THE RADICAL RIGHT'S THREE-DIMENSIONAL APPROACH TO GENDER EQUALITY – THE CASE OF CROATIA

By
Lorena Drakula

Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Political Science

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Political Science

Supervisor: Professor Béla Greskovits

Austria, Vienna
June 2022

Abstract

While gender equality develops across Europe, the Eastern European region lags behind its western neighbors. This paper asks the question of how the 'gender gap' has developed with regards to the rise of the radical right and explores this in the case of Croatia, demonstrating that illiberalism plays a role in hindering gender parity. The Global Gender Gap Index is introduced as an index which provides data on women's representation and empowerment, and critically evaluated with a focus on how this index fails to explain noticeable trends or account for the role of social movements. Then, this paper will look at the idea of equality in the context of the radical right, challenging perceptions of the radical right as uniform in its outlook. Taking Croatia as a case study, the dynamics between the radical right movement and countermovement in the radical right political space will be explored through their opposition or promotion of gender equality and the gendered nature of their political agendas. Based on this analysis, the Global Gender Gap Index will be reassessed, stressing the importance of historical, societal, and political factors in developing time-scale studies from the reports, as well as including a more power and domination sensitive analysis in promoting a humanistic ideal of gender equality.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Professor Béla Greskovits, for his most patient and understanding supervision, without which this thesis would not have seen the light of day. Secondly, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Professor Andrea Pető, who mentored a significant part of my studies, offered valuable insights and advice, and was open and responsive to my every academic request. I am also thankful to Bianka Vida for her provision of the most recent contributions to the academic debate surrounding the gendered aspects of crisis and de-democratization. Finally, I would like to acknowledge that this all would not be possible without a generous Postgraduate Opportunity Scholarship, provided by anonymous donors and Central European University. Your help is greatly appreciated, as this endeavor would not have been possible without it.

Parts of this thesis are used and further developed elements of final papers submitted to courses *Gendering Illiberalism* (accounts of the gendered nature of the illiberal modus operandi); *Worldly Philosophers of Capitalism, Democracy and Development* (the analysis of the political vs. the economic sphere); and *Social Movements* (the analysis of the neoliberal transformation of the civil sector).

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Closing the 'gender gap', an issue often recognized but not always properly conceptualized, remains one of the key agenda points for liberal democratic societal projects today. The scarce definitions of the 'gender gap' determine it as the "difference between women and men as reflected in social, political, intellectual, cultural, or economic attainments or attitudes" (World Economic Forum 2017) or, more widely, as "the gap in any area between women and men in terms of their levels of participation, access to resources, rights, remuneration or benefits" (European Commission 1998). While not necessarily strictly definable, as it applies to a vast number of different disparities, the gender gap can easily be measured in specific areas – an insight provided by the World Economic Forum through the development of the Global Gender Gap Index. The yearly reports gather data from 2006 until today, allowing us to measure progress towards gender parity across four dimensions: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment.

Specifically, the 2022 report conveys that Eastern Europe lags behind its western neighbors with more than 6% more disparity, and stresses that the trends of the past 15 years predict Eastern Europe will take another 134.7 years to achieve gender parity, compared to 52.1 years in Western Europe (World Economic Forum 2021). What is noticeable, then, is a gap within a gap – not only do women have lower participation levels, access to rights, resources, and benefits, but Eastern European Women endure additional political, cultural, and economic shackles when compared to Western European women. Globally, these center-periphery divergences are even wider. As the gender gap in areas of education and health has, according to the Index, narrowed most noticeably, with most countries nearing gender parity in these two

categories, the thesis will focus mostly on an analysis of the discrepancy in terms of Economic participation and Opportunity and the Political Empowerment subindexes.

The Global Gender Gap Index, while it provides data on the representation and empowerment of women in various fields, does not provide explanations for the noticeable trends or account for the way in which different societal movements influence the 'gaps'. The issue of the gender gap then - especially in terms of political participation and economic opportunity, needs to be considered in light of recent trends that might have affected it - to see how they are formed and shaped from a more qualitative perspective.While the list of potential influences on the gender (dis)parity is more complex than the scope of this article, it can be assumed that some of the main protagonists who influence its widening/narrowing are those actors in society who support the strict gendered divisions in terms of limiting women to the private sphere, i.e., the family. Most notably, conservative and other rightist ideologies usually interpret 'gender gaps' as *natural* forms of hierarchy/social divide, renouncing societal projects that aim to contest these disparities and often organizing towards their protection.

The main research question – how the gender gap has developed with regards to the rise of the radical right – becomes more complicated when we take into account that the right is not uniform in their advocacy around gendered issues. Having this in mind, it is necessary to stress that their positions on the role of women in society exhibit patterned differences rather than random deviations. In post-communist Europe, the liberal political programs that aimed to minimize gender inequality were implemented within a wider political and economic transition towards market-based economies and through processes of democratic consolidation. This specific alignment allowed for contemporary illiberal actors to use projects of feminism and emancipation as "symbolic glue" for a wide array of failures of democratic representation and socioeconomic grievances that came as a result of the transition (Grzebalska et al. 2017). Formed as a countermovement to the mainstream pro-Western forces that maintained the ideals

of marketization of all spheres of society, the contemporary radical right contests the political liberties offered by the existing 'social contract' - disputing individualism and promoting the family, subjugating minority rights to the interest of the nation, prioritizing unity over multiculturalism, sovereignty over cosmopolitanism. The biggest tension and in the discourses of conservative and radical right actors comes, therefore, as a result of contesting a major part of the *political* liberal democratic hegemony, while at the same time endorsing *economical* (neo)liberal policies and practices.

When looking at the Global Gender Gap Index, it is noticeable that political empowerment and recognition still stand the worst in a cross-European context, with Eastern Europe's gender gap in this area becoming even wider (World Economic Forum 2021). This paper explores these patterns in in the case of Croatia, the country which is interesting because it had the narrowest overall gender gap in Eastern Europe and Central Asia in 2006, and was surpassed by eight other Eastern European countries in overall gender parity by the report in 2022 (World Economic Forum 2006; 2021). This period in Croatia was undoubtedly marked by the spread of illiberal politics in the shape of conservative and religious movements, anti-gender campaigns, legal battles, reactionary civic organizations etc., resulting in the relative stagnation or regression in policies that are supposed to counteract gender disparities. Exploring the elements of the "the war on gender" this paper aims to show that a contributing element to slower advancement towards gender parity are illiberal contestations which hindered the progress towards parity in the area of Political Empowerment on the one hand and promoted women's further inclusion into the labor force on the other.

This is done by exploring how the dynamics between the *movement*, represented mostly by the *mainstream radical right*, and *countermovement*, the *illiberal radical right,* reflect through the opposition or promotion of gender equality, on the gendered nature of their political agendas, and policy reversals in the case of Croatia. It continues as follows: first chapter

introduces the Global Gender Gap Index, it's methodology and key insights from tracking data in the case of Croatia. Second chapter analyzes the complex relationship between the radical right and the pursuit for equality, challenging ideas that the radical right is uniform in its positions, exploring the specific historical context and political positioning of conservative and radical right parties in Croatia during the 2010s. Third chapter explores the patterned differences on gender equality and analyzes them as elements of movement, countermovement, and emancipatory movements on the right. The thesis explores how the dynamics between the movement, represented mostly by the mainstream conservative right, and countermovement created in the radical right political space reflect through the opposition or promotion of gender equality and the gendered nature of their political agendas in the case of Croatia. The conclusion reassesses the Global Gender Gap Index, stressing the importance of historical, societal, and political factors in developing time-scale studies from the reports, as well as including a more power and domination sensitive analysis in research of gender equality.

2. On the Gender Gap Index

As previously mentioned, the Global Gender Gap Report, published annually[1] by the World Economic Forum, measures the gender gap across four subindexes. The Economic Participation and Opportunity subindex looks at the ratio of female over male labor force participation, wage quality for similar work, estimated female earned income over male value, ratio of female over male legislators, senior officials and managers, and ratio of female over male professional and technical workers. The subindex of Educational Attainment looks at the ratio of female literacy rate over male value and the ratio of female net primary, secondary and tertiary level enrolment over male value. The subindex of Health and Survival gathers data on female healthy life expectancy over male value and the sex ratio at birth. Finally, the Political Empowerment subindex captures the ratio of women in parliament and at the ministerial level over male value, and years with female/male head of state in the past fifty years.

The Index is based around three basic concepts: it measures gaps rather than levels (differences in access to resources and opportunities irrespective of the level of development), captures these gaps based on outcomes rather than input variables, and ranks countries in terms of equality rather than women's empowerment. As the Index aims to provide a snapshot of the gender gap in several dimensions, it excludes "indicators related to country-specific policies, rights, culture or customs" – i.e., it measures effects of policies, rather than analyzing the policies themselves (World Economic Forum 2021, 72). Policy information is nevertheless provided in Country Profiles, providing additional analytical context, and specifying possible indicators for future research.

