

Anti-Gender Discourse in Serbian Media

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Abstract

This paper seeks to lay out a critical feminist analysis of anti-gender discourse in 843 media texts published in Serbia from January 1, 2019 to October 31, 2022. A database with the largest coverage of mainstream news was selected. The analysis was carried out on a targeted sample through a search for several key terms characteristic for anti-gender discourses. Those terms are “gender ideology”, “family values”, and “traditional values”. Our research showed how the Serbian anti-gender movement's discourse corresponds to the discursive framework and broader activities of the international anti-gender movement. As such, the local anti-gender movement stands in opposition to feminism, the LGBTIQ+ movement, and progressive politics in general. Like the international anti-gender movement, the local current relies on essentialist and biological understandings of gender and sexuality and insists on the traditionalist family structure based on gender asymmetry and accompanying hierarchies and is part of a broader rejection of ideas and practices of social and human equality. This context shines a light on why ideas about the social conditioning of gender, the fluidity and changeability of human identities, as well as the equality (in the legal sense as well) of different manifestations of human sexuality are considered so subversive.

Keywords: feminist critical discourse analysis, anti-gender discourse, gender ideology, family values, media, Serbia

Introductory Considerations

A decade has passed since the anti-gender movement began to gain support and visibility throughout Europe. This 2012 turning point marked a massive conservative unification of anti-gender movements from France, across Slovenia, and on to Poland during mobilizations against campaigns seeking to ban same-sex marriage and those opposing the ratification of The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence

Against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention). However, the “fight” against “gender ideology” started earlier. This “fight” was spearheaded by the Vatican in the mid-1990s as part of efforts to roll back the recognition of sexual and reproductive rights by the United Nations (UN).

The anti-gender movement is conservative and has over the past three decades or so been gathering various actors on the right, uniting them in a “holy war” against “feminist and LGBTIQ+ attacks” on the “traditional family” and “normality”. The anti-gender movement unites individuals from religious entities, political parties, reactionary quasi- intellectuals, supporters of fake news, and ordinary citizens “concerned” that gender equality and guaranteeing basic human rights to discriminated minorities may threaten their social privileges.

At which point does this movement begin appearing in the Serbian media? Which ideological assumptions of the local anti-gender movement can be reconstructed from media discourse and what are the most common phrases used by its proponents? Who are the key players? Which topics have caused the greatest degree of anti-gender mobilization in the last three and a half years? These are some of the fundamental questions underlying this paper.

In order to arrive at answers to the above questions, a feminist critical discourse analysis was carried out on the content of 843 media texts published in Serbia between January 1, 2019 and October 31, 2022. The analysis was carried out through a search for these key terms: “gender ideology”, “family values”, and “traditional values”. A database with the largest coverage of Serbian mainstream news was chosen.

This paper contains three sections followed by concluding remarks. The theoretical framework is developed in the first section and entails a brief overview of previous research. Key terms are also defined in the first section. The second section is devoted to outlining the wider methodological framework and a precise description of the sample and concrete content analysis used. The following, third section, aims to present the data, along with quantitative and qualitative analyses of the collected data. The concluding remarks contain an analysis of the extent to which anti-gender discourse present in the local media corresponds to related anti-gender discourses within the international anti- gender movement.

Theoretical Framework

Anti-Gender Movement

The subject of our analysis are anti-gender discourses, so it is necessary to first define several basic terms that we will use in the text. The publications on which we rely to do this represent a corpus of recent texts that were created in the past few years, and which, with their interdisciplinary, transnational, and analytical approach, have established themselves as core literature when it comes to the phenomenon of anti-gender movements and the criticism of the so-called gender ideology (as formulated by conservative social actors). The recency of this literature speaks in favor of the growing interest in this phenomenon, which is gaining wider social support. An interesting discovery was made by Maja Gregorić, who analyzed academic texts fed into the Google Scholar database (scholar.google.com) containing the term “anti-gender” in the title, abstract, or content of the text (2020). Gregorić’s research showed that works dealing with the anti-gender movement have been published since 2014; a sharp increase in the number of texts happened three years later followed by a decline in the years to follow (Gregorić, 2020, pp. 152–153). However, this research was completed in February 2020, just before the outbreak of the global pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus, so it would be interesting to see more recent data. A simple

search of the same database provides insight into how several studies dedicated to this topic have been published over the past two years and there is a diverse corpus of texts related to the transnational context of anti-gender movements. A simple search of the same database provides insight into how a number of studies dedicated to this topic have been published over the past two years and there is a diverse corpus of texts related to the transnational context of anti-gender movements.

Damjan Denkovski, Nina Bernarding and Kristina Lunz (2021) see anti-gender movements as highly organized (although not centralized), financially well-secured, and transnational, whose goal, both locally and internationally, is to undermine women's and LGBTIQ+ rights. In addition, they add, conservative actors who do not attack gender rights for their own sake, but use these attacks to increase their own positions of power and support social and political hierarchies in a situation of their perceived threat and decline (Denkovski et al., 2021, p. 12). Noting that the right to abortion, programs such as sexuality education and gender studies, the right to homosexual marriage, and transnational initiatives in the fight against gender-based violence are increasingly threatened around the world – Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk write that the anti-gender movement appears to them as “increasingly influential and coherent” (2022, pp. 2–3).

From these definitions, it is possible to conclude that although it is not centralized, the anti-gender movement is nonetheless picking up steam and has clear characteristics. The various conservative actors leading it can be precisely mapped. In addition to this diversity of actors, as well as ideological divergence, a differential feature of this movement, above all, is the identification of a “common enemy” in the form of progressive forces that stand for gender equality in the broadest sense.

