

# POLITICKÉ VEDY / POLITICAL SCIENCES

Časopis pre politológiu, najnovšie dejiny, medzinárodné vzťahy, bezpečnostné štúdiá / Journal for Political Sciences, Modern History, International Relations, security studies

URL of the journal / URL časopisu: <http://www.politickevedy.fpvmv.umb.sk>

Author(s) / Autor(i): **Michaela Grančayová**  
Article / Článok: Book Review: Right-Wing Populism and Gender: European Perspectives and Beyond  
Publisher / Vydavateľ: **Fakulta politických vied a medzinárodných vzťahov – UMB Banská Bystrica / Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations – UMB Banská Bystrica**  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24040/politickevedy.2021.24.4.191-197>

**Recommended form for quotation of the article / Odporúčaná forma citácie článku:**

GRANČAYOVÁ, M. Book Review: Right-Wing Populism and Gender: European Perspectives and Beyond. In *Politické Vedy*. Vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 191-197. ISSN 1335 – 2741. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.24040/politickevedy.2021.24.4.191-197>

By submitting their contribution the author(s) agreed with the publication of the article on the online page of the journal. The publisher was given the author's / authors' permission to publish and distribute the contribution both in printed and online form. Regarding the interest to publish the article or its part in online or printed form, please contact the editorial board of the journal: [politicke.vedy@umb.sk](mailto:politicke.vedy@umb.sk).

Poskytnutím svojho príspevku autor(i) súhlasil(i) so zverejnením článku na internetovej stránke časopisu *Politické vedy*. Vydavateľ získal súhlas autora / autorov s publikovaním a distribúciou príspevku v tlačenej i online verzii. V prípade záujmu publikovať článok alebo jeho časť v online i tlačenej podobe, kontaktujte redakčnú radu časopisu: [politicke.vedy@umb.sk](mailto:politicke.vedy@umb.sk).

## Book Review: Right-Wing Populism and Gender: European Perspectives and Beyond

Michaela Grančayová\*

---

DIETZE, G., ROTH, J. (eds.). *Right-Wing Populism and Gender: European Perspectives and Beyond*. Bielefeld (Germany): Verlag, 2020. 268 p. ISBN 978-3-8376-4980-2.

---

The contributors to the book *Right-Wing Populism and Gender: European Perspectives and Beyond* offer an interesting and innovative insight into the interplay between sexuality, gender and right-wing populism. Building on a number of cases from countries such as Austria, Germany, Slovenia or the United States of America, the authors examine the roles that gender plays in the discourses and political campaigns of (mainly but not only) European right-wing populist parties. They also show that class, gender and race are of a tremendous importance to both right-wing populist actors and their counter-movements (for example The Black Protests in Poland). Additionally, the volume proves that since in the recent years, the importance of gender and sexuality in the right-wing populist discourses has been increasing, the implementation of a gender lens can be an especially helpful tool for any future research that aims to look into right-wing populism and its faces and strategies.

*Right-Wing Populism and Gender: European Perspectives and Beyond* is a monograph compiled by two notable authors, namely Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth. **Gabriele Dietze** is a university professor and a gender theorist. In her research, she predominantly deals with populism, migration, and race. Until nowadays, she has worked as a lecturer of Cultural, Media and Gender Studies at Humboldt University in Berlin, and in Austria, Switzerland, and the USA. In the past, she held the position of Harris Guest Professor at Dartmouth College

---

\* Mgr. Michaela Grančayová is a PhD student at the Institute of European Studies and International Relations, Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, Comenius University in Bratislava, Mlynské Luhy 4, 821 05 Bratislava, Slovak Republic, e-mail: michaela.grancayova@fses.uniba.sk.

in Hanover, New Hampshire, USA. **Julia Roth** works as a Professor of American Studies at Bielefeld University in Germany. In her research, she mainly concentrates on gender and global inequalities, right-wing populism, citizenship, and intersectionality. In the past, she worked as a lecturer at Humboldt University in Berlin, at Potsdam University in Germany and at the Universidad de Guadalajara in Mexico. Other contributors to the volume are **Birgit Sauer, Niels Spierings, Imke Schmincke, Eszter Kováts, Stefanie Mayer, Edma Ajanovic, Cornelia Moser, Patrick Wielowiejski, Roman Kuhar, Mojca Pajnik, Simon Schleusener, Simon Strick** and **Agnieszka Graff**.

The volume consists of fourteen chapters. Each of them applies a gender lens to give the reader an insight into a different face of right-wing populism. This means that the authors make use of “an approach that encompasses gender as a social construction, as a social practice, as an axis of inequality, and as a link to the economic developments of neo-liberal globalization, poverty and structural racism [which] is indispensable for understanding the political shift to the right” (Dietze and Roth 2020, p.8). Moreover, they observe “that populism is not only concerned with gender as an issue itself but also with gender as a meta-language for negotiating different conditions of inequality and power in the context of current struggles over hegemony, and over resources forged by neoliberalism” (Dietze and Roth 2020, p.8).