[1] The Global Gender Gap Report published in 2020 was written in the year 2019, and no Report was written in 2020 because of the Covid -19 pandemic.

Measuring on a scale from 0 to a 100 (with 100 being the marker of gender parity), Western Europe has been leading the way as the region that achieved the highest percentage of gender parity (77,6%), with Eastern Europe, clustered together with Central Asia, staying more than 6 percentage points behind (World Economic Forum 2021, 7). Out of the four dimensions, the widest disparity is seen in Political Empowerment, where the Report from 2021 measures only 22% of the gap closed to date. Second largest gap, Economic Participation and Opportunity, is a product of women's underrepresentation in the labor market, wide income disparities and a "persistent lack of women in leadership positions", even though there is a positive trend in proportion of women among skilled professionals and there is progress in wage equality (World Economic Forum 2021, 5). With women's underrepresentation in the labor market being one of the key sources of inequality, the report states that "addressing normative and legal barriers for women to work and advance remains a priority area for policymakers and businesses" (World Economic Forum 2021, 13). Finally, Educational Attainment and Health and Survival have mostly been bridged globally, which excludes them from the analysis.

Since 2006, the total progress towards gender parity measures only 3.6 percentage points. In Europe, Western countries continue the trajectory of closing their gap, with a 0.9 better percentage than in 2020, while Eastern Europe and Central Asia widened its gap by 0.26 percentage points. More specifically, Eastern Europe and Central Asia have progressed or stagnated across all subindexes except for Political Empowerment, which has regressed so significantly as to inhibit progress in total. On the other hand, both Eastern Europe and Central Asia and Western Europe have improved their position on Economic Participation and Opportunity by 0.7 percentage points, showing that Eastern Europe is lagging behind Western Europe politically, but not in terms of equal economic participation. This is also visible in the fact that in terms of Economic Participation and Opportunity, Eastern Europe and Central Asia have closed 73,5% of the gender gap, compared to Western Europe's 70%, while in Political

Empowerment Eastern Europe and Central Asia have closed only 14,2% of the gap, only one third of the progress made in Western Europe (43,8%).

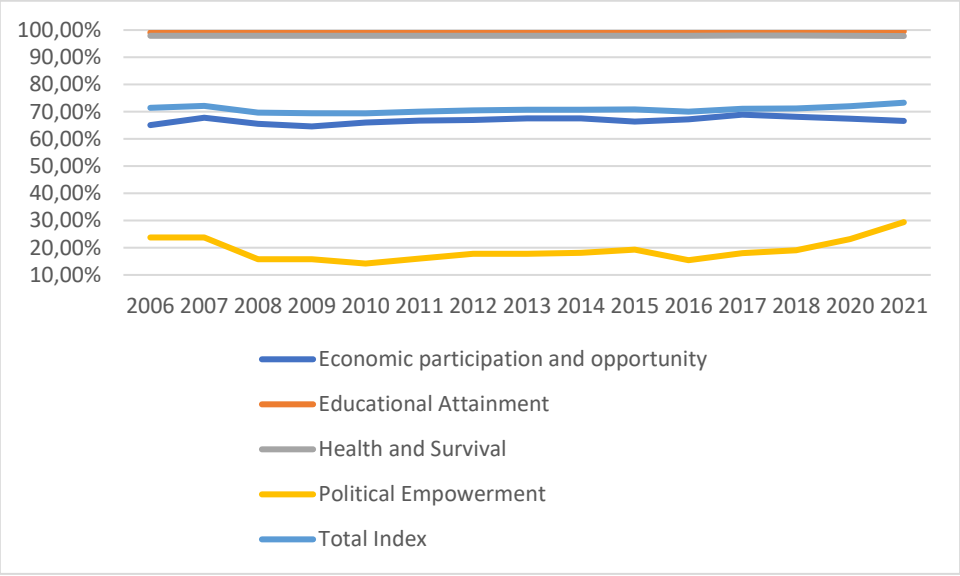
However, the regional averages "mask large disparities between countries on closing the Political Empowerment gender gap" (World Economic Forum 2021, 24). One of such examples is the fact that Eastern Europe generally performs significantly better in terms of Political Empowerment than Central Asia – out of the 10 best performing countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia in terms of Political Empowerment, 9 of them are in Eastern Europe and only one is Central Asian (Georgia, closing 24,5%). Even more, the 6 other Central Asian countries included in the report rank in the last 8 spots of the regional rankings in Political Empowerment, having closed between 6,9% and 14,1% of the gender gap. This points to the issue of over-aggregation and the need to cautiously approach data in global reports. Ideally, the Global Gender Gap Report should provide a starting point for future research that would be more information dense and sensitive to the historical and sociopolitical context of the analyzed countries.

Having these reservations in mind, the Global Gender Gap Index situates countries into wider regional trends as well as provides a simple tracking system for the success (or failure) of policies aimed at achieving gender parity. As "the magnitude of gender gaps in countries around the world is the combined result of various socioeconomic, policy and cultural variables", the data needs to be looked at from a qualitative perspective to account for how specific normative and legal barriers to achieving gender parity are shaped in various political and social contexts (World Economic Forum 2018, 32). Analyzing the time-series data offered by the Index and situating it in the sociopolitical context of specific countries such as Croatia provides the best insight into exact effects and limits of implemented policies, and points to those trends that overpower cultural change towards progress or shift it in the opposite direction.

2.1. Croatia – progress towards gender (im)parity

Since its establishment, the Global Gender Gap Index progressed 3,6% towards gender parity, which means that Croatia is well below the global average progress. Starting as the highest-ranking country in overall gender equality in Eastern Europe and Central Asia in 2006, Croatia was passed by 8 other Eastern European countries by 2021 (Lithuania, Serbia, Latvia, Albania, Moldova, Belarus, Bulgaria and Slovenia), ranking as 45th in the 2021 report. It currently scores 0.733 on the gender (im)parity scale (0,013 more than the 2020 report, and 0,019 points closer to gender parity since 2006), stating that it still needs to cover 26,7% to achieve gender parity.[2] In terms of the subindexes, Croatia improved its score by 0,015 in Economic Participation and Opportunity, 0,005 in Educational Attainment, 0,056 in Political Empowerment, and lowered its score by 0,001 in Health and Survival in the period from 2006 to 2021. Figure 1 offers a visual of the progress Croatia made on gender parity in total, as well as across all four subindexes.

Figure 1. Progress towards gender parity in Croatia. The Global Gender Gap Report 2006-2021



[2] Comparably, Serbia and Lithuania have improved their score by 4.4 percentage points or more from 2020 to 2021. This points to the fact that quicker progress is not unachievable.

The largest distance to gender parity in Croatia is, as in other countries, measured across subindexes of Economic Participation and Opportunity and Political Empowerment. In terms of Economic Participation and Opportunity, in the total period from 2006 to 2021, Croatia improved its labor force participation rate (74% to 86%), the number of legislators, senior officials, and managers (from 35% to 36%), and the estimated earned income. However, survey data shows that the gender gap widened in areas of wage equality for similar work, which could be accounted for by a shift in measuring methodology. The ratio of female professional and technical workers stayed roughly the same and is the only parameter in Economic Participation and Opportunity where women achieved gender parity, constituting about 52% of the total workforce. In total, the 2021 report states that Croatia has now achieved 66,6% of gender parity in the subindex of Economic Participation and Opportunity.

In terms of Political Empowerment, the ratio of women over men in parliament rose from 28% to 45%, while the ratio of female over male ministerial positions lowered from 50% to 31%. In the area of Political Empowerment, Croatia stays relatively well positioned in the parameter of highest political positions in the country, mostly because there was one full term of a president Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović (2015-2020), and one part of a prime-minister term carried out by Jadranka Kosor (2009-2011). With many different countries having almost no women in power, including Western European and other relatively progressive countries, Croatia comparably improves its score relative to the mean. In total, the report states Croatia has now achieved 29,4% of gender parity in Political Empowerment.

Additionally, the data shows that the discrepancy between the gender gap in Croatia and in Western Europe is not as significant as it is for some other Eastern European and Central Asian countries. Croatia is much closer to Western Europe in terms of Political Empowerment, having closed more than 29% compared to the regional average of 14,2%. However, in terms of Economic Participation and Opportunity, it closed significantly less than the average both in

Eastern Europe and Central Asia and in Western Europe (Croatia closed 66,6% compared to 73,5% and 70% respectively).

In other words, while some progress has been made, the rate at which Croatia is closing its gender gaps is significantly slower many other Eastern European or Western European countries. While some contextual indicators are provided in the report, the methodological choice of focusing on outcomes, and not means, signifies that policymakers cannot rely on the Index when contemplating policy solutions for specific countries, as it is not understood which variables (political, cultural, economic…) influence the rate of achieving gender parity. More specifically, the Global Gender Gap Index, to be used according to its potential, necessitates additional research on how the politics around gender equality is shaped. The case of Croatia, whose progress towards gender parity has been significantly lagged, can be used to show how one aspect of these gendered politics, radical right advocacy, influences the processes of decision making around gendered issues.