When it comes to anti-gender movements, it is necessary to make another important distinction – introduced by Irena Cvetkovikj and Manja Veličkovska – between: 1) the traditionally conservative sector of the general public and their negative attitudes towards feminism and LGBTIQ+ rights; and 2) anti-gender movements as transnational movements that oppose what they call “gender ideology” or “gender theory”. In this distinction, they build on the position of Andrea Pető, who states that anti-gender movements are a completely new phenomenon, whose goal is to change the world order, and science, in the Gramscian sense, is the field of struggle here. Andrea Pető also argues that the anti-gender movement is a nationalist, neoconservative response to the crisis of the global neoliberal order (Pető, 2021, p. 42). This movement, in the context of the broader crisis of democracy, is also analyzed by others (such as Graff & Korolczuk, 2022; Denkovski et al., 2021). The thesis of a completely new and distinguishable movement is confirmed by the fact that phrases like “gender ideology” have only been used since the 1990s, where the first European example of mass street mobilizations was the gathering of Catholics in Spain in 2005 as a reaction to the legalization of same-sex marriage (Paternotte, 2015).

Conservative Actors

Conservative actors leading anti-gender movements can be categorized in several ways. Denkovski et al. (2021), for example, divide these actors into three groups: old, new, and allies. Among the old, they include the Catholic church, right-wing think tanks, and institutions that are often based in the United States (Korolczuk 2017 lays out a similar categorization). They see the new groups as those that were specially created during the previous decade to fight “gender ideology”. They are made up of concerned parents or citizens around the world, whose messaging, branding, and visual identity are often very similar to each other, even though they come from different countries or even continents. In the new category, the authors include so-called government-sponsored non-governmental

organizations (GONGOs). As new actors, the authors also recognize other institutions that advocate against equality, as well as numerous political parties around the world that were either formed to deal with this topic or just joined the movement for the sake of collecting political points. Finally, they group allies – intellectuals, politicians, journalists – together into the third category (Denkovski et al., 2021, p. 10).

Of course, this division is not ideal as some allies can be included in several groups at the same time. In addition, the group of so-called new actors is also the most heterogeneous because it contains the largest number of different groups. But what is more important than the categorization itself, is that these groups already have a tradition and are connected both internationally and at the state and local level, so there is an easy flow of information among them. In addition, these are groups that have financial and other support, whether material or intellectual.

Elżbieta Korolczuk has classified several ways in which movements opposing “gender ideology” are organized. This categorization deepens the so-called new actors group classification. According to her, these groups are:

- international/transnational non-governmental organizations specializing in lobbying and the legislative processes of the European Court of Human Rights and aiming to limit LGBTIQ+ and reproductive rights;
- parliamentary committees established by political parties;
- national/local conservative non-governmental organizations;
- grassroots groups of concerned parents; and
- portals, online groups, and open platforms for disseminating information, books, booklets, etc. (Korolczuk, 2017, pp. 46–47).

Our research on media discourse in Serbia has also shown that very diverse groups of conservative actors are represented in the local public space.

Gender Ideology

As mentioned earlier, anti-gender movements, although they are led by so many different actors, are primarily united by their common “enemy”. Therefore, these are the movements that explicitly oppose what they call “gender ideology”. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte state that the emergence and development of the concept of “gender ideology” are well known and documented in literature (Paternotte & Kuhar 2017a, p. 9).

Namely, the beginning of the development of anti-gender discourses is linked to the counter-strategy devised by the Vatican in response to two United Nations (UN) conferences – the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994 and the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace held in Beijing in 1995. Therefore, this concept developed as a counterattack to the recognition of sexual and reproductive rights by the UN, which was viewed as a defeat by the Vatican. From this beginning and throughout the next decade, a wide international mobilization followed, which entailed sustained partnerships, propaganda, and campaigning against LGBTIQ+ and gender equality rights.

In Europe, anti-gender actors prepared the ground for the movement to gain momentum. Most often, the growth of these movements coincided with the preparation or adoption of laws that expanded the range of basic human rights for women and LGBTIQ+ persons. In most European countries, the turning point was 2012, and mobilizations were most often stimulated by specific political debates that depended on the local context. Same-sex mar-

riage was a key catalyst for protests in France (2012–2013), as was the referendum campaign in Slovenia (2009–2012, 2014–2015). Anti-gender debates in Poland also started in 2012, as actors voiced opposition to the ratification of The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (more in: Paternotte & Kuhar 2017b, pp. 256–258). Eszter Kováts and Maari Põim chronicled attacks on gender that happened in Europe from 2006 to 2015 (2015, pp. 13–18).

Over the next three decades, the term “gender ideology” was expanded and became part of the dominant discourse:

‘Gender ideology’ refers to a set of notions revolving around the idea of radical ‘gender feminists’ and the homosexual agenda advancing an idea that dismisses the natural order of things (i.e., the natural hierarchy of men and women, for instance), which in pushing for individual identity over social expectations undermines the anthropological basis of the family and, therefore, society. (Denkovski et al., 2021, pp. 9–10)

How Are “Traditional Values” Defined?