Throughout the book, the cases of right-wing populist actors in the countries such as Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Hungary, France, Slovenia, the United Kingdom, Sweden, the United States of America, Poland, and Brazil serve to demonstrate that nowadays the concept of gender has become an integral part of (not only) European right-wing populist discourses and its strategies. This being the case, the volume thus proves that (1) gender serves as one of the key instruments that right-wing populist actors use to enhance their social and political influence and that (2) to understand the right-wing populism’s increasing popularity, it might be beneficial to analyse these actors through the optics of gender and sexuality studies. Moreover, since nowadays, right-wing populism has become “an umbrella term” that may signify various things (Dietze and Roth 2020, p.8) the editors connect it “not only to parties, movements or organizations, but also to media discourses, narratives and forms of action” (Dietze and Roth 2020, p.8). Additionally, due to these reasons, Dietze and Roth (2020, p.8) propose “to speak of a right-wing populist complex” which in their understanding encompasses “right-wing extremism”,

“religious fundamentalism” or “femonationalism” (Dietze and Roth 2020, p.8). Taking into consideration that in the recent years, the so-called “gender ideology” rhetoric, the battle for “traditional family” and the LGBTIQ rights have become one of the most prominent weapons in the right-wing populism’s quest to broaden its appeal to voters, I am of the opinion that the application of a gender lens in the scholarship that deals with far-right actors might be especially helpful to enhance our understanding of (not only) what makes this type of politics so attractive.

Although the examination of (predominantly) European right-wing populist actors and their counter-movements through a gender lens is an approach that connects all fourteen chapters in the volume, from the geographical point of view, the book is far from being homogenous. The volume mainly deals with the right-wing populism in Europe, but its scope is not limited to only one part or region of the Old Continent. It offers case studies from Western Europe (France, Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands), Central Europe (Poland, Hungary, Slovenia), Northern Europe (Sweden), but also from North and Latin America. Even though, the book’s selection of cases is definitely very interesting, it lacks a clearer reasoning. Additionally, it is hard to comprehend why the editors of the volume decided to include these specific country cases and not different ones.

Given that gender and sexuality have become important discursive and mobilizing tools for many (not only) European right-wing populist actors, I believe that in the terms of the country case selections, the volume could have offered more diversity. For instance, it would have been interesting, if the book had based its gender analysis on the forms and strategies of mainly European right-wing populism according to the Old Continent’s regional distribution. Each part could include three or four most prominent regional case studies. I am of the opinion that the implementation of this approach could have offered a more nuanced understanding of what role gender and gender relations play in current European right-wing populist discourses and why it is worth to implement a gender lens when studying far-right populism in general.

From the point of view of the book’s contents and findings, I consider the volume rather persuasive in its claim that gender analysis can be a vital asset when looking into right-wing populism. However, from time to time, I find some of the volume’s statements rather vague and unclear. For instance, Dietze and Roth (2020, p. 9) claim that “the field of inquiry ‘right-wing populism and gender’ is only just now beginning to emerge...”. Although, it is perhaps true that compared to others, the above-mentioned field is not so thoroughly examined, I

would not say that “right-wing populism and gender” is specifically under-researched. In fact, there are already several works that deal with the subject. The authors of the edited volume mention a few themselves (e.g. Spierings et al. 2015, Bitzan, Kottig and Peto 2017, Sauer 2017), however it is also worth mentioning a study by **Eszter Kováts** (2018): *Questioning consensus: Right-wing populism, anti-populism, and the threat of “gender ideology”*, or **Kimberly Morgan** (2017): *Gender, right-wing populism, and immigrant integration policies in France, 1989-2012*. Thus, even though, Dietze and Roth’s volume is certainly a valued asset to the discipline, claiming that this field of studies “is only just now beginning to emerge” (Dietze and Roth, 2020, p.9), might be rather misleading.

Although, all the articles in the volume, which are new contribution to the scholarship, offer important findings and demonstrations of what role gender, race, sexuality, and class play in far-right discourses and campaigns, in my opinion, three of the works deserve a special attention.

First, I consider **Cornelia Moser**’s study rather significant in explaining how right-wing populism in France uses the categories of gender and sexuality to mobilize people for its cause and how “a certain ‘modernization’ of the sexual politics of right-wing movements [...] has made them compatible with some fractions of feminism in France” (Moser, 2020, p. 117). To achieve this, **Moser** uses the examples of “anti-gender ideology” campaigns made by La Manif pour tous (translated as Demonstration for everyone) (LMPT), En Marche pour la vie (translated as March for Life) and Front national/Rassemblement national. Moreover, the author engages in demonstrating the transformations of “right-wing sexual politics” (2020, p.125) throughout the years and in explaining the right-wing populism’s attitude towards tolerating certain “harmless” forms of feminism (for example the advocacy for equal pay) and the movement’s refusal of what they understand to be “toxic feminist ideology”, which allegedly poses a threat to the “traditional” family by allegedly experimenting with children’s sex, etc. The study as such is an important contribution to the debates on right-wing sexual politics as well as on the similarities between “right-wing ‘anti-gender’ discourse” and feminist discourse (Moser, 2020, p. 131). For example, in the past, these similarities translated into La Manif pour tous’ and left-wing feminists’ union against surrogacy (Momigliano 2017)

