



CHAPTER 1

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# Paradoxes That Matter: Introducing Critical Perspectives on Right-Wing Sexual Politics in Europe

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This book grew out of dreaming about “BruNo”, an ambitiously planned but never realized research project that aimed to investigate the “Brutal

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Normalities” reflected and co-created by right-wing populist movements in various European countries. The “BruNo” study would have comparatively analysed right-wing discursive strategies towards gender and sexual diversity, while developing political as well as pedagogical tools to intervene in a situation characterized by right-wing populism increasingly undermining democratic principles in European societies. The present book project partly resulted from a collective effort to build a European research network focussing on these issues.

A group of about a dozen researchers first met in person at a workshop in Berlin in 2015, initiated by Dissens, a German NGO focusing on critical masculinity studies, right-wing extremism prevention and political education (e.g. through their educational work with boys in schools built on the hypothesis that masculinist ideology makes boys vulnerable to far-right politics). In the next couple of years, several attempts to secure resources for the planned research activities by submitting applications to public and private research organizations have been met with compliments and highly positive evaluations but no funding. We were able to meet again in the autumn of 2016, when we organized the “Sex Still Sells: Paradoxical Right-Wing Sexual Politics in Europe” international conference that took place on both sides of the German-Polish border: at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt/Oder on 19 October 2016 and the Collegium Polonicum in Ślubice, on 20 October 2016. While more attempts at getting funding followed, we also decided to develop a publication plan to share already existing research findings available to us. Some of the conference participants became authors of the present volume, while others could not stay with us, partly because of the general precariousness characterizing academic and NGO research environments in most European countries and globally.

After ending the public part of the conference, we scheduled an internal meeting where we discussed further steps for developing our future activities. At this meeting, as a result of long discussions, we reached a consensus about four relevant themes to become the main foci of a future publication project. The authors contributing to this volume have been explicitly invited to discuss these four collectively developed themes in their analyses: the paradoxes within sexual politics in their local variations; the transfers and travelling of concepts, practices and political strategies; the role of political ideologies; and the rhetoric of crisis (or in fact, several crises). The aim was to communicate across national

borders following those right-wing politics that had managed to spread internationally in the recent past.

While the initial group was composed of researchers from universities, public research institutes and NGOs involved in political education, the requirements of scientific publishing processes revealed some of the difficulties of such co-operations. Even if the NGOs' presence may be less visible in the final publication, nevertheless important contributions and inspirations have resulted from these co-operations and exchanges: the whole project of a network was an idea coming from David Nax and Olaf Stuve who were both members of the NGO Dissens (see Nax and Schmitt 2015; Hechler and Stuve 2015). Similarly, Andreas Hechler's (2019) work has been important for the book project in underlining the connection of a "crisis of masculinity" with far-right attacks on gender studies: it sensitized our project to the different crisis discourses. An important feature of the initial project was to bring together a broad sample of studies allowing for informed analysis of European developments including studies from the north, south, east and west of Europe in a comparative perspective.

The specific method we wanted to apply was to form small groups of researchers comparing two countries, discussing the four themes cross-cutting the chapters and sharing the results of these discussions with a broader audience. The exciting experience of the few personal meetings, where we started to make plans leading to this book, made us too optimistic and underestimate the practical difficulties. Research is usually conducted in a national perspective or by researchers familiar with several national contexts; cross-country co-operations, however, have been faced with the different scientific styles in different countries, various discipline-specific theoretical and methodological approaches as well as the significant workload that a co-written paper can represent. The lack of funding for new research made implementing a cross-country perspective even more difficult. Another worrying aspect is that continuous attacks against gender studies do not always come from far-right governments, but also from colleagues within academia. Public research institutes, such as the former research network of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, have been under attack by far-right governments and also in several countries by neoliberal reforms that attempt to shape research in terms of supposedly desired economic outcomes or political benefit. Part of the precarity is also the generally too heavy workload expected especially of researchers, whose positions are conditioned to temporarily determined

projects. All these conditions were part of the reasons why most plans to produce comparative co-authored papers collapsed.

