Book Review

Fábián, Katalin and Korolczuk, Elżbieta (eds.) (2017) Rebellious Parents: *Parental Movements in Central-Eastern Europe and Russia.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 376 pages.

While we are told not to judge books by their covers, this edited volume clearly invites the potential readers to spend a few seconds wondering about the main title, *Rebellious Parents*, and the cover photo: we see decent-looking middle-aged women and men participating at an apparently peaceful street demonstration, with charts hanging from their necks. On the charts, there are the words 'Danger' and 'Gender' on a pictogram of a bunch of dynamite.

Those who followed the media news or the academic publications about social movements in Europe in the last five years will most likely suppose that the book is about the emerging 'anti-gender' discourse and mobilisations. But by looking at the table of contents, it becomes clear that besides those movements opposing 'gender ideology', numerous other issues and related civil society initiatives from Central-Eastern Europe and Russia are discussed in this book. While reading through the eleven case studies in the volume, we can make an inventory, and by the time we reach the concluding part, we will have a list of eight causes: i) parents' claim for political support of traditional family roles, while rejecting the constructivist conceptualization of gender (in Russia and in Ukraine); ii) artificial reproductive technology (ART) patients' claims for recognition, including increased health insurance sources (in Bulgaria); iii) divorced fathers' child custody and visitation claims (in Poland and in the Czech Republic); iv) young fathers' (peer) learning needs about involved parenting (in Poland, in Russia and in Ukraine); v) single (and disabled) fathers' social and welfare support claims of (in Ukraine); vi) parents' claims against mandatory vaccination of children (in the Czech Republic); vii) mentally disabled children's parents' social support and recognition needs (in Estonia, in Latvia and in Lithuania); vii) claims against the (over)medicalization of childbirth (in the Czech Republic and in Hungary).

Both of the editors of the volume, Katalin Fábián (originally from Hungary, currently a professor at Lafayette College in the USA) and Elżbieta Korolczuk (from Poland, currently working at Södertörn University in Stockholm and teaching at Warsaw University) have already provided significant contributions to the academic literature on civil society movements in Central-Eastern Europe, and have a wide regional network among actors in this field.

In the introduction chapter, the editors provide an explanation regarding the title of the volume: 'We use the term "parental movements" because in contrast to parents' movements, which concentrate mostly on legal changes concerning custody, welfare, and health care, the movements examined in this book have broader agendas' (p. 2). They add that in some cases the activists themselves prefer the term 'parental movement', in order to 'stress that they fight on behalf of the family', or because they

intend to 'appear as gender-neutral' (p. 13), or maybe they want to 'obscure the fact that activists are nearly all men (as fathers) or nearly exclusively female (as mothers or those who wish to be mothers)' (p. 13–14). Moreover, the editors offer a series of ways to categorize the wide range of relevant initiatives, and they share numerous highly insightful thoughts about the nature of different parental movements. Curiously, one of the editors' most significant introduction statement is – the reader will realize when reading some of the case studies, how significant it is! – hidden in an endnote (p. 23, endnote 2): 'The emergence and increasing capacity of parental movements worldwide stem also from developments in new information and communication technologies. Following Benedict Anderson's (1983) analysis of reading circles in the early days of the printing press, we can conceptualize some online groups as contemporary imagined political communities.'

The first chapter, by Tova Hojdestrand, presents the grassroots mobilization in defence of traditional and family values in Russia, in the early 2010s. According to the rhetoric of this nationalist movement, international child rights standards (expressed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and manifested by UNICEF) implied 'a disruption of child-parent relations, of social ties and of the entire Russian way of life' (p. 46.)

In the second chapter, Olena Strelnyk presents the results of her research, implemented in 2011–2014, about conservative parents' mobilization in Ukraine, organized by an NGO, The Parents Committee of Ukraine (Roditel'skiy komitet Ukrainy). This movement, just like the similar one in Russia (presented in the previous chapter) is against 'YuYu' (the abbreviated form of the phrase 'juvenile justice' in Ukrainian), i.e. the international children's rights norms, in the name of defending traditional family values – which includes, in their interpretation, the entitlement of parents to apply mild corporal punishment as well.