2.1.1. The case of Croatia - analyzing trends

As shown in the Figure 1, and discussed in the previous chapter, the general trend in the progress towards gender parity in Croatia is stagnation. However, there are some visible spikes and downfalls in terms of Economic Participation and Opportunity and Political Empowerment,

Figure 2. Progress towards gender parity in terms of Economic Opportunity and Participation - Croatia. *The Global Gender Gap Report 2006-2021*

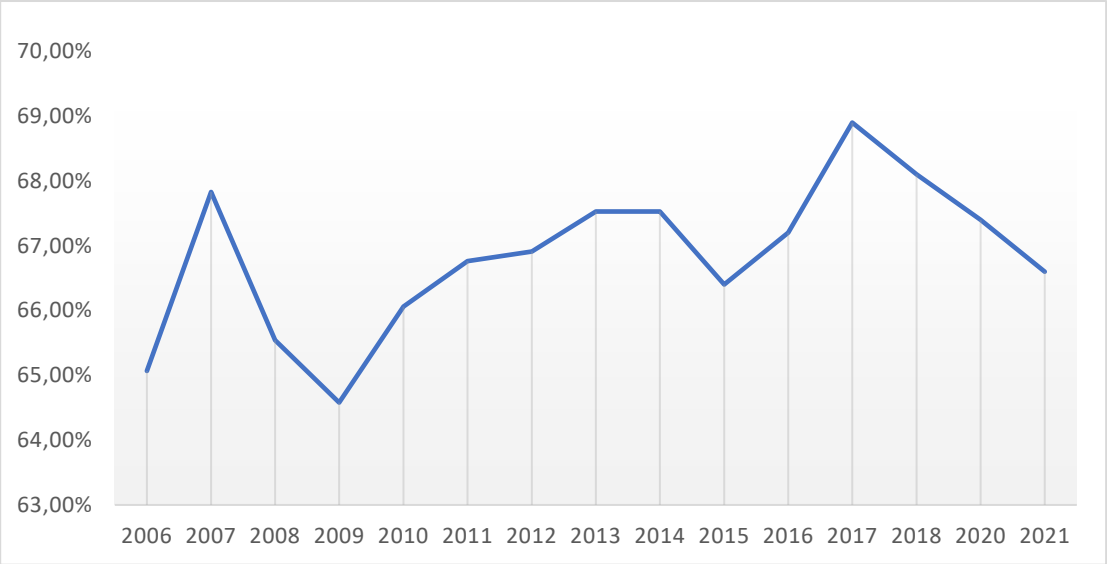
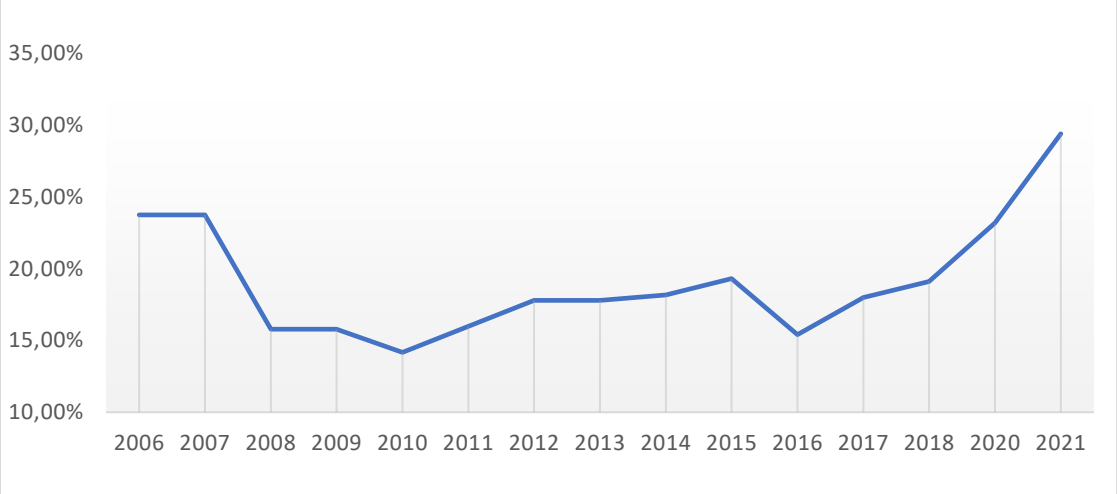


Figure 3. Progress towards gender parity in terms of Political Empowerment - Croatia.



shown in the Figures 2 and 3 respectively. The first period signifies the downfall of gender parity after 2007, lasting roughly until 2009 for Economic Participation and Opportunity, or 2010 for Political Empowerment. This downfall is especially significant since it constitutes the first widening of the overall gender gap for multiple years in a row since the year 2000.[3] This correlates with the aftermath of the financial and economic crisis, pointing strongly to its gendered consequences, which will be discussed shortly. Second, the period of slow progress towards restoring levels of gender parity which were achieved in 2007, that lasted from roughly

[3] The Global Gender Gap report calculated historical data scores for the progress of countries towards gender parity between 2000-2006 as part of their analysis in 2007. See World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2007*.

2010 to 2014/15 in both subindexes. This is followed by a period of growth in both cases, but the spike in Economic Participation and Opportunity is interrupted in 2017, resulting in a downfall that continues today.[4]

Aside from the financial and economic crisis, the period of 2007-2010 in Croatia was marked by negotiations for the accession to the European Union, which was finally realized in 2013. This is significant because it shaped the reaction of the in-power government, which decided to fight the crisis by following the example of the European Union – through further deregulation of labor markets, privatization, and austerity politics, which significantly affected policies around gender. Describing the politics of EU towards gender equality after the crisis, Bianka Vida contends that:

> "…one can see a sharp deterioration in the EU's commitment to gender equality without even mentioning women or gender in its policy responses. The EU has not based its new economic policies on an analysis of their gender impacts, and has left aside gender policymaking tools, such as gender mainstreaming, gender impact assessments, and gender budgeting. Instead, the EU shifted its priorities toward a promotion of neoliberal economic goals that further intensified the already-existing imbalance between egalitarian and economic goals within the union." (Vida 2022, 5)

Outside of the policymaking approaches of the EU, the effect of the financial and economic crisis had gendered consequences in itself. Women were disproportionately impacted by job and pay cuts, especially through the cuts is the public sector, crucial for the maintenance of social reproduction, where women traditionally constituted the majority of the workforce (e.g., the education or the health care system). Austerity measures also had a significant impact on

[4] While the last two years of the downward trend in Economic Participation and Opportunity can be explained by the gendered effects of the pandemic, it is not immediately deducible which policy change affected its sudden deterioration in 2017. When comparing the Global Gender Gap Index in 2017 and 2018, the only significantly lowered variables were wage equality for similar work, determined by surveys, and the number of legislators, senior officials and managers.

lower-class women and minority groups, who depended most on social policies (especially in terms of child- and elderly-care), which resulted in the reestablishing of the gender division and undermining the successes of political liberalism – in other words, they were attacking the very social ties that enabled the reproduction of capitalism itself. Even after the recovery, women were more willing to accept lower-paid positions and jobs in precarious conditions or more flexible workhours, which explains the relative improvement in labor market participation rates of men and women. After the crisis, in the case of Economic Participation and Opportunity, the progress towards gender parity slowly grows up until 2014, when a new Employment law is introduced, constituted of further deregulations of the labor market and contractions of workers right, showing once again that the flexibilization of labor laws negatively affects the Economic Participation and Opportunities of women.

The trends in Political Empowerment of women in Croatia, aside from also suffering the consequences of crisis, show a slow improvement starting in 2011 and ending with 2015, which corresponds with the government of the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Outside of this period, the Croatian government was constituted from the various coalitions of Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), a (mostly) conservative right party whose intrinsic shifts between mainstreaming and radicalization significantly influenced their position on traditional social norms, as discussed in the next chapters.

The differences in the ideological positioning of the same party are visible in the short downward trend between 2015 and 2016 when, in the shortest executive term in the history of the Croatian government, the coalition of HDZ and the newly emerged party *Most*, signified the rising pressure the conservative HDZ was facing from the right. Governed by the traditionalist and nationalist Tomislav Karamarko, both HDZ and the male-dominant *Most* failed to mobilize enough women representatives, or to provide them with executive functions. Since the establishment of the Global Gender Gap Index, 2016 remains the only year when

there were no female members of the Inner Cabinet of the Croatian Government. However, the political tensions between the two parties in the coalition resulted in the dismantling of the Government and early elections, where Tomislav Karamarko was replaced by liberal and pro-European Andrej Plenković as the president of HDZ, resulting in a further improvement in female representation.

In other words, the internal turmoil in the right effected changes in gender equality trends measured by the Global Gender Gap Index. However, as the Report focuses on outcomes, rather than input variables, it does not account for the socioeconomic context that instigates changes in gender parity. As visible by this analysis, it is possible that the slow progress of Croatia towards gender equality is a result of internal ideological and political conflicts between key actors who should be promoting them.