As our focus was on ongoing political developments of far-right sexual politics, another difficulty was to match slow science with fast-changing political situations. For example, in Hungary and Poland, we were unable to keep up with the speed of the right-wing governments' dismantling democracy that went on even during the Covid pandemic (see, for example, the Polish constitutional court ruling on abortion and the repression of feminist and LGBTIQ\*—lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer—protesters, and the new Hungarian regulations that make adoption of children by gays and lesbians impossible, and the introduction of an unalterable sex-at-birth record in the civil registry that practically means ending legal gender recognition for trans and intersex people in Hungary), and left little time and space for reinvigorating democratic processes and organizing visible opposition.

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Sexuality and gender have been particularly central in far-right politics this past decade in paradoxical ways. An intermediate result of our attempt to build a network across multiple European countries was the identification of what we call *paradoxical right-wing sexual politics in Europe*. By that, we mean right-wing actors such as parties', organizations' and movements' simultaneous yet contradictory statements and sometimes practices regarding sexual politics that take on various forms in the contexts introduced in this volume. The emphasis right-wing actors have placed on sexual and gender politics has largely contributed to their current political success in many European countries (as well as beyond Europe but discussing those in detail is beyond the scope of this volume). We should also note that Europe as an indeterminate discursive space is not identical with the EU as this volume also includes a chapter on Russia.

The phrase *right-wing sexual politics* used in this volume refers to a set of values, beliefs and practices that consist of familism—i.e. an ideology about morally sanctioned family ideals (Edgell and Docka 2007), also assuming that “the family that is working “right” has no need for state intervention or familial policies” (Havas 1995: 1)—misogyny, homophobia, heteronormativity, and opposition to sexual and gender diversity. The trans- and international scope of this volume reveals a variety of compositions and definitions of what counts as a “right-wing” actor: in



some contexts, the nationalist component is more relevant than (fundamentalist) religious ones; in others, racism plays a more central part than heterosexism or homophobia. Also, contextually differing alliances of (neo)liberal forces with(in) right-wing parties and organizations can be observed.

Right-wing politics are not just to be found among right-wing political parties. Right-wing populist, far-right and certain ultraconservative religious views, or parts of them, might be shared by actors and groups that do not consider themselves as far-right. Furthermore, the essentialist binary gender views or ethno-nationalist, racist, Islamophobic discourses of some feminist and LGBTIQ\* actors sometimes resemble those of antifeminist or homophobic right-wing actors. Therefore, this volume also studies whether some feminist and LGBTIQ\* theories as well as activism bare openings for right-wing ideologies. In order to address these common tendencies that have differing and sometimes opposing expressions in local contexts or within transnational alliances, the chapters on Austria, France and Sweden, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Poland and Spain, Portugal, and Russia will all address certain aspects of the four themes that we consider to be at the core of the analysed phenomena.

The first theme is about the paradoxes in sexual politics in their local variations. While exposing the contradictions in right-wing argumentations and practices, identifying and analysing of paradoxes as an epistemological stance also needs to be understood in the context of “post-truth” and “fake news” debates. Many examples can show that right-wing actors in their defence of a supposed “natural order” do not seem to particularly care about the logical coherence or truthfulness of their messages’ contents. Our working hypothesis is that these paradoxes are more than simple contradictions in the sense that they are not a sign of weakness but rather an essential component contributing to the political success of right-wing parties, organizations and argumentations, and must therefore be seen as a strategic tool in forging their strength.

All of the studied contexts show far-right sexual politics to be paradoxical, yet the paradoxes and contradictions vary sometimes importantly from one scene to another. Attacking immigrants for their lack of sexual modernity, and at the same time, gender studies for their alleged transformation of traditional sexual politics seems to be one of the most central paradoxes of right-wing sexual politics that has proven to be efficient in mainstreaming far-right ideologies in larger parts of society, and sometimes even leading to electoral success. In calling this a paradox, we wish

to underline the political efficiency of right-wing ideology's incoherence. While not always coherent, it does have a high potential of persuasion for large groups joining these politics as it allows a status quo of sexual politics to be maintained and enjoy a feeling of cultural superiority over migrant communities.

