

Book Review

Right-Wing Populism and Gender. European Perspectives and Beyond, edited by Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth, transcript, 2020. (Book Review)

FABIO SANTOS (FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN, GERMANY)

In the edited volume *Right-Wing Populism and Gender. European Perspectives and Beyond*, Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth bring together a wide array of contributions adding a much-needed gender perspective to the ever-growing research into right-wing populism (RWP) and its progressive counter-movements. In fourteen chapters, political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, cultural, media, and (Inter-)American studies scholars disentangle some of the hostile discourses and concrete political measures implemented or envisioned by right-wing actors across Europe and, to a much lesser extent, in the Americas, mainly the United States. A few chapters also consider or explicitly highlight the role of social movements in countering what the editors call a “right-wing populist complex.” As explained in the introductory chapter by Dietze and Roth, this term is intended to capture media discourses, narratives, and forms of action beyond (yet often related to) the more formal RWP structures of political parties, movements, and organizations.

The plea for systematically looking at this complex through a social constructivist and intersectional gender lens is convincingly made in light of “a common feature [which] can be observed in all current versions of right-wing populism: an ‘obsession with gender’ and sexuality in different arenas” (7). As the variety of actors, discourses, and countries covered in the edited volume illustrates, this “anti-genderism” is indeed a characteristic that unites right-wing populisms in excluding other(ed) individuals and groups: besides the “usual suspects” of RWP, such as Muslims and immigrants mentioned throughout the book, these include proponents of progressive sex education curricula in Germany (Schmincke) and same-sex marriage in France (Möser), an alleged homosexual and leftist elite in Slovenia (Kuhar and Pajnik), and

emancipated women refusing to (be) define(d) in terms of care work and motherhood in German society (Dietze). Other chapters focus on the ways in which strong RWP parties in Hungary and Austria argue that “traditional” (i.e. patriarchal and heteronormative) family models and values are under threat (Kováts; Mayer, Ajanović and Sauer). Yet another group of chapters look at how (predominantly white, heterosexual, and working class) masculinist identity politics are mobilized in different right-wing populisms in Europe and the U.S. (Sauer; Schleusener; Strick).

The reader also learns that some RWP actors, mainly in Germany, Scandinavia, and the Netherlands, claim to accept or even be in favor of women’s and LGB (less TQI+) rights as long as these “minorities” do not trouble the (self-)images and entitlements of “the common people” (Spierings; Wielowiejski). In the midst of texts focusing on theoretical considerations and RWP discourse and action, Wielowiejski’s chapter stands out for being the only truly ethnographic chapter daring to engage (and brilliantly so!) with RWP actors on the ground: his participant observation among parliamentarians and the youth organization of the German AfD reveals more about the complexly situated positionings and worldviews of its members than merely looking at ads, speeches, and mission statements. Wielowiejski skillfully shows that for some right-wing actors, “homosexuals and binary trans* people can very well be accepted as respectable representatives of a static gender binary. As such, they fit into a far right that is fixated on identity” (144).

The book ends with two chapters changing perspectives: while Graff deals with the so-called Black Protests in Poland (originating from fights for reproductive rights, hence, not to be conflated with the Black Lives Matter protests),

Roth writes about emerging transnational and intersectional feminisms in the Americas. Her chapter is the second highpoint of the collection: the only author going beyond Europe and the U.S., Roth astonishingly maps intersectional, post- and decolonial feminisms from places, movements, and actors that are themselves interconnected. In the midst of Inter-American and global RWP alliances mentioned by the author (e.g. Bolsonaro-Trump), feminist contestations –e.g. the Women’s Marches in the U.S., the *NiUnaMenos/NiUnaMás* protests across Latin America, as well as collective and transnational groups memorializing the legacies of Alanna Lockward and Marielle Franco– signal the utter necessity for RWP research to consider these (counter-)movements from a global and historical perspective. As Roth rightfully argues, women’s strikes and other initiatives from, across, and beyond the Americas “tie gender and racial claims back to the underlying economic and colonial structures of inequality” (262).

Overall, amidst growing societal and academic debates, this edited volume should become a major reference for anyone working at the crossroads of right-wing populisms and intersectional feminisms. Dietze and Roth have done a marvelous job in bringing together the contributions with different disciplinary and geographical foci. Given that RWP is a global and complex phenomenon, the eclecticism of the chapters is a strength rather than a weakness of the book. Still, structuring the chapters into broader sections would have helped the reader navigate through the rich volume. The only serious disappointment is that the “beyond” in the book title makes a promise not kept. Only three chapters include non-European contexts, and two of these are focused on the U.S. While the cases presented in the book certainly address pressing issues across Europe (including its oftentimes neglected East), the book would have benefitted from a more thorough inclusion of perspectives on and from the Global South (see, for example, Costa 2020 for the Brazilian case). Since some of the authors of the edited volume are currently working from and toward that direction (see the research group “Global Contestations of Women’s and Gender Rights,” Bielefeld University), we can be assured that it is

only a question of time until we learn more about the “beyond” postulated in the book title.

Works Cited

Costa, Sérgio. “Der Rechtsruck in Brasilien: Ein intersektionaler Deutungsversuch.” *Leviathan*, vol. 48, no. 4, 2020, pp. 655-79.

Author’s Biography

Dr. Fabio Santos is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the Institute for Latin American Studies at Freie Universität Berlin. He previously taught as Guest Professor of International Development at the University of Vienna and earned his PhD at the International Research Training Group “Between Spaces. Movements, Actors and Representations of Globalization” (Freie Universität Berlin). From intersectional, post- and decolonial perspectives, his research focuses on global inequalities, entangled histories, and contested borders. He is the author of *Bridging Fluid Borders. Entanglements in the French-Brazilian Borderland* (Routledge, forthcoming 2022).