3. The right and the pursuit for equality – analyzing the case of Croatia

The most concrete reason why the study of gender equality deterioration necessitates the research of the emerging radical right is the position that the right traditionally takes on issues of equality. While there are many theories that contrast the political left and the political right in terms of their economic positions, the role of the state, or their position on rationality, a basic sociocultural understanding of the right focuses on its view of the world as inherently hierarchical, of social inequalities as natural, and of the existing moral framework as outside of the political scope. In this way, rightist political actors argue that "natural" inequalities cannot and should not be interfered with by the state, therefore adopting a critical and disapproving position to gender equality promotion projects.

While some authors do label these political developments as the rise of the extreme or the far right, this paper adopts the term *radical* to stress the nominally (albeit perhaps deceptively) democratic character of the these right parties, actors and ideologies (Mudde 2007; Kitschelt 2007; Carter 2018). While there is no consensus around the definition of the radical right, it is generally accepted that they are politically right-wing, that they can be analyzed as more-or-less part of the same party family, and that there exists a relatively clear set of cases that the radical right refers to – at least in Central and Eastern Europe.

At the level of parties, it is mostly accepted that this newly emerged right does not unequivocally fall into the conservative party family. It is necessary to stress that most scholars analytically separate the "new" radical right, and the more traditional, centrist, and mainstream conservative right that historically served as one of the main actors and ideological factions. One definition of this new party family is offered by Cas Mudde in his seminal book *Populist*

Radical Right Parties in Europe (2007) where he describes populist radical right parties[5] as those parties which have strong populist, nativist, and authoritarian stances, while at the same time not being anti-democratic (2007, 20). Populist radical right parties, according to Mudde, differ from the conservative party family because they place sociocultural above economic questions, are not based only on traditional ethical and religious values, and are nativist rather than nationalistic (ibid. pp. 28). Mudde also differentiates between other anti-elitist parties on the right, which typically organize around a single issue, and populist radical right parties which share the anti-establishment tendencies, but usually formulate them in wider nativist and/or neoliberal agendas (Mudde 2007, 30).

It is necessary to stress that the modern right does not necessarily discard the notion of equality before the law, individual liberty, or equal rights for all members of the political community – i.e., it is not un-democratic per se – but it does advocate for certain differences in the way we assign societal roles. This element is mostly found in the way authoritarianism is conceptualized as a key characteristic of radical right parties – based on conventionalist policies that protect and promote traditional social norms, values, morality, roles and ways of like (Carter 2018; Mudde 2007). In historically Christian societies, this often includes strong positions on abortion rights, the aspiration to protect traditional, patriarchal family structures (especially in terms of marriage, protection of children, and the representation of women), strong opposition to inclusion of non-heteronormative sexualities and identities, and exclusionary position on minorities and other religions (Carter 2018, 11). These positions reflect the idea of a common morality that serves as the cohesive element to the nation, and the protection of this morality through the reproduction of a traditional, often hierarchical order.

[5] In his account of populist radical right parties, Mudde takes the example of HDZ as populist radical right from 1990 to 2000. In the 90s, HDZ certainly can be characterized as populist, nativist, and authoritarian. However, the start of negotiations for accession to the European Union and the fact that the Croatian center-right political space was not occupied by other demochristian parties soon led to the mainstreamization of HDZ, bringing them closer to a conservative, than a radical right ideology.

Additionally, this authoritarianism implies strong moral, social, political and legal normative and disciplinary measures, including discrimination towards those who break these norms and threaten the cohesion of society (Carter 2018).

In other words, radical right parties take on different forms, methods, and arenas of contesting the key elements of the liberal democratic script – through disputing individualism (in the economy or in terms of political freedoms), minority rights (or advocating for a majoritarian democratic system), pluralism, globalization (as influence of international institutions or as a critique of multiculturalism), cosmopolitanism, liberal democratic checks and balances etc.

2.2. The neoliberal-conservative convergence

Much like in the rest of Europe, the political structures and institutions of liberal democracy in Croatia have been dominated by a conservative demochristian political party – the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). It's positioning on the political spectrum has varied and shifted since the 90s – HDZ started as a radical right nativist party in the beginning of the transition to market capitalism and democracy, but today takes the position of center-right, mostly set forth by the accession to the European Union. Throughout the three decades of Croatia's existence, HDZ has been the majority party in eight out of ten governments, effectively prevailing as key policymakers and creators of the official government approach to gender equality. However, their position has been significantly weakened in the 2010s by the rise of many smaller, fast-paced radical right parties that relied on a more nativist and traditionalist view of Croatia's society, taking over the political space occupied by HDZ in the 90s. Assembled first as anti-establishment parties, the new radical right parties influenced a

significant shift of the Overton window, providing parliamentary support and access to the public discourse to new forms of radical nationalism, traditionalism, and familialism.[6]

While radical right actors existed even before the curtailment of advances towards gender parity, the parties that occupied the radical right political space since the 90s in Croatia have always had a marginal influence in the parliament, while the new radical right was mainly constituted of completely new actors and parties in the political arena. [7] These parties mostly gained agency through protests against globalization and the consequences of the economic crisis, forming considerable challenges to the liberal democratic order for the first time since Croatia's independence. The newly emerged radical right actors differed from the mainstream conservative party specifically through their critical approach to foundational elements of liberal democracy, their disapproval of the Western centeredness of Croatian government, and their populist advocacy of the *volonte generale*.

The formation of these populist radical right parties and actors was, however, somewhat different than in Western Europe, especially considering their sociopolitical development (Obućina 2011). The radicalization of the political arena in postcommunist countries was shaped by the experience of multiple transition – to a liberal democratic society as well as market capitalism. The similarities with Western European populist radical right parties are ideologically significant – they both manifest in strong nativism, charismatic populism, xenophobia and anti-liberal stances. However, the historical configuration in which these parties were constituted illuminates a specific *modus operandi* of these liberal contestations.

[6] Familialism is defined as „a form of biopolitics which views the traditional family as a foundation of the nation, and subjugates individual reproductive and self-determination rights to the normative demand of the reproduction of the nation." See Grzebalska and Pető (2018), pp. 4.

[7] Some of the most significant and parliamentary successful newly emerged parties were: *Most nezavisnih lista* ("The Bridge of independent lists", established in 2012), *Hrast – Pokret za uspješnu Hrvatsku* (Hrast – "Movement for successful Croatia", established in 2012), *Neovisni za Hrvatsku* ("Independent for Croatia", established in 2017.), *Domovinski pokret* ("Homeland movement", established in 2020). However, this is not an exhaustive list, as many smaller radical right parties also participated in elections, and politicians often switched loyalties.

Most notably, the liberal democratic political project was implemented alongside market capitalism, and was supported by a distinctively neoliberal framework – the privatization of state-controlled sectors, cuts in public spending, dismantling of the welfare state, and deregulation of labor markets. In the highly nativist setting of 90s' Croatia, HDZ (which was in power since 1990) converged with this neoliberal societal ideal, establishing an economic program that later led to the party's mainstreamization into a center-right conservative ideology, achieving its peak during EU accession negotiations. In other words, HDZ survived the shift from radicalism to the center-right, all the while sustaining and progressing the neoliberal agenda.[8] Recognizing this convergence, the radical right used the grievances surrounding neoliberalism to attack both HDZ as neoliberalism's champion, and liberal democracy as it's accomplice.

The biggest nativist party in Croatia - that advocated nation-making ideals of Christianity, family, and tradition - brought globalization, individualization, and pluralism, subjugating cultural values and norms to the influence of the market. This was the first contradiction of radical right ideology in Croatia, and one that was promptly exploited by the new radical right, presenting themselves as the "true" representatives of the nationalistic and religious Croatia. Moreover, this was not just a „clever political mobilization strategy" but precisely the *modus operandi* of the illiberal populist actors, exposing the failures of liberal democracy and market economy, and at the same time offering „a livable and viable alternative centered on family, nation, religious values and freedom of speech" (Grzebalska et al. 2017).

Looked at from this perspective, the rise of the radical right during the 2010s in Croatia can be seen as a majoritarian nationalist response to the unrestrained processes of (neo)liberalization, globalization and monopolization, as well as the long-lasting influence of

[8] Comparably, the conservative parties of the 80s in the West such as the British Conservative Party and the Republican Party in the US significantly shifted towards free-market ideology as *conservatives*, rather than mainstreaming into conservatism through neoliberalization.

foreign and transnational institutions. This radical right challenged neoliberalism to some extent, primarily through criticizing technocratic depoliticization and disturbing the hegemony of 'progressive neoliberalism' – the coalition of "mainstream liberal currents of the new social movements", brought together by common views on redistribution and recognition (Kiely 2020; Fraser 2017).