Analysing the possible meanings of these paradoxes can open new angles of critique and can also highlight the discrepancies between different national contexts. For example, in Sweden, the homonationalist defence of supposedly liberal "Swedish values" on gender and sexuality (see Chapter 4 by Möser and Reimer) plays a much larger role than in Italy, where the far-right defence of "Italian traditions" is built on opposing LGBTIQ\* politics and policies, although avoiding direct homophobic discourses (see Chapter 5 by Trappolin). In some countries, e.g. Austria, Germany, Sweden, France and the Netherlands, right-wing sexual politics are paired with specific forms of racism and have led to expressions that could be interpreted as defending women and homosexuals against supposedly misogynist and homophobic migrants and Muslims. Several chapters in this book contribute to the discussion whether such framings and practices should be interpreted as a type of right-wing feminism, "national feminism" (Bitzan 2011), homonationalism (Puar 2007) or femonationalism (Farris 2017), or whether they are examples of a right-wing appropriation of feminist topics, and therefore expressions of an opportunistic strategy that serves to mask antifeminist politics.

Jasbir Puar (2007) coined the term "sexual exceptionalism" in order to accentuate paradoxes within Western racist discourse and claims of superiority. In contemporary Western and Northern Europe, the self-evident "sexual modernities" (Puar 2007) or "sexcular" modernities (Scott 2011) very often hold a double function: on the one hand, they mask prevailing structural heterosexism, and on the other hand, the critique of homophobia and/or (hetero)sexism becomes entangled with nationalist, neo-colonial and racist discourses producing the uncivilized "barbarian" *Other*. Such discourses can be produced within Europe against internal "non-European" or "not-enough-European" *Others* such as migrants or "Eastern Europeans" (Kulpa 2014; Chetaille 2013; El Tayeb 2011; Ayoub 2016; Paternotte and Kuhar 2018).

Some gays and lesbians, and self-proclaimed feminists who share far-right views on Muslims and migrants have joined far-right parties and organizations or voted for them even though these parties do not defend women's and gays' and lesbians' rights. The rhetoric of saving women

and children, utilized in order to justify murder or even pogroms and mass extermination, shows a certain historical continuity within ethnic, racist, antisemitic and misogynistic politics (see, for example, Blee 1991; Bracke 2012; Dietze 2016; Dietze and Roth 2020).

The second theme calls for special attention regarding transnational developments. In tracing how concepts as well as practices and political strategies travel—for instance, in groups like “identitarians” (Bruns et al. 2014), the “third way” (Lebourg 2010), or in formulations like “the great replacement” (analysed in Goetz 2020: 41), etc.—and in paying particular attention to the networks and political opportunities that allow for that transfer, we wanted to improve our understanding of how right-wing organizations have gained strength in different European contexts. This volume focuses on contemporary far-right politics and networks; nevertheless, some light is also shed on the continuity or adaption of old ideas to new situations. As shown in the studies on Austria, Spain, Portugal and Poland, discussing the transfer of fascist or national Catholic ideologies on sexuality and gender, right-wing sexual political concepts and strategies can travel not only geographically but also in time as historical continuities of these ideologies show.

A research perspective on transfer, translations and transnational dimensions can prevent ethnocentrism and methodological nationalism (i.e. the attempt to understand a global phenomenon while limiting oneself to a local scale). As nationalism is an important ideology of most far-right actors, it might at first seem surprising to look for supranational or even transnational dimensions in their sexual politics. Yet the different actors allying in far-right sexual politics show quite different international and transnational involvements. While some right-wing organizations and actors struggle ideologically with internationalism as it represents a contradiction to their nationalist agenda (as shown by Cornejo-Valle and Ramme in their Spanish-Polish comparison), other right-wing actors, for example, the Catholic Church, are historically global players and therefore facilitate imperialistic political strategies in promoting catchphrases such as “gender ideology”. And yet the particular local translations of right-wing travelling concepts need to be seen historically in order to understand the diversity of right-wing alliances. For example, La Manif Pour Tous (*the demonstration for everyone*; LMPT) developed the political strategy of secularizing the same old religious values, recasting them into new pseudo-scientific language coupled with a definite style of marketing political events, including the use of light pink and blue colour codes that

travelled well from France to Italy and Germany, but was less successful in Spain and Portugal.

