



# Lithuanian gender policies between biopolitics and moral panics

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# Biopolitics

- Biopolitics - the study of the “politicization of biology,” ways by which the biological dimension and life (including our human social life) come under the control of different power apparatuses.
- Foucault's analysis of sexuality as an apparatus of biopower. In Foucault's words, biopolitics is politics "situated and exercised at the level of life" (Foucault 1981,137).
- Foucault: “biopolitics deals with the population as a political problem, as a problem that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem and as power's problem” (Foucault et al. 2003, 245).
- Through biopolitics, normalising regulation of our lives as subjects takes place.



# Biopolitics and gender

- Like sexuality, gender is also entangled in the similar web of biopolitics – i. e., in the control of our lives.
- Work of biopolitics in the (re)production of the properly gendered citizen.
- Gender policies (or, in a more narrow way, family policies) are also related to the debate over the power-knowledge of gender and sex, a part of biopolitics or control over populations.

# Biopolitics and gender

- Gender and family policies “as significant biopolitical tools of neoliberal governmentality to enable women [and men] to work and reproduce, to produce capital and the workforce, thus filling a labor shortage gap, easing the pressure on welfare systems, and ensuring the existence of a future labor force” (Jemima Repo 2015).



# Biopolitics and gender

- How to govern sex, how to live gender and how to survive in the precarious game of life?
- To optimize national economies by reorganizing our lives (produce and reproduce).

# Gender, family and moral panics

- Gender and family as objects of moral panics when people resort to affective/emotional excess and get enmeshed in “a daily economy of saturated panics” (Grossberg 1992).
- The moral panic is about instilling fear in people and, in so doing, encouraging them to try to turn away from the complexity and the visible social problems of everyday life and either to retreat into a ‘fortress mentality’ — a feeling of hopelessness, political powerlessness and paralysis (McRobbie 1994).

# Objectives

- By using one of the most conspicuous example of gender and family policies, the *State Family Policy Concept* (2008), to demonstrate how conservative concepts of gender and family become a part of technologies of social control targeted at the discipline and regulation of life and its processes (qualitative content analysis of this document).
- How these policies play into moral panics?

# State Family Policy Concept (2008)

- Declares the importance of “traditional” family as an “primary and ultimate social institution”.
- Quoting international documents, it is stated that “human rights first of all are implemented through *family*” (VŠPK 2008, 5).
- The term of “gender complementarity” is frequently repeated which means an “equal cooperation of a man and woman in different kind of activities” (VŠPK 2008, 6).



# State Family Policy Concept (2008)

- The whole *Concept* is based on biological understanding of gender (sex differences).
- Crude biologism of this gender and family policy document is demonstrated by oft-quoted neurobiological and neuropsychological studies or “brain science.” This science is used to prove that different gendered behaviours among men and women and their gender identities exclusively depend on their different brain structure and functioning.

# State Family Policy Concept (2008)

- The digressions to brain sciences in the *Concept* clearly indicates that the term “gender complementarity” means nothing but secondary or “complementary” place of women in society. Their role is to merely complement men.

# State Family Policy Concept (2008)

- In its manipulative rhetoric, economic and social instability, incoherent family policy and the lack of attention to “harmonious” family in Lithuania are described, in the *Concept*, as main reasons for the increasing crisis of family institution in general. No references to many social processes that have been affecting changes of “traditional” family both in Lithuania and abroad are made:

*“... the absence of general family policy targeted at strengthening family values in the state and an insufficient attention to a harmonious healthy family highlight an increasing crisis of family institution” (VSPK 2008, 7).*



# State Family Policy Concept (2008)

- The *Concept* enumerates demographic problems that Lithuania encounters. Funnily, the most important are the following: a small number of marriages, later age of people who enter marriages, a large number of divorces and cohabitations when couples live together without an official marriage certificate.

# State Family Policy Concept (2008)

- The *Concept* argues that life out of wedlock is related to a number of problems, for instance, sexual unfaithfulness, promiscuity and even violence against women and children.
- To support these arguments, the Concept uses unreliable research conducted by ultraconservative and neoliberal think tanks such as Institute for American Values.

# State Family Policy Concept (2008)

- To be fair, it should be said that, in this *Concept* real issues related to family life are mentioned, namely, poverty, the lack of affordable housing for families, emigration, underdeveloped forms of flexible forms of employment, the lack family-friendly work environment, an insufficient network of pre-school institutions, an insufficient system of social support for families, violence against children, etc.