In the Russian context, one could not speak of an anti-gender movement, because the key concept around which associated right-wing currents gather is in fact “traditional values”. Emil Edenborg (2021a) analyzes Russian policies towards LGBTIQ+ rights in the context of their formulation as ideologies imposed on Russia from the outside – from the West. As Edenborg argues, the support and maintenance of heteronormative institutions is presented as opposition “from below” to liberal domination. This means that the 2013 ban on “propaganda promoting non-traditional sexual relations”¹ is not presented as an attack by the state on the rights of minorities, but is justified in this discourse as resistance to imposed sexual values (Edenborg 2021a, p. 2).

One concept stands out as central to this type of discourse, namely “traditional values”. It was in this way that traditional values became Russia’s state ideology from 2012 onwards. Traditional values here are rooted in traditions inherited from romantic nineteenth-century ideas of Russia as a guardian of Europe defending original Christian values, Stalinist homophobic practices, and late-Soviet politics. There is extensive literature on the formation and subsequent mainstreaming of the concept of traditional values (more in: Edenborg 2021a, 2021b).

Edenborg, relying on a large body of research, further states that in addition to internal state frameworks, Russia promotes “traditional values” with the help of various allies and strategies. The Russian Orthodox Church lobbies against LGBTIQ+ rights internationally, which has brought it closer to the Catholic Church as both lobby against same-sex marriage. In addition, the Russian state supports transnational non-governmental “for the family” organizations, including, among others, the World Congress of Families, which was co-founded in 1997 by conservatives from Russia and the USA. In addition to this organization, an ultra-Catholic organization with ties to the Trump administration Center for Family and Human Rights (C-Fam), located in the USA, also receives financial support from Russia (more in Edenborg 2021a, 2021b). There are still differences between these movements and one should not fall into the trap of putting them all under the same framework. On the other hand, there are similarities in their actions, messages, and intentions, as Edenborg (2021b) writes,² building on a line of thought developed by Paternotte and Kuhar (2018). In their comparative approach, they advocate for the thesis that it is important to start from the context, which is of particular importance for our paper and the analysis of the intertwining of related discourses of various actors in Serbia.

In the post-Yugoslav region, the body of research on anti-gender movements is always expanding and comes from a variety of fields. Thus, an overview of research in Croatia can be found in the work by Škokić (2019, p. 251); research on gender ideology in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina was done by Nejra Veljan and Mida Čehajić Čampara (2021); we can read about the situation in Slovenia in a contribution by Roman Kuhar (2017); and an analysis of anti-gender strategies and movements in North Macedonia was done by Irena Cvetkovikj and Manja Veličkovska (2022). Jelisaveta Blagojević (2006) and Daša Duhaček (2009) have written about concepts of sex and gender. In the recent years, Sanja Đurin, Renata Jambrešić Kirin and Tea Škokić (2019), Adriana Zaharijević (2019), and Adriana Zaharijević and Katarina Lončarević (2020) have written about attacks on gender and the concept of gender ideology from a theoretical perspective.

Research Framework

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

Our research is situated in a wider methodological framework of feminist and queer critical discourse analysis. Michelle Lazar (Lazar, 2018) outlines a broader definition of critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a movement whose goal is to raise critical awareness of the discursive level of social problems such as discrimination, unequal distribution of social power, and unequal opportunities for oppressed social groups, as a means of contributing to wider emancipatory projects. In these types of analyses, the phenomenon of gender inequality has occupied an important place since the beginning. At the same time, feminist studies have significantly impacted the development of CDA during its formative period in the 1980s. A little later, in the middle of the 2000s, feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) developed as its own specialized branch of study. As Lazar further explains, the term feminist here refers not only to the category of gender as one of the subjects of analysis – which is the case in CDA – but also to contemporary feminist epistemologies and practices and the principles of CDA. Among these contemporary feminist approaches, Michelle Lazar includes those that build on post-structuralist, queer, post-colonial, and intersectional theories, in which identity is understood as constructivist and gender as non-binary and changeable. As one of the founders of FCDA, Michelle Lazar defines it in the following way:

Feminist CDA is a political perspective which investigates the complex and diverse ways by which gender ideologies³ that entrench power asymmetries become ‘common sense’ in particular communities and discourse contexts, and how they may be challenged. This includes discursively sustained assumptions and inequalities, ranging from overt to increasingly subtler forms of sexism. Focusing on social justice and transformation, the objective of FCDA is to demystify and challenge discourses that continue to buttress gendered social orders in various ways, which harm and fore-close socially progressive possibilities for individuals and groups. (Lazar, 2018, p. 372)

Lazar (2018) formulates six interrelated principles of FCDA. The first principle is tied to the concept of gender as an ideological structure and practice that divides people into two blocks, basing the division on the assumed naturalness of sexual differences. The second principle is tied to the critique of power (starting from the Foucauldian [Michel Foucault] perspective) and focuses research on gender relations and identity. That the relationship between discourse and society should be analyzed as dialectical is the third principle of FCDA. Developing critical reflexivity as a practice is the fourth principle of this approach. The fifth principle outlines FCDA as an analytical activism, stating that it strives for a society of equality in which gender does not predetermine interpersonal relations. In addition, analytical activism is said to be constantly seeking out and imagining ways of being and working that are socially inclusive and open to everyone. Finally, the sixth principle

of this approach is the transnational lens, because the importance of analyzing both similarities and contextual differences in the functioning of gender ideologies and how different strategies are accepted in response to them are highlighted.

What unites all of these principles is that FCDA strives to overcome the boundaries between theory and practice, and Lazar sees political criticism of discourse not as a contribution to action, but as action itself. Our paper can also be read in this context, because our critical analysis of anti-gender discourse in the local media does not aim to only neutrally present these tendencies in media language, but also to criticize them from the perspective of the struggle for gender equality.

