
BOOK REVIEW

All different but all misogynists

Müser, C., Ramme, J. & Takács, J. (Eds.) (2022). *Paradoxical Right-Wing Sexual Politics in Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan

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In recent years, with the strengthening of the populist right and its increased focus on gender and sexuality, there has been growing interest in studying this issue among researchers of social sciences, leading to the publication of several edited volumes (e.g., Kuhar & Paternotte, eds., 2017; Krizsán & Roggeband, eds., 2019, or Kováts & Pöim, eds., 2015). Yet another volume on this topic, therefore, needs to promise something extra beyond the general description of right-wing anti-gender strategies most of us in the field are already familiar with. This collection of essays promises such an extra addition (a focus on paradoxes), and while it does not consistently keep this perspective, it does offer some exciting new additions to the literature of right-wing populism and gender. It grew out of a research project that would have compared right-wing discursive strategies regarding gender and sexuality in Europe, and which, though never completed, provided enough inspiration to a number of renowned researchers to explore these issues in their local context. This original background also accounts for the fact that most articles focus on analyzing discourses (of parties, organizations like the World Congress of Families, or even of researchers), and (with one exception) less attention is paid to the experiences of ordinary people.

The original idea of the project was to pair certain countries with very different contexts, where nevertheless the same traveling concepts and paradoxes can be observed with regard to right-wing activities. Though eventually only two such comparisons were realized, these constitute the perhaps most intriguing chapters of the book. Monica Cornejo-Valle and Jennifer Ramme compare Poland and Spain, with special attention to the role of the Catholic Church in these countries. These two countries are often seen as polar opposites in terms of gender and LGBTQ+ rights, with Spain having same-sex marriage and Poland restricting abortion and designating certain municipalities as 'LGBT-free zones'. Nevertheless, the chapter reveals that the Catholic Church functions very similarly in both, at least in terms of supporting right-wing ideologies. At the end of the article, one cannot help but wonder how come we see huge differences between these countries in terms of policies and public opinion. While one may have some guesses (e.g., a strong feminist tradition in Spain in contrast to a conflicted attitude to feminism in Poland), the authors could have paid more attention to these factors as well. While the Catholic Church is certainly an important factor in the

spread of right-wing ideologies, its local manifestations may be quite diverse, and (as the article on Italy, to be discussed later, also testifies) its influence on politics strongly depends on the local environment.

The other country-to-country comparison, Cornelia Möser's and Eva Reimers' piece on France and Sweden, uses the different interpretations of citizenship as the foundation of analysis, and makes an important point when emphasizing that right-wing sexual politics may be inclusive of (certain types of) women's and LGBTQ+ rights and yet constrain the sexual self-determination of other groups, such as migrants. What they call 'classical racism in homotolerant and feminist guise' (p. 100) has indeed popped up its head not only in the US (the 'homonationalism' described by Jasbir Puar) but even in countries where the leadership otherwise ignores or even curtails women's and LGBTQ+ people's rights – unless they can be instrumentalized to oppress other groups. With the recent election of the extreme right-wing party into the Swedish parliament, it has now become increasingly important to be aware of such ideologies.

Portugal seems to be an exception to the general advancement of the extreme right in the EU. Ana Cristina Santos gives a good overview on the present political situation, but what I consider her article's most valuable part is the excerpts from interviews conducted with members of the LGBTQ+ community. All too often, political analyses of right-wing populism focus on parties and social movements and ignore the effect these have on the population. Santos' chapter reflects that though the influence of the extreme right is still insignificant in their country at the parliamentary level, LGBTQ+ people already feel it in their everyday lives. More research would be needed on how right-wing rhetoric, though perhaps marginal in terms of policymaking, nevertheless exercises an effect on experiences and fears of homophobia.

Meloni's recent victory at the Italian elections makes it especially important to study the path that led to this unfortunate turn. Luca Trappolin's chapter gives a thorough overview of the various right-wing actors on the political and NGO scene. It maps the development of various groups and events, with special focus on the World Congress of Families – an important organization connecting right-wing groups within and outside Europe, which has played an important political role, therefore, its influences should also be examined in countries where it is less visible. Of the case studies, this is the first one in the book that explicitly deals with paradoxes, including the conflictual relationship between the Vatican and various right-wing political and civil society actors. Another point of interest is how certain right-wing actors try to avoid explicitly homophobic language in order to appear palatable, but this does not make their ideas any less 'anti-gender'. This is again a phenomenon also present in other countries of Western Europe and would be worth a study of its own. Another topic worth researching could be the relationship of such right-wing actors to those in countries (e.g., Poland or Hungary) where homophobia is an accepted part of public discourse and is frequently utilized by right-wing parties and other groups. Whereas the explicit nationalism of extreme right-wing parties and political groupings makes it unlikely that they would ally with their counterparts abroad, this is exactly what is happening within the context of the World Congress of Families.