Secondly, I find **Patrick Wielowiejski**’s contribution on “identitarian gays and threatening queers” (2020, p. 135) rather striking as well. In his study, **Wielowiejski** uses his two years’ experience of working for German far-right

populist party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in order to “show how right-wing actors try to construct themselves as ‘identitarians’ who are gay-friendly and in opposition to a political enemy they call the ‘liberal globalist elites’ who appear to be gay-friendly on the surface, but who essentially work to strip people of their identities” (Wielowiejski, 2020, p. 136). For example, he claims that in his specific case study (2020, p. 144), “the dividing line between ‘healthy’ and ‘mentally ill’, between ‘normal’ and ‘perverted’ does not run between hetero and homo, but rather between forms of life that affirm identity and those that are critical of identity.” Thus, **Wielowiejski** employs his personal experience to provide the readers with a specific look into the contested relationship between homosexuality and far-right parties, which I believe to be an important asset to possible future studies that might deal with the relationship between far-right actors and their engagement with homosexuality on various levels of doing politics.

Finally, I consider **Gabriele Dietze**’s article (2020, p. 147) *Why are Women Attracted to Right-Wing Populism? Sexual Exceptionalism, Emancipation Fatigue, and New Maternalism* a vital contribution to the debate on how right-wing populist actors use and portray women in their campaigns and discourses, and their reasons for doing so. Other scholars may find particularly salient **Dietze**’s implementation of three sets of “affective arenas (*emancipational fatigue, sexual exceptionalism and new maternalism*)” that right-wing populist parties use in order to provide women with “(retro)-revolutionary voice” (2020, p. 160). Although, **Dietze** mainly chooses the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) campaigns and discourses, I believe that her approach can be implemented to more cases to enrich our understanding of what role women’s bodies play in the right-wing movement and how right-wing parties use female discontent in their attempt to gain political capital.

As previously mentioned, on the one hand, the volume would certainly profit from some changes. For example, some of the terms and labels that the volume’s authors work with would profit from a clearer explanation. For instance, in her piece on authoritarian right-wing populism and masculinist identity politics, **Birgit Sauer** (2020, p. 25) mentions “old” right-wing parties and the new populist right, without providing the reader with a thorough explanation of the differences between the two. Since not everybody coming across this monograph might be equally familiar with the terms and the scholarly debate surrounding them, the author should have offered a brief explanation and justification for her choices. However, besides such shortcoming, I find the text

to be a significant contribution to the volume and its goals.

In conclusion, the monograph *Right-Wing Populism and Gender: European Perspectives and Beyond* provides an important insight into how right-wing populist actors use gender, sexuality, race, and class to win more people for their cause and enhance their political powers. Moreover, it shows that gender dominates the discourses and campaigns of both right-wing populist actors and their counter-movements (e.g., The Black Protests in Poland). The contributors to the volume demonstrate their findings on a number of cases from predominantly European countries and claim that it might be of a great importance to study far-right populism through a gender lens. Even though the volume has certain flaws (such as sometimes very vague claims, not thoroughly explained expressions), I find its approach rather significant in helping to enhance our understanding of what constitutes the best possible methods to study right-wing populism and what role gender and sexuality plays in the far-right discourses and campaigns. All in all, I recommend this volume to everybody who is interested in the interplay between gender and right-wing populist actors and wants to learn more about studying right-wing populism through a gender lens.

### References:

- BITZAN, R., KOTTIG, M., PETO, A. 2017. *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*. London: Palgrave, 2017. 386 p. ISBN 978-3-319-82849-7.
- KOVÁTS, E. 2018. Questioning consensus: Right-wing populism, anti-populism, and the threat of "gender ideology". In *Sociological Research Online*, vol. 23, 2018, no. 2. ISSN 1360- 7804, pp. 528-538. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1360780418764735>.
- MOMIGLIANO, A. 2017. When Left-Wing Feminists and Conservative Catholics Unite. In *The Atlantic*. [online], [Accessed on 25.10.2021]. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/03/left-wing-feminists-conservative-catholics-unite/520968/>.
- MORGAN, K. J. 2017. Gender, right-wing populism, and immigrant integration policies in France, 1989-2012. In *West European Politics*, vol. 40, 2017, no. 4. ISSN 1743-9655, pp. 887-906. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2017.1287446>.
- SAUER, B. 2017. Gesellschaftstheoretische Überlegungen zum Europäischen Rechtspopulismus. Zum Erklärungspotenzial der Kategorie Geschlecht. In

Politische Vierteljahresschrift, vol. 58, 2017, no. 1. ISSN 2364-9976, pp. 3-22.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5771/0032-3470-2017-1-3>.

SPIERINGS, N., ZASLOVE, A., MUGGE, L. M., DE LANGE, S. 2015. Gender and Populist Radical-Right Politics. An Introduction. In *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 49, 2015, no. 1-2. ISSN 1461-7331, pp. 3-15. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2015.1023642>.