Alongside FCDA, it is also necessary to include a queer perspective when criticizing anti-gender media discourse. This is because the anti-gender movement focuses with the same force on the collapse of LGBTIQ+ rights as it does on those based on the principle of gender equality. In the anthology in which Michelle Lazar's text was published, an important contribution that introduces a queer linguistic perspective was written by Heiko Motschenbacher (Motschenbacher, 2018). This theoretical perspective emphasizes sexual identities and the power relations (also Foucauldian) that affect them, producing social inequality. Approaches that connect the analysis of sexuality and CDA focus on questioning hegemonic, stereotypical, and essentialist discourses about identities, as well as gender binarism as a fundamental mechanism on which heteronormativity is based (Motschenbacher 2018, p. 389).

Sample and Methodological Remarks

The analysis was carried out on a targeted sample made up of media texts published between January 1, 2019 and September 30, 2022 on internet news portals. These internet news portals are an extension of their print, radio, or television editions (and at their core purpose correspond to the functions of the daily or weekly press). Media internet portals that do not have printed editions were also included in the sample. The specialized search engine naslovi.net (<https://naslovi.net/>) was used to form the sample as it enables keyword searches of all news published on the sites included in its database. Naslovi.net shows only the title, source, and summary of news pieces on its pages, while links direct visitors to the site of the source itself where they can read articles in their entirety. Given that the texts were collected electronically, based on a keyword search, there is a possibility that some stories may have been missed, so a slight deviation from the actual results is possible.

The sample includes the following media outlets: Akter, Al Jazeera, Alo, B92, BBC, Beta, BizLife, BK TV, Blic, Borba, Cenzolovka, Danas, Dnevnik, Deutsche Welle, Euronews, Euroactiv, Voice of America, Glas javnosti, Glas Šumadije, Glas Zapadne Srbije, InfoKg, Insajder, Jugmedija, Jug press, Južne vesti, Luftika, Kurir, Moj Novi Sad, Mondo, Morava info, N1, Nedeljnik, Newsweek, Niške vesti, Noizz, Nova S, Nova ekonomija, Novi magazin, NoviSad.com, Novi standard, OK radio, Pečat, Peščanik, Pirotke vesti, Politika, PP media, Pravda, Press, Prva, Radio 021, Radio 101, Radio sto plus, RTS, RTV Kragujevac, RTV Novi Pazar, RTVVojvodina, Sandžak press, SEEbiz, Slobodna Evropa, Sportal, Sputnik, Srbija danas, Studio B, Subotica.com, Svet, Svet plus, Šumadija press, Talas, Telegraf, Večernje novosti, Veliki park, Vesti online, Vice, Vranjske, Vreme, XXZ magazine.

When it comes to the methodological approach, the research relied on content analysis techniques. The unit of analysis is the topic, which can be textual and/or pictorial. The categories of analysis were determined on the basis of formal (visibility of events) and content (representation of these events in the media) criteria. As for visibility, the frequency and importance given to events through the place/time, context and form of their presentation are examined. Quantitative indicators are used, primarily the number of pub-

lished texts, in which sections they are located, the length of the texts, what is the ratio of signed to unsigned texts. Examining the representation of events in the media – i.e. the way in which they are presented – requires a qualitative analysis that includes an analysis of the interpretive framework and strategy of representation – i.e. the basic messages obtained through media reporting and the way in which they acquire meaning and values through textual media practices (and which are these meanings and values). This includes the analysis of words and constructions used for supertitles, headings and subtitles of texts, because they directly indicate the attitude readers should have towards the problem/content of the text. Also, the composition of the texts, i.e. the way in which they are composed and organized, is analyzed. An important segment of this paper is the analysis of gaps – of what is missing in the reporting – as a basis for drawing conclusions about what is found instead of the missing content.

Analysis of Collected Materials

When it comes to the visibility, that is, the representation of texts containing the term “gender ideology”, the analysis of a targeted sample that includes 843 media texts, published in the period from January 1, 2019 to October 31, 2022, shows that it is nearly absent in media discourse before 2018. It is interesting that all 18 articles published in 2018 refer to Croatia, that is, they report on the process of ratifying the Istanbul Convention and the protests that ensued. In the period from January 1, 2019 to October 31, 2022, 30 media texts were published in which the term “gender ideology” could be found.

Relative to the total number of published texts, almost three quarters (74%) were published by two media outlets on the right-wing of the political spectrum: Novi Standard (14) and Pečat (8). The weekly media Vreme published two articles in the analyzed time frame, while all other media published one media article each. It is interesting that out of a total of 30 published texts, five of them (17%) were published in Vreme, Danas, XXZ, and Noizz, and they represent texts that are extremely critical of the use of term “gender ideology” and the activities of the advocates of the fight against it. The question remains to what extent this is a reaction to broader

Table 1. Media texts per year

Year	Number of Media Texts	%
2019	5	17
2020	13	43
2021	/	/
2022	12	40
Total	30	100

Table 2. Published content per media outlet

Media Outlet	Number of Media Texts	%
<i>Novi standard</i>	14	47
<i>Pečat</i>	8	28
<i>Vreme</i>	2	7
<i>Danas</i>	1	3
<i>Srbija danas</i>	1	3
<i>Dnevnik</i>	1	3
<i>Večernje novosti</i>	1	3
<i>XXZ</i>	1	3
<i>Noizz</i>	1	3
Total	30	100

processes of questioning women’s human rights in the context of the international anti-gender movement, rather than a consequence of the influence of the local offshoot.