The third chapter, written by Ina Dimitrova, provides an insight into the online activism of patients of assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) in Bulgaria. The claims of this movement are, sometimes implicitly, based on the concept of 'deservedness' – which is a disturbing feature from the aspect of equal dignity of humans. In this discourse, the well-educated and well-off majority Bulgarians, who are seeking medical solutions for their infertility, 'deserve' to become parents, and their babies are much needed for the sake of the nation as well, given the 'threat' that ethnic Turks and Roma will outnumber the ethnic Bulgarians in the country.

Elżbieta Korolczuk and Renata E. Hryciuk, in the fourth chapter of the volume, categorize and present a wide range of fathers' initiatives in Poland. The authors identify three main strands: the 'angry fathers' are attempting to enforce their interests in child custody and visitation issues after divorce in a fierce way; the 'fathers' advocates' are supporting divorced fathers in a consolidated way; while 'engaged fathers' are concentrating 'on increasing and deepening the quality of fathering' (p. 125).

The fifth chapter, co-authored by Pelle Aberg and Johnny Rodin, introduce the concept and the history (from 2008) of 'daddy schools' in Saint Petersburg, initiated by progressive middle-class men, aimed at providing seminars for fathers and fathers-to-be to discuss parenting issues. The 'daddy schools' attracted positive attention not just from the media, but also from the regional and local authorities; these grassroots

civil society actors apparently 'succeeded in framing their activities and ambitions as being in line with state interests' (p. 161).

Iman Karzabi, in the sixth chapter of the volume, takes an approach to present fathers' activism in Ukraine which is like Korolczuk's and Hryciuk's in their case study on Poland: she categorizes a broad range of initiatives, and identifies also three strands. Firstly, there is a 'pro-marriage' movement, represented by the International Center of Fatherhood (Mezhdunarodnyj Centr Otsovstva), an Evangelical Christian organisation that promotes the view that fathers have a key role in transmitting the 'traditional family values' to their children. Secondly, there are NGOs aimed at advocating the interests of 'vulnerable families', namely single-father and disabled-and-single-father families – indeed, given the absence of general gender equality norms (promoted e.g. by the EU), single fathers are excluded from certain welfare provisions which are guaranteed for single mothers. Thirdly, there are 'daddy school' initiatives in Ukraine as well; similar to the ones in Russia, presented by Aberg and Rodin in the previous chapter of the volume.

While, according to the findings of Karzabi, there are no post-divorce fathers' initiatives in Ukraine, this is not the case in the Czech Republic. Steven Saxonberg's chapter (the seventh in the volume) provides a critical discourse analysis of the messages posted to the online discussion forum of the website 'Daddy Info' (Tatove.info), in 2010–2012. According to Saxonberg's conclusion, the male participants of this forum apparently 'want to keep all the factors that give them a competitive advantage over women in the labour market, but they want to eliminate the one main area in which they feel disadvantaged: that of child custody.'

The eighth chapter, by Jaroslava Hasmanova Marhankova, addresses a particularly controversial issue: the anti-vaccination movement of parents, as manifested in the Czech Republic. (Notably, resistance towards mandatory vaccination is mentioned in Strelnyk's case study on Ukraine, too; as one of the features of the conservative parents' movement.) Hasmanova Marhankova links this movement the ideology of 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996), given the gendered nature of parenting, and the fact that women (mothers) bear the burden and responsibility of decision making regarding their children's health. She highlights the aspect of social class as well, by claiming that vaccine refusal 'serves as a mechanism through which educated, middle-class parents reinforce their privileged position as informed consumers with enough resources to make informed choices and successfully negotiate with health and state authorities' (pp. 243–244).