Moving on to Austria, Karin Stögner uses antisemitism as the silver thread to examine the politics and rhetoric of the FPÖ (Freedom Party). After a (perhaps unnecessarily lengthy and too psychological) introduction, she analyzes not only what the party's leaders have said but also printed – visual and written – materials; the analysis of images is especially fruitful

in detecting hidden nationalistic messages. This is a strength of the chapter, but unfortunately the focus on antisemitism is its weakness. While it is certainly important to call attention to lingering hidden (or in some instances, not-so-hidden) antisemitism in right-wing circles, some of Stögner's examples seem somewhat contrived; instead of illustrating antisemitism, they rather highlight a general mistrust of difference of any kind (especially within the ethnically perceived nation, something she calls 'mixophobia'). At the same time, underlining that antisemitism is indeed still present, however hidden (or not) in extreme right-wing discourses is important, as too often it is obscured by focusing on other, more explicitly scapegoated minorities.

Hungary has been widely discussed as a prime example of a country where the government itself represents extreme right-wing anti-genderist and homophobic views. While Erzsébet Barát's discourse analysis does start with the banning of gender studies by the FIDESZ government, a more interesting issue she raises is how trans* people and queerfeminism have become scapegoated by certain sections of the women's movement. While her analysis is limited to a single publication, without exploring the verbal and at times even physical violence exhibited by certain transphobic Hungarian feminists, her chapter is an important reminder that even allegedly progressive social movements may become allies of the extreme right. More research would be needed, however, to explore how these two groups (right-wing groups and trans-exclusionary feminists) perceive each other and whether there are any connections between the two in terms of borrowed concepts and rhetoric or even, possibly, informal ties.

Russia is an important actor in far-right networks, not only as the largest European country with a populist right-wing government, but also because it has close connections with right-wing parties and organizations elsewhere (including the World Congress of Families). Erin Katherine Krafft's chapter examines the Russian anti-gender backlash from a historical and political perspective, putting it into the context of the state's constant construction of enemies within and outside its borders – something that has led to sad results since the book's publication. A minor but especially interesting element in the article is the description of how gender studies centers were not banned, like in Hungary, but transformed in a way that they reinforce rather than question 'traditional' gender norms. Similarly to Erzsébet Barát's chapter on Hungary, this warns that socially critical disciplines may be appropriated and misused by forces aiming to curtail the rights of certain groups.

Finally, Ulrike M. Vieten's chapter on Northern Ireland introduces yet another perspective. Here the group allegedly representing the threat to traditional values is not defined on the basis of sexual orientation, ethnic background or refugee status but religion ('sectarianism'). Consequently, right-wing sexual politics is more focused on abortion rights than other forms of sexual self-determination. While somewhat different in topic, this chapter contributes importantly to the overall picture, showing that depending on the cultural and political context, the populist right selects various groups as 'enemies', but in all cases, control over sexuality is central to their politics.

Eva Reimers and Olaf Stuve's conclusion makes explicit some of the paradoxes explored (sometimes only implicitly) in the previous papers. What is more interesting, though, is the part called 'Missing Links', where they call attention to largely unexplored factors in the functioning of the extreme right – the importance of hegemonic masculinity, the strategies of populism and the fact that movements against LGBTQ people and sexual self-determination often connect very different forces. While there is ample literature on

how homophobia is rooted in ‘traditional’ gender norms, and the articles of this volume, as well as some others, have analyzed how right-wing populism restricts women’s and LGBTQ+ people’s rights, its connection with heterosexual masculinity is rarely studied in depth. Considering the fact that a large percentage of right-wing voters come from the lower classes, the visual and verbal images of hegemonic masculinity by some right-wing populist parties probably give a partial explanation of their popularity. The third ‘missing link’, that of alliances between very different forces, may have practical significance for political and civil society actors working for human rights. Exposing the contradictions of right-wing populism and emphasizing the differences between its actors may help break up these unholy alliances. Möser, Ramme and Takács’s volume is an important contribution to this effort.

RITA BÉRES-DEÁK

(independent researcher)

[ritakarhukissa@gmail.com]

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