On the other hand, most of the texts were published in society sections (9) or represent columns and opinion pieces (6). Bearing in mind that the usual order of sections in the media reflects a hierarchy of content importance, in which politics, economy, and society usually occupy the front and first few pages, and the importance of the content decreases until it finally ends with entertainment, leisure, and the like, the sections in which texts were published are an indication that the content covered by the term “gender ideology” is recognized as socially important.

Nearly half of all published texts covered by the term “gender ideology” were attributed to an author. This is an indication of this content being recognized as socially important.⁵

The relatively small number of total published texts in which the term “gender ideology” can be found, the term’s use being limited to media on the extreme right-wing of the political spectrum, a large chunk of the texts being published in the World or Region sections, as well as the absence of the term’s local use may represent an indication that it is still not widely accepted in the public discourse in Serbia (or at least not by the mainstream media). A term that is much more prevalent in the public sphere and has a similar content is “family (and traditional) values”. Like “gender ideology”, it also functions as an empty signifier whose use depends largely on the context in which it is used and which covers an entire spectrum of meaning – from the nuclear family to the limited understanding of the nation as a patriarchal extended family with rigidly defined gender roles and clear hierarchies.

Table 3. Content per section

Section	Number of Published Texts	%
Society	9	30
Columns/ Opinion Pieces	6	20
World	6	20
News	2	7
Politics	1	3
No Section ⁴	6	20
Total	30	100

Table 4. Overview of published content according to attribution

Attribution	Number of Published Texts	%
Byline	14	47
Staff Writer, No Byline	2	7
Adapted Agency News	2	7
Other Media	12	39
Total	30	100

In the period from January 1, 2019 to October 31, 2022, 342 texts mentioning this term were published in various media and their number is constantly growing.

Relative to the total number of published texts, the largest number was published by *Danas* (30), *Kurir* (29), *Blic* (22), *Pečat* (20), *B92* (18), *N1* (16), *Večernje novosti* (14), *Alo* (14), *Telegraf* (13), and *Nova S* (13). These media outlets published a total of 189 media texts, which represents more than 60% of all published texts.

An indication of the fluidity and dispersiveness of the term “family values” – and the variability of its meaning in different contexts – is its representation in sections that cover very different content. Its presence is also an indication that the use of this term is seen as unproblematic and widely acceptable.⁶

Table 5. Published texts per year

Year	Number of Published Texts	%
2019	49	14
2020	63	18
2021	77	23
2022	153	45
Total	342	100

Table 6. Published content per media outlet

Media Outlet	Number of Published Texts	%
<i>Danas</i>	30	9
<i>Kurir</i>	29	9
<i>Blic</i>	22	7
<i>Pečat</i>	20	6
<i>B92</i>	18	5
<i>N1</i>	16	5
<i>Večernje novosti</i>	14	4
<i>Alo</i>	14	4
<i>Telegraf</i>	13	4
<i>Nova S</i>	13	4
<i>Novi standard</i>	9	3
<i>Radio O21</i>	9	3
<i>Pravda</i>	8	2
<i>Nedeljnik</i>	8	2
<i>Mondo</i>	7	2
<i>RTV Vojvodina</i>	7	2
<i>Srbija danas</i>	7	2
<i>Sputnjik</i>	5	1
<i>Politika</i>	5	1
<i>BizLife</i>	5	1
<i>Morava info</i>	5	1
<i>RTS</i>	5	1
Other Media Outlets	73	22
Total	342	100

Table 7. Content per section

Section	Number of Published Texts	%
Politics	48	14
World/Region	47	14
Entertainment	41	12
Society	32	9
News	32	9
Columns/ Opinion Pieces	31	9
Free time	22	6
Sport	20	6
City	18	5
Economy	13	4
Culture	10	3
Serbia	10	3
Other	6	2
No Section ⁷	12	4
Total	342	100

Table 8. Overview of published content according to attribution

Attribution	Number of Published Texts	%
Staff Writer, No Byline	92	27
Byline	90	26
News Agency	52	16
Initials-Only Byline	29	8
Adapted Agency News	11	3
Other Media Outlet	28	8
No Attribution ⁸	40	12
Total	342	100

In what follows, we will focus on the texts in which “family values” are interpreted in a political way by political actors as being desirable yet threatened models of organizing individuals and society and the similar way in which this takes place within the framework of “gender ideology”. It should be kept in mind that precisely because it is widespread and seems common sense, the term “family values” simultaneously has a much greater capacity for mobilizing wider sections of the population. It is possible to single out several

narratives around which the concepts of “gender ideology”/“family values” are articulated; they are often intertwined and connected to each other. Their basis is in conservative traditionalist discourse in which the family represents a metonymic image of the nation in which women primarily figure as mothers, the embodiment and symbolic bearers of the ideals of the nation and/or the state and, at the same time, a mechanism for their maintenance (or destruction).

By reason of the above, the three key terms in the determination of the nation and national identity without which these terms (the nation and national identity) cannot be considered are: “motherland”, “fatherland”, and “homeland” (Grosby, 2005). The first two terms combine the concepts of mother and father – in the sense of their biological functions – and land as the image of a certain territory. The third term, “homeland”, refers to the immediate family environment in which a child is conceived, raised, and grows up, adopting the image and territory as part of itself (Grosby, 2005). As Nira Yuval-Davis states, women have always been important protagonists in the national arena not only because of their role in the biological reproduction of the nation – their role in cultural reproduction is essential as well. A key determinant of the militaristic and nationalist creation of national identity is the genealogical dimension of a specific, common origin in the form of blood and ancestry, which are the basis for the creation of a homogeneous representation of the nation. Thus, in such a collective imaginary, women are primarily associated with children and childbirth, the future of the family and the collective, i.e. the nation as such.