Sometimes the rhetoric of “gender ideology” goes hand in hand with fantasies and fears of a “great replacement” of the local population or an imagined Western culture: for example, in the writings by Renaud Camus who came up with this term (Goetz 2020: 41) in France, or in the *Volkstod* (referring to the *death of the nation* in a racially homogeneous blood-related understanding of the term—see: Botsch and Kopke 2018) in Germany. This leaves us with the question: what exactly does the far right fear their imagined community will be replaced with? Sometimes the main emphasis seems to be—like in Sweden—more on the “great replacement” than on “gender ideology”, a term succinctly described by Gillian Kane as “a theory drummed up by hard-right religious activists, who present it as a gay- and feminist-led movement out to upend the traditional family and the natural order of society. It’s a catchall phrase to sell a false narrative and justify discrimination against women and LGBT people. And it is winning elections” (Kane 2018).

This leads us to the third theme that inquires about the role of political ideologies in right-wing sexual politics: about ways nationalism, familism, racism and religious ideologies can combine in different local constellations. By taking examples from very different European (secular, Catholic, Protestant, Muslim or Orthodox) contexts, our volume examines the impact of religion on right-wing sexual politics however without making it a unique factor, because, as research, for example, on Christianity has indicated, religion might be a source for both fostering and rejecting right-wing positions (Strube 2015).

Regarding their right-wing politics, self-perceived secular countries like France and Sweden (see Chapter 4 by Möser and Reimer) can also show similarities to countries with strong religious ties like Italy. Moreover, while in the Polish case Catholic fundamentalism seems to play a major role in fostering right-wing sexual and gender politics, in Spain and Portugal, both Catholic countries as well, the church does not have the same influence. Right-wing religious actors share some ideological elements with other parts of the far right, including political parties and neo-fascist groups, especially with regard to non-normative gender and sexual expressions and relationships. But on racism religious actors sometimes differ from far-right parties. The entanglement of ideologies such as nationalism, racism, Islamophobia or antisemitism, heterosexism, misogyny and homophobia varies and is of differing density in regard

to what discourses are more likely to be acceptable and accepted in a particular state. Variations of ideologies and their specific intersections might compete within one another as shown, for example, in the case of Ireland where competing nationalisms produce differential sexual political outcomes (see Chapter 6 by Stögner on the Austrian case, and Chapter 9 by Vieten on Ireland).

Whether and to what extent religious institutions and actors can rely on right-wing ideologies like racism, nationalism and neoliberalism is historically, locally and situationally contingent. Different combinations of these political ideologies can be observed in most right-wing actions in the presented studies. The analysed ideological combinations have an impact on failed or blocked transfers of ideologies, strategies and politics from one (national) context to another.

Our fourth theme, the rhetoric of crisis, requires a more in-depth analysis, too. In far-right discourses, many different crises are proclaimed and decried like, for example, the crisis of masculinity, an immigration crisis, the crisis of the family, the crisis of European civilization, an economic crisis or the pandemic crisis. This rhetoric of crisis clearly has to be understood as such a rhetorical strategy that produces and plays with fears that the same organizations then also offer solutions to. Yet pointing out this propagandistic character is not enough to understand why people choose to believe it. While some of the examined actors present their politics as solutions to imagined or real crises, the workings of political ideologies and the rhetoric of crisis have so far not been fully taken into account in the analyses of right-wing sexual politics.

“Gender ideology” is sometimes presented as an individualistic and materialistic ideology in a cold and alienated world, against which the right-wing actors suggest the warmth of the family and the nation as living alternatives. This rhetoric is clearly in conflict with some streams of right-wing neoliberal politics, yet it is the core idea of the more national-socialist actors who wish to reserve economic benefits for what they believe to be national natives, whom they want to see reproduced by heterosexual families.