Egle Sumskiene, in the ninth chapter, introduces the advocacy initiatives of parents of intellectually disabled children (and adults) in the Baltic States. In these countries, the issue of intellectual disability was surrounded by hostile attitudes inherited from the Soviet era, when it was considered as 'a serious threat to the myth of a healthy and productive Soviet society' (p. 255). In the case of parent activism, Sumskiene identifies the 'collective identity of being caregivers' (p. 271) of the founders of relevant NGOs as a key feature which results in emotional synergy and contributes significantly to the strength and political success of this movement.

The topics of last two case studies in the volume are closely connected. The tenth chapter, written by Ema Hresanova, is about the 'natural birth' movement in the Czech Republic, in the early 2010s. (Notably, the Czech natural birth movement is

mentioned also in Hamanova Marhankova's chapter on the Czech anti-vaccination movement, by pointing to conceptual links and to cases of personal overlap regarding the key figures of the two movements.) In the case of the Czech natural birth movement, the issue of planned homebirth is promoted just by a small fraction of radical activists, while there is broad range of claims opposing over-medicalization of childbirth. Katalin Fábián's chapter (the eleventh) aims to analyse a specific aspect, the visual self-representation of the Hungarian home birth activism, with a special focus on the actions organized in relation to the criminal procedure against the protagonist figure of the movement, Dr. Ágnes Geréb, starting from 2010, when she was accused of negligent malpractice. By analysing a set of sensitization campaign posters, Fábián makes an important remark about a group picture of men (apparently, fathers), by highlighting that they are 'diverse in appearance, allowing the viewer to ascribe different economic status and political affiliations (by appearance, such as hairstyle and clothes) to each carrier of the message that asks the reader to consider home-birth an honorable choice.' Apparently, this is relevant regarding the actual composition of home births activists in Hungary, given the ideologically overarching nature of the issue.

Reading through the eleven case studies of the volume is a set of stimulating journeys in nine countries: some scenes visited resemble to other scenes in other countries, while a few sites seem to be rather unique and exotic. And by now, it is a journey back in time, an opportunity to witness the eve of the huge current 'anti-gender' movements (Kováts and Põim, 2015).

Then, after the trip (in the concluding chapter), the editors aim to draw 'Regional and Theoretical Lessons'. This seems to be a challenging and somewhat frustrating endeavour. Firstly, the reader of the volume may still not be convinced that all these movements, just because the participants are (or want to be) parents, should be discussed together or compared to each other; moreover, the territorial scope may seem also seem questionable as a ground for analysis, given the significant differences in the history of these societies before, during and after the era of state socialism. Secondly, the composition of the volume gives the impression of being supply-driven. The most visible aspect of this is the apparent lack of balanced geographical representation within the region: the relevant developments in the Czech Republic are analysed in three chapters; in the cases of Russia and Ukraine in two chapters each; in a single chapter in each of the cases of Bulgaria, Hungary and Poland, while the three Baltic states are mentioned within the framework of a single case study. However, everybody with some practical experience of organizing a conference, or just a conference panel, should know the limits of enforcing a concept. So instead of asking 'why mix all these case studies into one edited volume', we may ask: 'why not?'

Some ethical concerns may be raised at this point. As we have seen, the movements presented in the volume are diverse – for example, from the aspect of democratic and human rights values. In some cases, the case studies' authors did not try to cover their (positive or negative) feelings and judgements towards the claims and arguments of the different movements. As the authors of the chapter presenting the diversity of fathers' movements in Poland reflect on their positions, they 'faced a number of political, moral and epistemological challenges' when they were studying activist groups with whose values they did not sympathise. As for the potential readers

of the book, they would also feel uncomfortable to lean over this collection of movements, and to see some, which are dear to their hearts, to be pinned among movements with disturbing claims. (Presumably, many of the prospective readers identify as feminist and sympathise with the birth movement; moreover, in the specific case of the prospective Hungarian readers, they may recognize friends and familiar faces on the photos in the respective chapter). Finally, the subjects of the case studies, the activists, may also feel that they are in bad company in the volume. However, there is maybe something which would unite the representatives of the presented movements: they would, for very different reasons, reject the label of 'rebellious'.

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