They are also the bearers of the honor of the community because with their appropriate behavior they embody the boundary that marks the boundary of the collective itself. In this sense, the purpose of a woman is her reproductive function, that is, the preservation of not only biological existence, but also the purity of the nation (Yuval-Davis, 1997), and the traditionalist structure of the family, based on an essentialist understanding of gender and sexuality, gender asymmetry and accompanying hierarchies, is the guarantee of the acceptance and survival of a hierarchical society, state, and nation. As Adriana Zaharijević puts it, “biological determinism is fatefully linked with ‘non-biological’ roles that constitute sociality and which remain at the foundation of hierarchy” (Zaharijević, 2019, p. 38). Hence, it is not unexpected that in Serbia, opposition to “gender ideology” – that is, advocacy for “family values” – is also presented as a defensive reaction to the agenda of the destruction of the family, the origins of which some proponents traced as far back as the French Revolution in 1789. One source states the following:

In order to explain and understand it, we must first give at least a sketch of the modern history of the attack on the traditional family, which eventually produced results in a large number of countries. Understandably, we will focus on communism, feminism, totalitarianism, as well as two of the most important global revolutionary events (1789 and 1917), which, miraculously, center the ‘reform’ of traditional families – via divorce, free love, the emancipation of women, the equalization of legal and illegal cohabitation, i.e. the status of married and illegitimate children, the introduction of women into the labor market, the change of tax policy, the affirmation of abortion, etc. – as the site of implementation of new policies. (Đurković, 2020a)

It is also not unexpected that these two great revolutions – the French of 1789 and the October Revolution of 1917 – are mapped as the cruxes of “modern attacks on the family”, as their ideas about democracy, human freedom, and equality, as well as the ways in which to realize them, crucially shaped modern history. The former of the two revolutions, among other things, shaped modern history by making the women’s and feminist move-

ment possible through the idea of the equality of all people. The latter did so with its revolutionary practices regarding the equalizing of men and women.

However, as Đurković further states, although “the modern destruction of the family is reduced [...] to a repetition of the mechanisms that were set up in early Soviet communism, before Stalin’s conservative shift [...] the theoretical basis for the destruction of the family was well underway in the Western civilization, too. It began in the sixties and at the end of the twentieth century, it will by far surpass the models and demands propagated by Trotsky and Kollontai” (Đurković, 2020b). The consequences of the alleged “destruction of the family” can be seen today in the imposition of the idea that “the family from which we all came and in which we were created and raised is no longer needed,” that children are “an unimaginable labor and sacrifice” for which “today’s ‘liberated,’ advanced, work and free-sex-occupied woman no longer has either the will or the time,” in families that are “racially mixed, created out of wedlock, same-sex (although it has become redundant to talk about sexes as they have been overcome and abolished), ‘partnerships,’ or simply ‘single-parent’ families” (Панов, 2022). This destruction of the “normal” and “natural” family, consisting of a man and a woman as natural, biological opposites, is seen as part of the project of “relativizing and canceling fundamental traditional values of national, religious and cultural identities” whose main exponents are “ideological-political feminism, the so-called global LGBT front, and the extreme environmentalism of the ‘greens’, which has a tendency of sliding into ecofascism” (Милосављевић, 2022). According to advocates of the fight against “gender ideology”, the “ideology of genderism”⁹ plays a key role in the new value framework that will lead to “establishing the conditions for the fundamental destruction of the world as we know it” (Панов, 2022). As another author puts it:

For man to be reduced to a foolish being such as a consumer, or ‘economic animal’, it is necessary to destroy every other identity that adorns him, from nationality to sex. [...] The ideology of ‘genderism’ can be observed in this context, that is, in the creation of countless different easily changing ‘genders’, none of which is the real, true gender, i.e. sex. The two natural sexes are to be replaced by hundreds, if not thousands of ‘genders’, none of which are real but artificial. By abolishing any natural, historical, spiritual, or genetic authenticity and exclusivity, counter-initiation aims to encompass everything and everyone, to network the entire planet. (Родић, 2022)

This “escalation of gender madness” that is “so far removed from life, from real men and women, from what they want and need” and according to which “no male characteristic is desirable” (and “not only those that have any relation with testosterone – strength, courage, potency – but also socially mediated traits like protectiveness”), “is no longer even an ideology anymore; it’s insanity” (Antonić, 2021). According to these authors, this “ideology” is promoted in different ways, especially through state institutions, legislation, and school programs, allegedly targeting the most vulnerable: children.

