

We are not an empty #line15

In the past two years the Hungarian Government has made a series of moves to limit academic freedom and reduce the impact of civil society that opposes official government policies. This series of attacks culminated in a ban on Gender Studies in early October. The ban was followed by a statement issued by the spokesman of the prime minister reaffirming that “The government's standpoint is that people are born either male or female, and we do not consider it acceptable for us to talk about socially constructed genders rather than biological sexes.”

According to Andrea Pető, professor at the Gender Studies Department at the Central European University, the Hungarian government not only revoked the Hungarian accredited two-year M.A. program by erasing it from line 15 of the document, but also substituted Gender Studies with a new study program: “Economics of Family Policy and Public Policies for Human Development.” The government's efforts to limit academic freedom culminated yesterday with an announcement made by CEU that it will be moving to Vienna, in the academic year 2019/2020, as the government has not concluded an agreement that would allow CEU to operate in freedom in Hungary.

We do not see the events in Hungary as isolated, but rather as part of a larger network of attacks on Gender Studies in Europe, the USA, Latin America and the Middle East. These attacks come in different forms, at individual, institutional and political levels. It may manifest as physical violence and threats or legal and political reforms. The decision to ban gender studies needs to be addressed as one specific manifestation of a broader anti-gender movement that has made critical research, academic freedom and knowledge production its targets. As part of a research field of prolific debates on knowledge production, we are well aware that all forms of academic work stand in close relation to politics. This urges us to acknowledge the specific political interests that the ban on gender studies in Hungary serves, but also to stress that this is but one of the violent effects of these movements.

Therefore, as a response to these attacks, globally and locally, an initiative was formed by university teachers and students at the University of Gothenburg and a call for mobilization was issued with a goal to express solidarity with Gender Studies. The initiative started in Summer, when in August our first statement of support was issued and sent to the Hungarian minister of Education. Building upon our engagement with participatory approaches students from the first year Course in Gender Studies at the Department of Cultural Sciences, Gothenburg University designed a slogan and sent out their support widely. This idea was followed by staff members to make a call for a university wide action. This resulted in a gathering on October 25, 2018, when a group of around 40 university representatives, deans, teachers, students, activists gathered in front of the main university building in Gothenburg, to express solidarity with Hungarian Gender Studies teachers and students and condemn attacks on Gender Studies globally.

We, the undersigned, are concerned that this is just a beginning of a spreading phenomenon of anti-Gender Studies sentiment. With this act of solidarity, we would like to call to attention that such phenomena will be met with resistance and that Gender Studies as a scientific field of research will persist and thrive despite efforts to shut it down. We strongly condemn the acts of the Hungarian Government and express our solidarity with Gender Studies scholars worldwide.

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