This points to the fact that the political success of the radical right was executed through the struggle over "issue saliency" rather than specific political positions – the radical right did not introduce new and alien positions to mainstream values in contemporary democracies, but returned the political focus on issues that were previously depoliticized (Mudde 2010). Their contestations of the neoliberal hegemony, however, only tangentially criticized its source of power - the unstoppable implementation of market rationality to all spheres of society. Outside of the implementation of some protectionist measures and the critiques of the neoliberal technocracy, the radical right "remained committed to neoliberal economic policies, including fiscal conservatism, free trade (…) and tax cuts for the wealthiest in society" (Kiely 2020, 413). This is precisely the reason why scholarship interprets the radical right ideology as focusing on sociocultural, rather than socioeconomic issues – it perpetuated the economic ideals of neoliberal market capitalism, but at the same time emerged as the main adversary of neoliberal hegemony in the social and cultural sphere. Because of this conflictual relationship of the radical right towards neoliberalism, it is problematic to track how specific party families influenced wider societal and political processes that influence the forming of gender policies.

Additionally, parties fluctuate in their advocacy depending on pending coalitions that are considered to be more or less fruitful and the societal political cleavages. Their ideological core may change depending on the strategic priorities, e.g., maximizing political functions, creating government policies or expanding the electorate (Akkerman, Lange, and Rooduijn 2016), as well as in terms of what they programmatically advocate vs. what they actually stand for. This

is especially significant when we consider that even though there usually exists a common core ideology, political parties are not homogenous at the membership level, but "aggregates of diverse yet intersecting factions (ideology- or interest-based) that are in dynamic relation to one another and to the larger political scene" (Mudde 2007, 38). In this way, the rise of radical right parties did not provide a clear-cut advocacy or exhaust the influences on gender equality, as the contestations of the liberal democratic order can be executed on different ideological levels and not be reflected in official party programs, public discourse, or membership structures.

Nevertheless, having in mind that a conservative party was in power for most of the Global Gender Gap Reports, it is necessary to consider how the turnover in gender equality indicators was created by the fluctuating political positions and diverging goals at the center of ideological struggles on the right. The assumptions in this thesis are that the emergence of new radical right parties and the surrounding radical right movements that formed and influenced governments affected the radicalization or mainstreaming of HDZ, having concrete effects on policymaking and the way they framed the gendered ideal society.

2.3. The neoliberal civil society – market vs. social equality

On the other hand, contributing to liberal democratic consolidation, the post-transitional civil society took on the shape and form of their Western counterparts, prioritizing identity politics over material issues, professionalizing the civic sphere, and solidifying the dependence on private donations (especially foreign donations). This economization largely lessened the ability of the civic organizations to promote public interest. As the hegemonic elites expanded opportunities to influence policies, the issues marginalized by the for-profit sector were left unrepresented (Alexander and Fernandez 2021). Austerity policies, privatization of public

services and the deregulation of labor markets resulted in a rising precariat that lacked basic existential security, which contributed to the detachment of individuals from their communities, and less inclination to participate politically (Inglehart 2008). The focus on technocratic professionalization and the large withdrawal of party politics from the spheres of civil society influenced what Peter Mair (2006) calls the "hollowing of democracy" - citizen disengagement directly connected to the atomization and social isolation, the disintegration of broader networks of the civil society, and confinement of political agents into state arenas.

At the same time, the framework focusing on individual rights and civil liberties was unfit to deal with the social and economic grievances caused by the transition. The new pursuit for equality abandoned the concept of social equality for issues of representation, "fetishizing choice and individualism at the expense of aiming for structural changes" and mainly profiting educated professionals rather than low-skilled workers (Grzebalska and Pető 2018, 2). This merging of human rights framework and the key values of liberal democracy with "neoliberal economic policies and governance principles" was the crucial element that determined the *gendered* nature of the latter radicalization towards illiberalism (Grzebalska and Pető 2018). The parallel transition towards market capitalism, the establishment of a new liberal democratic political project, and the reshaping of the civil society were instrumentalized by the radical right aiming to equate real inequalities and contradictions created by the transition with emancipatory projects towards gender equality.

In this sense, one of the main reasons for the deterioration of progress towards gender equality comes precisely from the restructuring of the civil society organizations according to neoliberal ideals. Effectively, two parallel processes were on the rise with the professionalization of the civic sector: the leftist, grassroots, horizontal civil society was left debilitated in construction of meaning, leaving the emancipatory struggles for gender equality to the colonizing hands of the market. Additionally, as the civil society rephrased "political

dissent in the language of expertise, consultancy and service-provision", promoting policies of representation rather than ones that create structural changes, it de-politicized citizens and allowed contentious issues to be reframed in line with the radical right agenda, (ibid. pp. 6). Losing touch with the communities they serve, civil organizations have "foregone a critical source of their power" and the possibility to "counter the hegemonic forces of the market and state in civil society" (Alexander and Fernandez 2021).

Framing issues of reproductive rights, rights of sexual minorities, gender studies and gender mainstreaming as elements of a "gender ideology" (promoted by foreign, liberal actors), the radical right used this term as "symbolic glue" – a common source of various economic and social insecurities and injustices, and democratic failures (ibid.). In the Croatian context, the wider political mobilization against "gender ideology" was recognizable in the aftermath of the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in 2018, where this decision of HDZ sparked a comprehensive backlash led by the Initiative "Istina o Istanbulskoj" ("Truth about the Istabul Convention"), collecting between 350,000 and 390,000 signatures of support towards a referendum.

These strategies of connecting women's emancipation with economic grievances were especially effective in postcommunist countries, where feminist projects were implemented with the transition to the market system, and the two societal goals seemed intrinsically correlated in such a way that can be exploited by illiberal actors. Even more significantly, this created a possibility for a broader coalition between various anti-gender actors – mainstream conservatives, radical and extremist right, and religious groups.

> ... opposition to this ideology has become a means of rejecting different facets of the current socioeconomic order, from the prioritization of identity politics over material issues, and the weakening of people's social, cultural and political security, to the detachment of social and

> political elites and the influence of transnational institutions and the global economy on nation states. (Grzebalska et al. 2017)

In other words, the liberal equality politics and framework implemented during EU accession were demonized, but the funding and political offers of the EU were drained by newly-emerged NGOs that focused on promoting familialist projects such as "family mainstreaming", pro-natality and demographic projects, and redefined human rights as „family rights, natural rights, and the rights of the unborn" (Grzebalska et al. 2017; Hodžić and Štulhofer, n.d.).[9] The radical right appropriation of the liberal democratic resources was, therefore, used to re-politicize society based on nationalist and familialist values. This also meant reintroducing norms to „the heretofore largely technocratic political and economical realms" (Grzebalska and Pető 2018, 2), as well as the "re-embedding of markets into a conservative cultural context, including the politicized use of social policy, among other methods" (Kiely 2020, 399).

The influence of the neoliberalization of the civil sector directly reflects on the issue of equality as well, creating a discrepancy on how we conceptualize its value – it is often conveyed the ideal of equality is taken as one of the foundational principles of liberal democracy, but what we mean by this equality is not always clarified. One way of looking at gender equality comes from the perspective of human rights – looking at equality, and gender equality in particular, as a value in itself, justified by the very value of being human. While this paper does build from this wider conceptualization, therefore assuming that democracy promotion projects must be on the trajectory towards equality for equality's sake, so we need to account for the actors and politics that hinder it, this is not always the case. On the other hand, in its narrower neoliberal conceptualization, the value of equality is attained by the positive consequences such an undertaking has for the market economy. Disregarding the structural causes of gender

[9] The most significant radical right NGO's in Croatia include *U ime obitelji* („In the name of the Family"), established in 2013, which according to some sources has more than 500,000 members, and *Vigilare*, established in 2011.

inequality and preoccupying emancipatory projects with economic goals, this understanding justifies "gender equality for the market" (Vida 2022, 5). The lack of conceptual clarity around these two different understandings of equality allows for many inconsistencies in tracking gender equality – indicators "embedded in neoliberal frameworks preoccupy gender equality aspirations", measuring and justifying them with economic or representative target setting (Vida 2022, 12).

As a measure developed by the World Economic Forum, the Global Gender Gap Index is a casualty of the neoliberal understanding of equality as well. One of the recurring themes in the analysis provided by the report is the importance gender parity is for the full exploitation of human talent – placing the value of humanity away from human rights, and into the jaws of efficiency, development and competitiveness (World Economic Forum 2013; 2007). The Global Gender Gap Report from 2013, for example, contends that empowering women is important because it means a "more efficient use of a nation's human capital endowment", and that "reducing gender inequality enhances productivity and economic growth" (World Economic Forum 2013, 31). It is a matter of double restrictions on the wider understanding of gender equality – on the one hand, the notion of equality used by the WEF is unbiasedly neoliberal, on the other, we are looking at how even the progress towards this narrowed inclusion of women is hindered.