Mobilizations against gender equality are sometimes interpreted as a form of resistance to neoliberalism (see, for example, Grzebalska et al. 2017; Korolczuk and Graff 2018). Opposed to these views, Didier Eribon held the increased participation in consumer society of the French working class responsible for their turning to the political far right since the end of the 1980s. Eribon describes the process of the French working

class gradually moving to the political right, based on his own suffering from homophobia while growing up, leading to his class migration to the bourgeoisie (Eribon 2009). Yet there is some empirical evidence that massive phenomena like *La Manif pour tous* in France, the German far-right movement *Pegida* (*European Patriots against the Islamization of the Occident*) and the far-right political party *AfD* (*Alternative für Deutschland—Alternative for Germany*) are composed mainly of middle- and upper-class populations (Vorländer et al. 2015; Geva 2019; Raison du Cleuziou 2019). Thus, the role class and economic aspects play in the mentioned discourses of crisis can vary significantly from one place to another: as the European countries examined in this volume also show differences regarding their specific economic structures and their places within the EU and on the global market.

Bringing together these four elements, our volume offers new perspectives. While a number of recent publications discuss right-wing sexual politics—some focus on particular national contexts (Hark and Villa 2015, 2020), others highlight specific aspects of right-wing expressions like “antigenderism” (Paternotte and Kuhar 2018; Köttig et al. 2017; Strube et al. 2021), and homophobia (Rohde et al. 2017)—the specific contribution of our project derives from its focus on the contradictions and paradoxes of right-wing sexual politics in Europe. It brings together a broad range of studies from the north, south, east and west of Europe in a comparative perspective with a particular focus on political ideologies and their transfers as well as the political use of rhetoric of crisis.

### WHAT IS SEXUAL POLITICS?

Since this book is about sexual politics, we ought to give a working definition of this term. In a broad sense, we interpret sexual politics as an operational field of power relations linked to sex, gender, kinship and sexuality issues that can be examined at different—local, national and international—levels, and through various intersecting features of social inequalities.

Sexual politics is a relatively recent concept, dating from the 1920s to 1930s (Weeks 2010). One of the first users of the term was Wilhelm Reich (1970 [1933]), exploring the links between authoritarian patriarchy and the suppression of sexuality in the emergence of what he called the mass psychology of fascism. Suppressing dissident forms of sexuality, as contributions in this volume will also show, seems to be an enduring



aspiration of authoritarian patriarchal forces embodied in many political and religious organizations as well as some governments in present-day Europe. Yet these repressions are not limited to far-right politics and have in some cases like national-socialist Germany been supported by a moral majority of the country. It would be wrong to consider the liberalization of sexual politics as a linear line of progress. All to the contrary, different examples of history have shown that sexual politics should rather be considered as a field of struggle. In his study on the sexual revolution in 1917 and the following years in Russia, Wilhelm Reich deplored the sexual conservatism of the revolutionaries who all too often hung onto traditional family and couple forms (Reich 1945). Although approaches to sexual politics among revolutionaries were not monolithic, by granting access to divorce and decriminalized abortion (Adamczak 2017), and the decriminalization of consensual homosexual practices within Soviet codes until the mid-1930s (Healey 2001), the early twentieth-century sexual revolution in Russia proved to be quite progressive, even compared to some of today's politics that limit reproductive choices and sexual liberties. Yet they have also proven to be organized around the model of the male factory worker who came to be the emancipatory norm everyone had to conform to (Adamczak 2017) and ignored many areas that maintain a structural subordination of females or the dimension of epistemic violence and culture. As Bini Adamczak shows in her study comparing the sexual politics of the Russian revolution to that of the 1960s sexual revolution and women's movements in the USA and in several European countries, the 1960s movements contested this norm of the male working class as the only emancipatory subject.

Simone de Beauvoir (1949), describing sexuality to be central to the social gender division, forged the category of experience as key to understanding the process of becoming a woman. Her influential work can be held responsible for putting sexuality centrally on the feminist agenda and making it a keystone for women's liberation. In the 1960s and 1970s, second wave feminists' and especially Kate Millett's discussions of the frequently neglected political aspects of sex brought a somewhat different understanding of sexual politics as the power-structured relationship between the sexes that some have come to call "gender" (see, for example, Delphy 2001). According to Millett, the greatest strength of patriarchy derives from its length: "its pretensions to a divine or natural base have been repeatedly served by religion, pseudoscience, or state ambition" (2000 [1970]: xiii). Discontent with the permanent state of

