

### Facts about the empirical basis of the dissertation

The aim of this dissertation was to understand how feminism as a children-kidnapping system became a valid description of reality for a certain segment of Czech society. To understand this issue, Eva Svatoňová has spent the last four years attending seminars and events addressing the issue of "gender ideology", talking to people who actively joined the battle against "gender ideology", watching and interpreting over a hundred videos on YouTube and reading and interpreting more than three thousands articles.

### Eva Svatoňová

Eva Svatoňová is a political sociologists who specializes in far-right politics, anti-feminism and culture wars in Central Europe. To understand these phenomena, she uses ethnographic methods and life-history interviews and combines discourse theory with sociocultural approaches.

### Time and place for the defence

Monday 13 June 2022 at 1 pm  
Aarhus University  
Building 1441, Auditorium 112  
Taasingegade 3, 8000 Aarhus C

### Contact

Eva Svatoňová  
sva.eva@cas.au.dk  
+45 50 30 19 06



## How Feminists Became Baby Snatchers. The Making of the Czech Anti-gender Discourse



PhD dissertation by Eva Svatoňová



AARHUS UNIVERSITY

# HOW FEMINISTS BECAME BABY SNATCHERS. THE MAKING OF THE CZECH ANTI-GENDER DISCOURSE

**Summary of the main points of PhD dissertation How Feminists Became Baby Snatchers. The Making of the Czech Anti-gender Discourse by Eva Svatoňová, Department of European Studies, Aarhus University.**

**The dissertation focuses on the emergence of the opposition to gender equality and LGB-TIQA+ rights in Czechia. The phenomenon is analysed through lenses of postfoundational discourse theory combined with socio-cultural approach.**

## Background

Since the notion of “feminism” first appeared in the public space, feminists have been accused of various crimes against femininity: being ugly, being masculine, hating men, being promiscuous, even killing unborn babies. Still, when I first encountered headlines such as “They Will Take Your Kids and Imprison Them” (Parlamentní listy, 2018), “Hunt for Children!” (Byzantine Patriarchate, 2013b) or “Nationalization of Children on a Global Scale” (Pavlíková, 2015), I became aware that such headlines were evidence that a new form of anti-feminism was now pushing to rearticulate the identity of the “feminist Other” in an even more radical way: as someone whose ultimate goal is to steal children from their parents and as agents in a war on the traditional family. Upon realizing this, I could not help but wonder how we got here. This thesis is, at the most fundamental level, my endeavour to answer that question.

## How “gender” became a “gender ideology”

In this dissertation, I argue that during the 2010s, a coalition of Czech conservative and ultraconservative actors succeeded in making “gender ideology” a matter of public debate

and, in so doing, redefined the meaning of the word “gender” which they portray as the enemy of the people (Hesová, 2020). To explain how they succeeded in doing so, I provide a diachronic account of the anti-gender discourse and demonstrate how it began to gain momentum in the Czech public space.

## Diffusing anti-gender discourse into Czech public space

Since one of the main arguments of this thesis is that the discourse was not developed in Czechia, the thesis shows how it, in the form of discursive resources, travelled to the Czech public space. In order to capture the transnational genealogy of the discourse, I further draw on the theory of diffusion (Kolins Givan, Roberts, & Soule, 2010). I argue that the discourse was diffused into the Czech public space through various channels which I identified through tracing the process in the media database.

## How the discourse settled in the Czech public space

Throughout a postfoundational discourse analysis informed by socio-cultural approach, I categorize the internal differences between the actors involved in the hegemonic project. Particularly, I identify three branches: religious, neoliberal and folksy. I argue that each of the branch articulates its specific antagonism and in doing so the actors use a political style which correlates with its desired target group.

## Conclusion

How did feminists become baby snatchers then? I argue that the anti-gender discourse has two purposes: One, it serves as a means for certain individuals and political organizations to secure them and their ideologies a power position. And two, it serves as a way for some to express their disappointment with the post-revolutionary development. Since the hegemonic project consisted of different ideological streams, it urgently needed one particularly powerful enemy to unite people representing all the branches of the project. Feminists, or “genderists” as the anti-gender actors call them, are particularly convenient. In the context of Czechia and its omnipresent anti-feminist sentiment, as I argued in chapter 5, they became an easy target.