Different types of actors, such as politicians, policymakers, and activists, engaging with institutions such as the bureaucratic system, parliament, court, or the Church, can resist gender equality in one or all of its understandings (Vida 2022). While modern-day left and liberal forces usually do accept equality either as a social goal or as a prerequisite for faster economic development, the right is not uniform in its advocacy. The differences are, however, patterned rather than random, and do not reflect the conflicts between party families. The root of the different approaches of the right towards the inclusion of women in the public sphere is, not

strictly tied to the way they conceptualize women, but to the goal they prioritize in the economic sphere. More specifically, it is an instance of a Polanyian *movement* vs. *countermovement* dynamic, which explains why some right actors, voters, and even institutions, accept the subjugation of the conventionalist and traditionalist aspect of their ideology to the imperatives of the market economy.

4. The fight for equality – instance of a Polanyian double movement?

There seem to exist at least two opposing tendencies when it comes to the way radical right political configurations gave importance to specific policies around gender equality. On the one hand, the *convergence of mainstream (liberal, conservative, and radical) right* challenges primarily the political and social implications of gender equality, while maintaining and promoting its economic aspects. This convergence is marked by a strictly neoliberal understanding of gender equality as the formal and legal opportunity to participate in the labor force, allowing for a partial financial and political emancipation of women who stepped out of the private sphere, but who nevertheless often remain in "typically female jobs" in the area of social reproduction. It acts as an instance of a Polanyian *movement*, governed by the imperative of market-expansion and executed through "fictitious commodification", i.e., subjecting (wo)men to supply and demand, treating their productive and reproductive labor as a good for sale, and estranging them from their traditional role in the household (Polanyi 2001, 130).

On the other hand, the *illiberal radical right* today acts as a *countermovement* to the unrestrained expansion of the market – a corresponding political reaction "against a dislocation which attacked the fabric of society, and which would have destroyed the very organization of production that the market had called into being" (Polanyi 2001, 130). This *illiberal radical right* specifically forms around social interests imperiled by the market (Polanyi 2001, 169), therefore criticizing both the economic and the political liberal script (Laruelle 2022), not least the all-consuming marketization of society, the dismantling of social ties, and the atomization of the community which came with neoliberalism, and which is manifested in politics of gender equality.

Rather than coalitions between specific parties or elements of one party's ideology, this 'double movement' represents "two organizing principles in society, each of them setting itself specific institutional aims, having the support of definite social forces and using its own distinctive methods" (Polanyi 2001, 132). Conceptualized as a "fundamental dialectic of capitalist market dynamics and their destructive effects on societies" (Atzmüller et al. 2019, 4), the constitution of these social forces remains ambiguous and contradictory, interwoven with and built upon previous advances of the adversary, allowing us to use the 'double movement' as an analytical tool to understand conflicts *on the radical right itself*. In this way, this paper uses the concept of a Polanyian 'double movement' as an interactive and mutually enforcing dynamic in which the same actors can reconfigure their position depending on the sphere of interaction, most recent societal shifts or crises, and general coalitions and strategies of achieving specific goals.

The two spheres of interaction which allow for different positioning of social groups constitute the main arenas of struggle of the 'double movement' – the economic sphere, and the political. Describing how *movement* and *countermovement* collided from two "angles", Polanyi specifies that the economic angle was characterized by a "clash of the organizing principles of economic liberalism and social protection", while the political angle interacted with the economic through a "conflict of classes" (Polanyi 2001, 134). This idea of the political sphere as a the domain of a conflict of classes echoes an industrial setting in which clearly delineated social groups advocated for their specific interests, representing either the 'needs of production', maintained in the economic sphere, emerging from market relations, and conceptualized as elements of a self-sustaining progressive force towards further development, or the 'need for social reproduction' – either of the labor force or of those social classes which were threatened by the all-consuming nature of the market.

Ellen Meiksins Wood (2016) describes how the historical division between the political and the economic spheres managed to transform the issues of domination and exploitation, that were previously inescapably tied to the struggles for political power, into questions of a completely separate, non-contentious, but competitive, economic sphere. The separation of these two domains was one of the main preconditions for the processes of the commodification of labor, i.e., its recreation as any independent entity at the market-level, for a certain price. Furthermore, the issues of the economy were placed outside of the political power structures, displacing them into the hands of individuals or groups that have no obligation or responsibility towards the reproduction of basic societal ties.

This divide between the economic and the political soon became constitutive for a division of order between economic and political liberalism – i.e., fights for democratization and acquisition of political liberties alongside economic liberties, which reflects in the possibility of the illiberal right today to contest the political, while reproducing economic liberalism. The sphere of the political, as the sphere of state intervention, sides both with the movement and the countermovement through the creation of policies and politics and constitutes the arena where the fight for gender equality is fought. At the same time, the political sphere, however, rather than serving as a simple domain of class influence, serves as the key custodian of all social reproduction, regulating the force of unlimited accumulation which "threatens to destabilize the very reproductive processes and capacities that capital - and the rest of us – need" through interventions in the forms of legislation and the formulation of social policies (Fraser 2016). In other words, when checking the action of the market in respect to labor and factors of production, the countermovement disputes the prioritization of the economic need for a wider labor force and the need for economic expansion over the ties, roles, norms and values that constitute society itself, and which are, in the Croatian context, understood as the trinity of the nation, Catholicism, and the traditional family.

However, this organization of social reproduction in financialized capitalism has undergone major shifts since the transition to the market economy. Accelerated by the further neoliberalisation after the economic crisis, it constructed completely new institutional forms and a different normative order for gender relations – the issue of women's inclusion in the labor market was no longer a normative, but an existential problem, instigated by rising poverty rates and the lay-off of many male-breadwinners (Fraser 2016). The result of these shifts and the general establishment of the neoliberal hegemony was the creation of new cleavages on the right, resulting in a fragmentation and emergence of new parties that criticized the established political constellations. The social dynamics of the 'double movement' today has, in other words, long left the divisions of the liberals vs. nationalists/socialists - the liberal creed has consumed the mainstream political positions, resulting in the fragmentation of contemporary nationalist forces and their internal division on issues of economic vs. political liberalism, movement vs. the countermovement, progressive neoliberal equality vs. traditionalist forms of gender+ oppression.

4.1. Movement – the mainstream radical right

As already mentioned, in the context of post-socialist Croatia, the mainstream right HDZ was the key carrier of the neoliberalization processes, compelled, at least partially, by the urgent need to distance themselves from the heritage of the former Yugoslavia. The reaction to this *movement* of neoliberal market expansion and the diminishing of traditional societal roles was, among other things, the emergence of the populist radical right, which criticized the mainstream right for allowing such disintegration of society. This was a reaction against "the deprivations of neoliberal economic globalization, job losses and cuts in social welfare" as well as against the neoliberal transformation of the gender regime (Sauer 2019, 172). The newly emerged

radical right forces, however, were not uniform in their criticism, allowing for new political reconfigurations. Some parties, such as Most, formed coalitions with the mainstream right, resulting in the radicalization of HDZ, and the establishment of a new, more radical movement, which contested the political liberalism implemented during the transition. Others stayed vary of HDZ's Western liberal connections and maintained a strong criticism both of economic and of political liberalism, advocating for a more nationalist (even planned) market economy which would protect the ethnic people. The struggles between these two forces were, however, fought in the arena of gender, which was taken as a key provision on the road to new hegemonic constellations, as well as to the formation of alliances with liberals, conservatives, or the Catholic church.

The transition to liberal democracy in Croatia was executed through, among other things, the implementation of liberal emancipatory politics of the second half of the 20th century, resulting in the breaking of the 'glass ceiling' and opening up possibilities for women to take on more important roles. This meant the implementation of so-called "gender mainstreaming" from above (which often uncritically mirrored successful policies from the West) and resulted in the "acceleration of the inclusion of women into labor markets", "the intensified commodification of female labor", and "in an ambivalent neoliberal gender equality" (Sauer 2019, 177). The newly established 'financialized capitalism' was characterized by its liberal-individualist and gender egalitarian nature – women were considered "equals in every sphere, deserving of equal opportunities to realize their talents, including, perhaps especially – in the sphere of production" (Fraser 2016). In other words, 'gender equality' was part of the transitional package. Implemented through policies of 'progressive neoliberalism', it celebrated the ideals of 'diversity', meritocracy and 'emancipation', which were specifically interpreted through the possibilities of access to the labor market (or better paid jobs in the labor market) (Fraser 2016; 2017).

As the political context radicalized after the economic and financial crisis, resulting in the rise of anti-establishment radical right parties that criticized the pro-Western liberal politics, the dynamics inside the governing HDZ shifted towards radicalization. Forming coalitions with radical right parties and responding to the requests of the newly emerged radical right NGO's that raised significant support, the liberal conservative party was forced to balance between international relations and the political dynamics inside the country. In the aftermath of parliamentary elections in 2015 and 2016, HDZ was forced to form the government in a coalition with Most and provide significant provisions to their populist requests. In this context, the movement of the *mainstream radical right* was formed, which reconciled the critiques of political liberalism, while at the same time maintaining their neoliberal economic course.