patriarchy led to criticism in the *Anti-Social Family* by Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh, whose recommendations about “basic principles of daily political struggle in personal life” (1982: 140) included not only encouraging flexible lifestyles and avoiding oppressive relationships but also exhorting caution about domesticity, often linked with women’s unrewarding work conditions. They also briefly introduced the London-based polyamorous Red Collective’s 1973 pamphlet on *The Politics of Sexuality in Capitalism*, from which we can learn that the breadth of sexual politics should be extended to include “housing provision, abortion law, child-care arrangements, and women’s chances to earn good wages” (Barrett and McIntosh 1982: 139).

For several feminists from the 1960s and 1970s, gender and sexuality are strongly linked: gender is often described as an expression of sexuality, for example, in German feminist Alice Schwarzer’s text on *The little difference and its big consequences* (1975), and in the highly influential work of Catharine MacKinnon (1982). For MacKinnon, sexuality is to women’s oppression what work is to capitalism, a view that has been strongly challenged by proto-queer and liberationist feminists during the sex wars, an internal feminist debate in the early 1980s USA on the place of sexuality in feminist theory that lay grounds of what later would become sexuality and queer studies. These approaches state a relative independence of sexuality from gender, or rather, they claim that matters of sexuality cannot and should not be reduced to questions of gender (Rubin 1984). Framing this volume on sexual politics opens perspectives on sexuality beyond gender politics. We believe that sexual and gender politics are intersectional, and topics including sexual identification and orientation, heteronormativity and moral views on sexual pleasure, and desire are equally important for a full understanding of far-right politics analysed in this volume.

By the early twenty-first century, the scope of sexual politics has grown with an increasing variety of contributors’ categories: it has become “a concept used to describe a wide variety of forms of intellectual work, social movement activity, and cultural politics contesting sex, gender, and sexuality by women, men, and transgender people, lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, queer people and heterosexual people, sadomasochists, pedophiles, anti-pornography campaigners, and many others” (Waites 2007: 4253). This book explores specific forms of European right-wing sexual political and cultural agendas, developed—and in some places



already implemented—by social and political actors to expand their power acquisition capabilities.

Most publications in this field focus either on “(anti-)gender” politics or on lesbian and gay politics. In using the concept of sexual politics, we wish to emphasize the link between those two and LGBTIQ\* politics in general, but also inscribe our project in historical attempts at understanding sexual politics as part of general politics involving political ideologies as much as economic systems and societal projects. While sexual politics can be and have been progressive in trying to maximize liberty and justice for all, one can also retrace the history of reactionary right-wing sexual politics that have mostly been inscribed in nationalist, familist and pro-natalist projects. “Sexual politics” then also represents an alternative terminology to the common practice of taking on far-right vocabulary like speaking about “antigenderism”, for example, or putting gender in quotation marks which, problematically, allows the far right to popularize their discourse further in setting or even dictating the frames of the political debate.

### UNDERSTANDING RIGHT-WING SEXUAL POLITICS

In this book, we interpret right-wing sexual politics as being done by individuals and collective actors belonging to the right-wing section according to a common perception of the right-centre-left divide of political landscapes. These actors can be characterized by political views such as nationalism, white supremacy, social conservatism, political Catholicism, monarchism, reactionism, fascism, libertarian capitalism and neoliberalism, for example, that are often based on presumptions about various forms of social hierarchies being justified, inevitable or necessary, while opposing the idea of equality and diversity.

The understanding of what is considered as right-wing, centre or left-wing, however, shifts significantly across Europe. Far-right world views or their elements also sometimes prevail or develop as what has been called “extremisms of the centre” (referring to popular support in several European societies for political measures abandoning and sometimes killing migrants and a broad acceptance of homophobic or transphobic measures—see Decker and Brähler 2020).