# State Family Policy Concept (2008)

- However, these enumerated problems disappear in an array of pseudoproblems, for instance, the description of a negative effects of media on adolescents and early age of their sexual relations that “negatively affect their ability to form a long-term future relations based on responsibility, respect and love that are necessary to create and develop a functional family” (VŠPK 2008, 12).

# State Family Policy Concept (2008)

- Priority accorded to family (not to individuals) and unfounded claims that “family based on marriage creates the best environment for its members to fully develop their inborn powers and social skills” (VŠPK 2008, 15).

# State Family Policy Concept (2008)

- As Lithuanian gender researchers and activists have noted (Jančaitytė 2011; Jankauskaitė cit. from Saukienė 2008), the *State Family Policy Concept* equates family to marriage; it thus both devalues non-marriage-based families and encourages discrimination and social exclusion of children born out of wedlock.
- In the *Concept*, marriage is regarded as a solution to all social problems encountered by Lithuania.



# State Family Policy Concept (2008)

- Although the *Concept* states that is “based on historically formed family values and on conceptions of family welfare that correspond to the Constitution of [the Republic of Lithuania] and other legal acts” (VŠPK 2008, 2), the Supreme Court of Lithuania declared it unconstitutional.
- The ruling of the Supreme Court stated that the “consitutional conception of family cannot be derived solely from the institution of marriage” as it was done in the *Concept*.

# Gender policies and biopolitics

- It can be argued that gender policies in this conservative *Concept* policy aim to govern the sexual subjectivities, bodies, behaviors, and practices that ensure the reproduction of labor and life in a very narrow and outdated way.
- By doing it this policy document it intends to maintain and widen existing differences in gendered behaviors and roles (an excessive regulation of a gender binary, “gender complementarity”).
- Moreover, unmarried individuals, single mothers, grandparents raising grandchildren (parents often work abroad) and those who oppose state-legislated coupledness are increasingly considered as non-normative, as “threats to” or “drains on” the nation and the state.



# Gender policies and biopolitics

- It also demonstrates that this kind of policymaking has been greatly affected by antifeminist attitudes and nostalgia for patriarchal family.
- This is evidenced, among other things, in the prevailing social model of a male breadwinner, in the underdevelopment of pre-school education system, in the lack of flexible forms of employment – all these factors that prevent women from fully participating in the labor market, burden their efforts to balance professional career and family, and at the same time prevent men from engaging more fully in family life.

# Gender policies and biopolitics

- Conservative gender policies that pay insufficient attention to gender equality, the division of paid labor and childcare responsibilities, or unpaid labor between men and women in a family also negatively affect fertility rates (during the last few years around 1.55-1.7 child, in 2014 – 1.63 child or 30.4 thousand children in total were born).
- The greatest decline was seen in the numbers of first-borns and second-borns, i.e., those offspring that mostly determine the total fertility rate. At this level, the total fertility rate is too low to even ensure generational replacement and creates conditions for swift depopulation.
- (to keep in mind that in 2016, the populations of Lithuania was 2.89 million. To compare, in 1992 – 3.7 million. So, in 25 years Lithuania lost 856 982 inhabitants).

# Gender, family and moral panics

- In this document, gender (“gender complementarity”) and family (family equals marriage) also become objects of emotional epidemics or moral panics.
- By reframing gender and family in a very conservative way, this document and a variety of political pronouncements work into people’s emotional fears and disappointments (“family is crumbling, the nation is disintegrating”).



# Gender, family and moral panics

- Moral panics around gender and family are remain very effective strategies of the right political forces for securing popular support for its values and its policies.
- But, on the other hand, they also demonstrate the failure of such conservative gender and family policy to control both female and male bodies and lives (low fertility levels, high divorce rates, particularly high emigration level, etc.)



# Gender, family and moral panics

“If we discuss the issue of strengthening the Lithuanian army, Riflemen Association and other societal organizations fighting for the security of the country and the need to assign a bigger budget for defense, we have to remember people who are born in families. Our traditional Lithuanian family survived the Tsarist and Soviet occupations because people defended their fatherland with guns and rifles.... Currently, we see a more aggressive activity of some human rights organizations that essentially defend only ideas of gays and radical organizations. However, these organizations attack us with the ideology of death. The nation will die, and so will our resistance.”

Rimantas Jonas Dagys, MP, “Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats” Party.

(2014.09.19, article “To destroy our family means to fight against our nation”. Available at: <http://tsajunga.lt/r-j-dagys-griau?-pasaulio-audrasatlaikiusia-seima-tas-pats-kas-kariau?-su-musu-tauta-2/>)