In the context of promoting gender equality, the mandates of this government show progress in terms of Economic Participation and Opportunity, accepting the need to expand the labor force and use all available human resources. They were even willing to accept women in managerial positions or representative roles in society, incidentally promoting Political Empowerment, while at the same time neglecting the historical configurations which excluded women from participating in the public sphere, and in this way maintaining the expectation of the women's 'double shift' of work and household labor. In form of radical right advocacy, this implies

> …promoting pro-natalist policies, while simultaneously exploiting women's motherhood and caring responsibilities by reprivatizing childcare, which has intensified women's unpaid work while simultaneously pushing women into the labor market (Vida 2022, 16).

This, radicalized version of the mainstream right promotes the neoliberal feminism operationalized through gender quotas, while at the same time criticizing wider political liberalism (equality, the freedom of choice, body integrity, LGBTQIA+ policies, minority rights, implementation of sexual education etc.). Significant shifts towards a humanistic gender

equality, however, were not instigated, and affirmative action policies targeted mainly educated women, allowing for women quotas or more parity in the higher ranks, relying exclusively on breaking the 'glass ceiling' as the main strategy of emancipation – for middle- and upper-class women. On the other hand, working class women were pressured by the rising poverty levels and often forced into precarious labor conditions, regularly taking up the lowest ranked jobs or jobs in social reproduction – positions that still seemed more suitable for women, but allowed them a 'double working salary' for the household. This class divisions resulted in gender equality still being especially vulnerable to effects of crisis.

Neoliberalism, therefore, brought the widespread inclusion of women into the labor market, but also ignored all of those power dynamics that have so far confined women to the private sphere – it implied 'gender equality' for the sake of development, rather than gender equality for the sake of human rights. Instead, the convergence of mainstream right in the 2010s promoted economic inclusion paired with the "protection" of women's traditional social role, advocated gender emancipation (in its neoliberal sense) through exploitation of cheap and migrant laboring women, while at the same time managing the reproduction of the system through policies ensuring the protection unpaid household labor, and demographic policies that aimed to renew the labor force. At the same time, these neoliberal emancipatory projects governed by the movement of mainstream right allowed for the further expansion of the market into the reproductive labor which was traditionally performed by women. Even though the women's role in the household was seemingly based on a traditionalist model, the official policies furthered the economic inclusion of women, while slowly deteriorating social reproduction. Most notably, these were policies aimed at combating unemployment rather than improving the working conditions available to the lower-class; advocating the return to the family without creating economic possibilities to do so. In this way, the movement, actualized by the radicalization of the mainstream conservative and liberal right, resulted in the demagogic

evocation of the traditional family, the attacks on women's individual rights, and the marginalization of other elements of political liberalism, while at the same time promoting an individualist neoliberal idea of gender equality aimed at achieving economic inclusion and representation.

Women's labor was commodified especially through the outsourcing and displacement of care-work, contributing to the expansion of the labor market into the private sphere - and this commodification was maintained through the illusion of adjacent emancipation (Atzmüller 2019). This aspect of social reproduction, as the underlying condition of any capitalist economy, provides the best example of the main elements of the contemporary movement in Croatia, including activities such as caregiving or housework becoming mediated by the market, while they were, at the expense of women, previously awarded no monetized value (Fraser 2016). As financialized capitalism diminished the institutional care work and returned it to families and communities, it has, by forcing women into the labor force without alleviating them of their care duties, diminished their capacity to perform it:

> The result, amid rising inequality, is a dualized organization of social reproduction, commodified for those who can pay for it, privatized for those who cannot. (Fraser 2016)

What Fraser (2016) calls the 'care gap', women are forced to outsource care to other, lower class or migrant women, which in turn allows them no capacity to fulfill the care duties in their own households, further displacing care and creating global care chains. While care work was already performed in oppressive social relations of the traditional family, it nevertheless stayed uncommodified for long, allowing for at least a certain level of reciprocity. In this way, the emancipation from the family, even though it did alleviate women from some aspects of their social role, negatively affected other solidarities, allowing further marketization and putting

more pressure on them to balance the work and family.[10] The analysis of the effects of *the movement* in Croatia, therefore, need to start from the point of emancipation for Croatian (middle class) women through their participation in (labor) markets, but it needs to take into account the limiting structural embeddings that restrained their emancipation " (Weicht 2019, 264). The movement of economic inclusion has coincided with the defamilialization of care, resulting in a widening 'care gap', and furthering the image that women and feminism are to blame for the destruction of social ties.

4.2. Countermovement – the illiberal radical right

On the other hand, the *illiberal radical right* who contest both the economic and political empowerment of women, aimed specifically at contesting political liberalism, and subjugating economic policies to the interest of the nation and the family. The major part of these contestations of the liberal order was, as previously mentioned, gendered, as they formed wider social movements aimed at dismantling institutions and legislature implemented to promote gender equality, especially focused around the dimensions of "employment, family-work reconciliation, sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender mainstreaming, gender-based violence, divorce rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, feminist foreign policy and the politics of teaching gender studies" (Vida 2022, 13). While these contested topics do not clearly fall into any of the subindexes measured by the Global Gender Gap Index, they illuminate wider societal conflicts which shape the advocacy of specific parties, and the progress towards gender equality (in the sense of human rights) challenged by the rise of the radical right today.

[10] However, it is important to state that Croatia stays one of the countries where elderly care is still traditionally performed by female family members, even though it is combined with a rising number or hired carers.

In the case of Croatia, the countermovement tendencies were mostly executed by social movements containing radical right voters, religious and conservative civic organizations, and public intellectuals, but encountered widespread support of supported otherwise politically disengaged individuals. Even though they were most active during the rule of the social democratic government (SDP), the same actors continued to pursue political changes after the mainstream right HDZ returned to power, causing a strong internal conflict inside of the dominant party, which was keen to criticize political liberalism, but unable to critically assess neoliberalism which shaped it as a ruling party since the 90s. One of the first illiberal attacks was formed through the appropriation of the human rights discourse, shifting the framing of LGBTQIA+ critique from the frame of "unnaturalness" to a promotion of "family rights", resulting in the constitutional redefinition of marriage. Illiberal actors used these gendered topics to formulate a widespread critique of the liberal West as the main agent which brought emancipatory projects to post-communist countries and forced the sovereign democracies to develop a legal framework based on Western standards, rather than Croatian tradition. The push for political illiberalism in Croatia, in other words, was originally a critique of the elites who were influenced by European liberals and a mobilization around a specific conceptualization of family, nation, tradition and a populist anti-liberal-West rhetoric.

When the *illiberal radical right* countermovement managed to mobilize significant support in their critiques of political liberalism, such as during the referendum in 2013 (which resulted in a constitutional redefinition of marriage as the unity between a man and a woman) the policies of gender equality were replaced by those policies that focus on family and demographic policies. This illiberal radical right maintained that the primary role of women in society is family oriented, upholding views that they should, at best, be limited to part time work in typically female jobs such as care work. The primary role of women here is not conceptualized as key carriers of labor force reproduction, but as mothers of the nation, keepers

of the norms, values, and traditions that shape and build the Croatian society. This ideal of a woman as a mother and wife was maintained during the past 30 years in Croatia primarily through the influence of the Catholic Church and the rhetoric of the far-right nationalists (who rarely had great electoral success). Nevertheless, in the 2010s, after the grievances and the de-democratization that came with neoliberalism, it was reestablished as the ideal model by which the society should assign societal roles.

As far as a consensus between the movement and the countermovement on the right does exist, it is in its "perception of *Frauenpolitik* (womens politics) mainly as *Familienpolitik* (family politics), their opposition to the *Gleichmacherei* (equalization) of the feminists, and stringent defense of the "natural differences" between the sexes" (Mudde 2007, 92). In this case, both gender equality in terms of Economic Participation and Opportunity and in Political Empowerment are criticized as being destructive to social ties, the family, and the basis of the nation. This saving of women from the labor market, at the same time, implies constraining them to a specific societal role, one that still endures a major part of all reproductive labor, but specifically aims at reproducing a traditionalist, nationalist, familialist society.

4.3. The emancipation on the border between the movement and the countermovement

One of the key assumptions of this thesis, not detectable in the Global Gender Gap Reports, is that gender equality is an emancipatory notion in itself, one that does not need to side either with movement or countermovement tendencies to be pursuitable. In her paper *Can Societies Be Commodities All the Way Down? Post-Polanyian Reflections on Capitalist Crisis* (2014), Fraser introduces a third set of forces whose primary aim is "neither to promote

marketization nor to protect society from it, but rather to free themselves of domination" (2014, 550).

> "While marketization unquestionably promotes precarious, highly problematic employment situations it is crucial to recognize that, on the other hand, it enables several processes of emancipation: of middle-class women from family care duties and of a substantial number of poor, unemployed migrant women." (Weicht 2019, 269)

However, this implies emancipation only for the middle- and upper-classes, undermining social protection and externalizing social reproduction to other, lower-class women which take on burden. Familialism, on the other hand, can be emancipatory, a conclusion that is necessary to understand when advocating a humanist understanding of gender equality. Saving the women of the precarious conditions in the market and the need of the double shift, it allows women re-embed their labor in socially reproductive conditions, performing it to the interest of rebuilding family and community ties.