Starting in kindergarten, sexual education – which has nothing to do with mental or physical health, but rather with the destruction of sexual identities – is also imposed on children in the West. The same was attempted in 2017 in Serbia, under the guise of the fight against violence in schools. This move was part of a ‘project’ by the Ministry of Education, which published a textbook manual entitled ‘Educational package for learning about the topic of sexual violence against children for primary and secondary schools in Serbia’, under the slogan ‘From kindergarten to college, with textbooks from various subjects, we’re learning to resist violence against children and women.’ [...] The aggressive propaganda of gender theory and the ‘fluid’

understanding of sexuality in preschool and grade school programs and the media results in increasing confusion and the loss of children and young people who, during puberty and adolescence, have yet to build their sexual identity. (Dimitrijević, 2021)

People are being sent the message that by accepting the 'gender identity' narrative they are becoming 'all-powerful' and that sounds appealing, doesn't it? However, 'omnipotence' is only an illusion: these people become, unfortunately, only a means to an ideological concentration camp. I was recently sitting with a friend who has a son in elementary school. We talked about the famous biology textbook. That friend of mine told me that his son is being taught at school that he is not a boy, but that he has yet to decide what (all) he will be. Completely desperate, he asked me: Who has the right to say THAT to my son? While listening to him, I remembered the famous scene from the novel *The Bridge on the Drina* where the Ottomans kidnap male children from their mothers. In the past, that was called a tribute in blood, and today, it seems, it's called going to school (Владушић 2022).

Through the establishment of sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit binary oppositions like nature/ideology, healthy/pathological, normal/abnormal, the defense of the traditional family (and especially children) is established as a defense of the "natural order of the world", based on gender complementarity, sexual and physical differences, and biological determinism. In that process, the rejection of demands for equality, autonomy, and the recognition of differences combined with anti-modern and anti-Western discourse is re-labeled as a defense of "us", the Serbian collective, on which outside forces are imposing that "which is not acceptable in our Serbian Orthodox tradition and culture" and calling "into question [...] our people, ethics, morality, conscience, history, and beliefs" (Stanje Stvari 2022).

What is seen as incompatible with tradition and culture can be traced on a number of levels. One of them concerns the numerous manifestations of human sexuality (especially homosexuality), which are described as "sick" and "unnatural" and actualized anew, for example, every time the Pride Parade is organized or the possibility of the legal regulation of same-sex unions is discussed. One author writes:

From the warning that failure to hold a gay parade is the end of Serbia's European integration, to the outbreak of a civil war between LGBT+ extremists and normal people who do not want to watch the sick parade. [...] Someone could say that we should ignore the sick and not give them the time of day, but precisely because we ignored them in previous years, we are today in a situation where a handful of sodomites are terrorizing us and directly attacking the sovereignty of the country and the will of its majority population. And not only that! Their fingers have let their tentacles loose on the most sacred thing we have: children! Through the education system, the media, they aggressively work to change the minds of the youngest and by imposing sick ideas about sex, the beauty of diversity in such an affirmative way where children are presented with gender ideology as the only way to success in business, society, and life. Marriage, a healthy family, traditionalism, having children, Orthodoxy, and morality are all backward ideas of Balkan primitivism against which it is time for the new man (LGBT+ man) to rebel, exploring and tasting all the deviant freedoms offered by European civilization. And all of this communicated via a very insidious manipulative game in which they are the ones spreading love, and we, by teaching children that homosexuality is a disease, are also teaching them hatred, not only towards them but towards everything foreign. (Вейзовић, 2022)

Other levels refer to the problematization of the patriarchal gender regime in general (gender roles, but also the physical and psychological integrity of women) and feminism as a theory and practice of female emancipation.

A society in which feminist ideology operates is automatically defined as patriarchal (for feminists a synonym for an undesirable society), and the main bearers of this culture are often accused of racism and encouraging 'rape culture'. Carrying out a kind of synthesis of these claims, it is not difficult to see that, when looking through the lens of feminism, men and women appear as actors opposed to each other by their very nature, and from this a naturalness of periodic subordination to one another follows. [...] Moreover, if we accept that biological reproduction is essential for the survival of the species, which is not a dramatic discovery but a simple fact, we can conclude that the supposed oppression of women by men, as imagined by feminists, is actually a desirable phenomenon from the perspective of biological survival of mankind. With very limited exceptions, it can be pointed out that every society that has accepted women's rights and feminist ideology has condemned itself to a gradual disappearance. (Malenica, 2021)

With a certain dose of sarcasm, we can note that women have gained the right to decide independently, without any influence from fathers, about the life and death of future generations, but representatives of feminist organizations still act as if women are being denied the basic rights that were given to them long ago. [...] In light of these facts, which are indisputable, it turns out that the purpose of feminism today is a mere struggle for power. The characteristics of contemporary feminism are a departure from an objective perception of reality, aggressive attacks on the current structures of society, the demonization of men as a category, and a destructive effect on the ability of certain societies to renew themselves, both in a purely biological sense, as well as culturally and nationally. (Malenica, 2020)

Through formulations like the "demonization of men" and "the undesirability of any male characteristics", these authors introduce the battle of the sexes motif, for which feminism is allegedly responsible and which additionally strengthens the image of the threatened (male) ethnic collective and the need for necessary defense. The following is a more explicit formulation:

There are no worse oppressors than feminists. They perpetrate the worst kind of torture on society, they rape us with foolishness and use all their might to destroy the Serbian family. This heinous abuse of domestic violence in order to marginalize men and deprive them of their role in society and the family is terrible. (Lisinac, 2021)

Due to the fact that "the basic function of feminism [...] is the destruction of the empirically confirmed patriarchal society based on tradition and the identity of the people", feminism figures as a tool that "the West [...] uses to attack Serbia and other countries" (Правда, 2019). As a foreign "import", it is part of the "new totalitarianism" in which "Western values [...] are cruise missiles and Trojan horses of Western interests" (Ћирјаковић, 2022), and "women's rights and women's suffering [...] are key neocolonial tools" (Ћирјаковић, 2021).

