering, denying the findings of natural sciences are perceived to be signs of the ideological destruction of societal fundaments, which all supposedly proves the connection between *genderism* and Communism.

In order to discuss the question of function that such a construction of analogy fullfills, I relied on Chantal Mouffe's and Ernesto Laclau's theory of discourse and their concept of the chains of equivalence. Following their thought, a discursive construction of the term *genderism* may be perceived as a chain of equivalence that consists of various terms that are defined in

Mouffe's and Laclau's theory as *signifiers*. In the logic of equivalence, gender is related to the terms like "ideology," "colonization," "violence" in the Lithuanian anti-gender discourse. The term *Communism* is, too, established as a negatively coded chain of equivalence. The relation between such two negatively connotated chains of equivalence is issued as an *Antagonism* in the theory of the abovementioned philosophers. Furthermore, such an antagonistic border between the terms is a reference point through which society and societal actors can define themselves. Thus, the two abovementioned chains of equivalence serve as the reference points in relation to which the society can be identified as a homogenous entity.

The discursive strategies of *anti-genderism* employed to mobilize society against gender equality policies represents an important desiderata of further scientific analysis and investigation.

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Figure 1: *St. Sebastian* by Andrea Mantegna, 1480, oil on canvas: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Sebastian_(Mantegna)#/media/File:Andrea_Mantegna_088.jpg.

Figure 2: *St. Sebastian* by Marco Basaiti, first half of the 16th century, oil on canvas:https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marco_Basaiti_-_St_Sebastian_-_WGA01399.jpg.

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BLOGIAU NEI KOMUNIZMAS? DISKURSINĖ „ANTI-GENDER" MOBILIZACIJOS STRATEGIJA LIETUVOJE

Dovainė Buschmann

S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnyje nagrinėjama Lietuvoje paplitusi diskursinė „anti-gender" mobilizacijos strategija, kurios pagrindinis elementas yra palyginti lyčių lygybės politiką bei terminą „gender" su komunizmu. Tyrimo klausimas: kaip Lietuvoje yra kuriama analogija tarp termino „gender" ir valstybinio socializmo politikos, kuri buvo taikoma šioje šalyje? Kodėl toks palyginimas yra sėkminga „anti-gender" mobilizacijos strategija? Straipsnis remiasi pasirinktais tekstais, kurie tiesiogiai adresuoja terminą „gender" kaip komunizmą.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: gender, antigenderizmas, komunizmas, diskursas.