In other words, an issue that Mudde defined as the second feminist bias (2007) – the view of the populist radical right as inherently male chauvinist – does not necessarily hold true. Approaching gender equality outside of market indicators and as from a social perspective includes not only understanding the gendered divisions in party constituencies and sociodemographics of the radical right electorate, but also the gendered discussions that are specifically tied to the populist radical right rhetoric and modus operandi.

This approach to the issue of the gendered ideological framing of the populist radical right includes taking women's positions and roles as results of structural causes, rather than matters of emancipatory blindness. In other words, insisting on the radical right as exclusively oriented towards curtailing women's interest disregards the "ideological complexity of right-wing projects", which are not only reactionary in their nature, but can also have a strong emancipatory potential for women, e.g., giving them a place back at the home and saving them from the

struggles of the market (Grzebalska and Kováts 2018). Therefore, an emancipatory movement on the right, as a tendency that criticizes economic liberalism, while allowing for political liberalism, is the only political project that can promote the social understanding of gender equality, reconciliating the movement and countermovement in the best interest of women.

5. Conclusion

When measuring and analyzing the progress towards gender equality, global indexes such as the Global Gender Gap Index provide a useful set of starting data, pinpointing the most prominent trends and the areas that need most improvement. However, conceptualizing equality exclusively in neoliberal terms and operationalizing it through variables of inclusion into the labor market or number of female representatives obscure the underlying relations of inequality outside of the market. Though the Global Gender Gap Index specifically opts for measuring outcomes rather than conditions, even the variables it does measure are adjusted to the requests of a neoliberal gender equality – e.g., accounting for the number of those who have broken the 'glass ceiling', but failing to account for the quality of such inclusion, and the gendered consequences that still come with it. In the words of Bianka Vida, embedding humanist values in capitalist development "offers little to counter gendered injustices that fall outside of market considerations" (Vida 2022, 13). And while it stays forgotten that, even when women do enter the workforce, they more often do so in outsourced and precarious conditions, performing the 'double shift' of productive and reproductive labor, the image of the progress towards gender equality provided by the Gender Gap Index remains partial at best.

For example, the issue of stagnating parity in the area of Political Empowerment needs to be conceptualized as part of broader processes of de-democratization, which would allow us to understand it as the effect of illiberal politics. In other words, the success of right-wing populism needs to be looked at through a gendered prism to combat gender inequality and

understand how the internal ideological divisions shape policy responses. Currently dominating the reaction to neoliberal crises in Europe, the analysis of the radical right influence on gendered policies also remains important in assessing the consequences of further crises, with some of them already being visible through the impact of the pandemic. This is especially worrisome as preliminary data shows more women than men lost their jobs, there is a slower re-employment of women, a decline of women's hiring into leadership roles, destruction of overall industries with higher participation of women (e.g. consumer sector, non-profits, media and communication), lowering of working hours for women etc. (World Economic Forum 2021).

As the past decade was marked precisely by the radical right mobilizing against human rights-based and participatory policies, often resulting in challenges to marriage equality, reproductive rights, sex education, antidiscrimination policies etc, the analysis of the radical right remains crucial for any emancipatory project in the future. Accounting for progress towards a social, humanistic value of gender equality, rather than a neoliberal one, needs to take into account the specific social, political, and economic context of both the economic and the political sphere to provide a complete image. Only then will it be truly visible how much of the road is still ahead of us.

6. Bibliography

Akkerman, Tjitske, Sarah L. de Lange, and Matthijs Rooduijn, eds. 2016. *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe: Into the Mainstream?* Routledge Studies in Extremism and Democracy. London ; New York, NY: Routledge.

Alexander, Jennifer, and Kandyce Fernandez. 2021. "The Impact of Neoliberalism on Civil Society and Nonprofit Advocacy." *Nonprofit Policy Forum* 12 (2): 367–94. https://doi.org/10.1515/npf-2020-0016.

Atzmüller, Roland, ed. 2019. *Capitalism in Transformation: Movements and Countermovements in the 21st Century*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Atzmüller, Roland, Brigitte Aulenbacher, Urlich Brand, Fabienne Décieux, Karin Fischer, and Birgit Sauer. 2019. "Polanyian Perspectives on the Movements and Countermovements of 'Our Time': An Introduction." In *Capitalism in Transformation. Movements and Countermovements in the 21st Century*, 1–21. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Carter, Elisabeth. 2018. "Right-Wing Extremism/Radicalism: Reconstructing the Concept." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 23 (2): 157–82. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2018.1451227.

European Commission, ed. 1998. *One Hundred Words for Equality: A Glossary of Terms on Equality between Women and Men*. Employment & Social Affairs. Luxembourg : Lanham, MD: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities ; Bernan Associates [distributor].

Fraser, Nancy. 2014. "Can Society Be Commodities All the Way down? Post-Polanyian Reflections on Capitalist Crisis." *Economy and Society* 43 (4): 541–58. https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2014.898822.

———. 2016. "Contradictions of Capital and Care." *New Left Review* 100 (September): 99–117.

———. 2017. "From Progressive Neoliberalism to Trump—and Beyond." *American Affairs Journal* (blog). November 20, 2017. https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2017/11/progressive-neoliberalism-trump-beyond/.

Grzebalska, Weronika, Eszter Kováts, Weronika Grzebalska, and Andrea Peto,. 2017. "Gender as Symbolic Glue: How 'Gender' Became an Umbrella Term for the

Rejection of the (Neo)Liberal Order." *Political Critique* (blog). January 13, 2017. http://politicalcritique.org/long-read/2017/gender-as-symbolic-glue-how-gender-became-an-umbrella-term-for-the-rejection-of-the-neoliberal-order/.

Grzebalska, Weronika, and Andrea Pető. 2018. "The Gendered Modus Operandi of the Illiberal Transformation in Hungary and Poland." *Women's Studies International Forum* 68 (May): 164–72. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2017.12.001.

Hodžić, Amir, and Aleksandar Štulhofer. n.d. "Embryo, Teddy Bear-Centaur and the Constitution: Mobilizations against 'Gender Ideology' and Sexual Permissiveness in Croatia." In *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe. Mobilizing against Equality*. London ; New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, Ltd.

Inglehart, Ronald F. 2008. "Changing Values among Western Publics from 1970 to 2006." *West European Politics* 31 (1–2): 130–46. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402380701834747.

Kiely, Ray. 2020. "Assessing Conservative Populism: A New Double Movement or Neoliberal Populism?" *Development and Change* 51 (2): 398–417. https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12567.

Kitschelt, Herbert. 2007. "Growth and Persistence of the Radical Right in Postindustrial Democracies: Advances and Challenges in Comparative Research." *West European Politics* 30 (5): 1176–1206. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402380701617563.

Laruelle, Marlene. 2022. "Illiberalism: A Conceptual Introduction." *East European Politics*, March, 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2022.2037079.

Mair, Peter. 2006. "Ruling the Void? The Hollowing of Western Democracy." *New Left Review* 42 (Nov-Dec): 25–51.

Mudde, Cas. 2007. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511492037.

———. 2010. "The Populist Radical Right: A Pathological Normalcy." *West European Politics* 33 (6): 1167–86. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2010.508901.

Obućina, Vedran. 2011. "Radikalno desne stranke u bivšim komunističkim državama: izazovi liberalnoj demokraciji ili socioekonomski protest?" *Anali Hrvatskog politološkog društva: časopis za politologiju* 8 (1): 93–105.

Polanyi, Karl. 2001. *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. 2nd Beacon Paperback ed. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Sauer, Birgit. 2019. "Cultural War 2.0? The Relevance of Gender in the Radical Populist-Nationalist Right." In *Capitalism in Transformation: Movements and*

Countermovements in the 21st Century, 169–83. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Vida, Bianka. 2022. “Introduction.” In *The Gendered Politics of Crises and De-Democratization: Opposition to Gender Equality*. London ; New York: ECPR Press ; Rowman & Littlefield.

Weicht, Bernhard. 2019. “The Commodification of Informal Care: Joining and Resisting the Marketization Processes.” In *Capitalism in Transformation. Movements and Countermovements in the 21st Century*, 261–73. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Wood, Ellen Meiksins. 2016. *Democracy against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism*. London: Verso.

World Economic Forum. 2006. “The Global Gender Gap Report 2006.” World Economic Forum. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2006.pdf.

———. 2007. “The Global Gender Gap Report 2007.” World Economic Forum. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2007.pdf.

———. 2013. “The Global Gender Gap Report 2013.” World Economic Forum. https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2013/.

———. 2017. “What Is the Gender Gap (and Why Is It Getting Wider)?” World Economic Forum. November 1, 2017. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/11/the-gender-gap-actually-got-worse-in-2017/.

———. 2018. “Global Gender Gap Report 2018.” World Economic Forum. https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2018/.

———. 2021. “Global Gender Gap Report 2021.” World Economic Forum. https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2021/.