Further, "the main incentives for change of this sort come from Western actors" under the guise of preparations for "European integration" (Ђурковић, 2020a). Its bearers are "the media, NGO networks, states of colonial democracy, the 'winners' of the transition in academia" (Рељић, 2022), the state apparatus that "ceases to exist as an extension of the

nation” and “members of the national elite” who have lost “the feeling of loyalty to the national idea”, an “alienated elite, [...] guided by their own narrow interests” that is “disinterested in or actively hostile towards the nation from which it arose” (Malenica, 2021).

In it, the citizen’s side, composed mainly of literate, cultured narcissists with all of their teeth, blames Serbian society – supposedly incurably ill – for every ugly thing and evil. This tendency of reading as Serbian every individual pathology and shameful act always escalates when some gruesome thing has elements that can be linked to the Serbian Orthodox Church and other specific institutions or cultural features of the Serbs. Personal evil then, as a rule, is interpreted as an alleged expression of culturally-framed, indestructible ethnic evil. Moreover, this reading of individual pathologies as Serbian is usually used as further ‘proof’ that all of us – of course, if we do not continuously decontaminate ourselves and if we do not deal [with the past] – are at least somewhat ‘Serbian beasts,’ Orthodoxy-led civilization-al scum prone to slaughter and rape. (Ћирјаковић, 2021)

Summary and Closing Remarks

This analysis of a targeted sample of 843 media texts published in Serbia between January 1, 2019 and October 31, 2022 shows that the term “gender ideology” has not taken root in the local media space. The relatively small number of total published texts in which it can be found – a large share of which was published in the World or Region sections – its use being confined to media on the extreme right-wing of the political spectrum, and the absence of its “local use” are all indications that it is still not widely accepted in public discourse (or at least not in mainstream media). A term that is much more prevalent in the public space and is constituted of similar content is “family (and traditional) values”. Like “gender ideology”, it also functions as an empty signifier whose use depends largely on the context in which it is used and which covers the entire spectrum of meaning – from the nuclear family to the limited understanding of the nation as a patriarchal extended family with rigidly-defined gender roles and clear hierarchies. As is the case with proponents of the fight against “gender ideology”, at the center of campaigning for “family values” is the defense of the “natural” order of the world through the defense of the “natural” family, which is threatened by various social and legislative interventions concerning reproductive and LGBT rights, various measures against gender discrimination, the equality of homosexual and heterosexual unions, sexual education, and protection from gender-based violence.

Narratives around which gender ideology is articulated in other countries – such as gender as an ideological construct whose goal is the colonization of local cultures and communities for the sake of the interests of foreign power centers (whether they be neoliberal capitalism or the continuation of communism) and feminism and, more broadly, the discourse of human rights as the new totalitarianism – are joined in Serbia by anti- Western and anti-modern discourse on European integration as a means of destroying national sovereignty and the Serbian national identity. In this process of attacking the national identity, which is seen as predetermined, immutable, and essentially timeless, according to the proponents of “family values”, parts of the local “unnationalised” and “alienated” political and intellectual elite also play an active role.

As in the case of the international anti-gender movement, relying on an essentialist and biological understanding of gender and sexuality and insisting on a traditional family structure rooted in gender asymmetry and accompanying hierarchies, is part of a broader rejection of ideas and practices of social and human equality. Only in this context does it become clearer why ideas about the social conditioning of gender, the fluidity and

changeability of human identities, as well as the equality (in the legal sense as well) of different manifestations of human sexuality are considered so subversive.

In this sense, the modalities of the use of the terms “gender ideology”, “family values”, “traditional values” in the media in Serbia clearly correspond to the discursive framework and wider actions of the international anti-gender movement, which confronts feminism, the LGBTIQ+ movement, and, in general, the left and progressive politics.

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ENDNOTES

1. The ban is the result of the Federal Law On Protection of Children from Information Harmful to Their Health and Development (О защите детей от информации, причиняющей вред их здоровью и развитию), which was approved by the State Duma on June 11, 2013.
2. To explain the affiliations of diverse actors, Edenberg analyzes anti-gender policies through the concept of discursive coalitions (2021b).
3. At this point, it is important to make a terminological distinction. Michelle Lazar uses the phrase «gender ideology» to refer to the ideological assumptions of social patterns that support gender oppression. Such a definition is very different from the same phrase used by conservative political currents to describe the «feminist conspiracy» in the fight against what they call «traditional values and the family».
4. A closer inspection of the «No Section» texts shows that out of a total of six published texts, four were columns or opinion pieces in Novi standard, one was a press release from the cultural institution Matica Srpska and the Committee for the Standardization of the Serbian Language commenting on the adoption of the Law on Gender Equality and particularly the use of gender-sensitive language (published in Novi standard) and a journalist's comment on the Noizz internet portal.
5. The attribution of content is another element that establishes the hierarchy of content importance in the media. While less important topics are less covered in depth and mostly through agency news and briefs, neither of which comes with a byline, deeper and more detailed coverage of topics recognized as socially important and it is usually left to more experienced and renowned journalists or guest authors
6. That the use of the term «family values» is seen as unproblematic is additionally indicated by its frequent use in texts written for marketing purposes, that is, as part of the advertising of various companies, products, and/or services.
7. Closer inspection of this category reveals that it is mostly made up of agency news.
8. Closer inspections shows that 10 of the texts without attribution are PR texts (economic marketing) while a significant chunk is agency news.
9. As the term gender comes from the English language, in order to place an accent on gender being an «imported» term, the author uses the phrase the «ideology of genderism» (Serb. ideologija dženderizma) alongside «gender ideology» (Serb. rodna ideologija).

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