In history, researchers from the exiled *Institut für Sozialforschung* (Institute for Social Research, home of the Frankfurt School) have examined this phenomenon: how could Hitler’s fascist ideas be taken on by

a large part of German society even though it is built on open lies and hateful ideologies (Adorno 1950). The study on authoritarian personality structures, which might for some seem outdated today, shows how the emphasis on misogyny and the overstressed occupation with sexuality of authoritarian personalities can be of interest for our present work, too. Understanding why people decide to hate, to fall into a closed mindset that seems to remain immune to argument and evidence needs further study today. The highlighted links between hostile views on women on the one hand, and racism and antisemitism on the other, also seem to remain relevant to our observations about irrational links that far-right ideologues create between migrants and acts of sexual violence or homophobia, for example. Several chapters in this volume also show how heterosexism links with antisemitism (see, for example, Chapter 2 on Poland, Chapter 4 on France and Chapter 6 on Austria). The authoritarian personality study showed that what we call paradoxical politics today was already crucial to far-right ideologies in the 1940s: they found that authoritarian personalities considered Jews to be at the same time too communitarian and too “infiltrated” in society, too communist yet too capitalist and so on. Therefore, we should stress that many important features of far-right paradoxical sexual politics discussed in this volume are not new in that they are recognized as paradoxical, but rather in the ways these paradoxes are spelled out.

Regardless of political or class affiliations, elements of far-right ideology are not only taken on but embodied and normalized in the process of their mainstreaming into society. The obedient subject that remains central to far-right ideology is today accompanied by a seemingly rebellious attitude of far-right protests. According to Decker and Brähler (2020), this does not contradict the persisting authoritarian personality structure of far-right followers as even the “rebellious” members never seem to attack existing power positions but rather imagine conspiracies allowing them to choose “easier” targets.

We refer to the normalization of far-right politics as “Brutal Normalities”, including institutional and everyday sexism, LGBTIQ\*-phobia and sexualized racism that can be observed not only in Russia and other post-soviet and post-socialist countries but also in many “old” European Union member states and other societies. In European debates, those politics are usually based on essentialist assumptions, such as the idea of a “natural” and/or “God-given” and complementary gender

binary, ascribing fixed (collective) identities to individuals and an opposition between these fixed identities and sexual and gender emancipation. “Brutal Normalities” also promote a gender hierarchy that is linked to ideas of male-supremacy, and preferences for patriarchal social models.

The entanglement of nation, gender and reproductionist agendas within nationalist movements has been analysed extensively by feminist scholars all over the globe revealing both variability and similarities (see, for example: Yuval-Davis 1996; Nagel 1998; Iveković and Mostov 2002; Banerjee 2012). In this volume, we focus on applications of familism that are part of specific conservative, right-wing and far-right sexual politics. The concept of familism can refer to both social familism (i.e. a set of social conditions pushing people towards living in marriage-based families) and ideological familism (i.e. a “set of ideas which associates only positive values with the normative family, places the family in the centre of social discourse, which presents the family as an incubator of macro-level sociability or, with other metaphors, as the basic building-block of society”—Dupcsik and Tóth 2014: 29). Within the field of welfare and family studies, familism is most prominently linked with assumptions about caring responsibilities to be covered by family members, not by state policies. Familism as a critical research category has been focusing mostly on the development of the bourgeois family in modern western states, including research on family policy, private households and their function within modern welfare states (Leitner 2006, 2014). European familism, however, draws on a long history (Notz 2015) such as family politics of the aristocracy and policies during colonialism or fascism. Within *volkist nationalism*, which influenced the German Nazi ideas about nations as biological and spiritual units (Griffin 2005), the family was an important anchor for racial and antisemitic imaginaries. In contemporary right-wing and nationalist ideologies, as represented, for example, by the Alternative for Germany (AfD), the heterosexual family still represents the “nucleus of the Nation” (Kemper 2014). National population politics are often intrinsic to right-wing sexual politics and aim at promoting their population policy agenda favouring groups perceived as “worthy” to reproduce the nation, i.e. upper-class, white, straight, able bodied, etc., nationals, and restricting access to reproductive choices (such as abortion, contraception, in-vitro fertilization) for everyone (see, for example, Yuval-Davis 1996; Roberts 1997; Takács 2018; Watson and Downe 2017).

Family ideology plays a significant role in advancing right-wing sexual politics at the supranational level of the United Nations and the European Union, too (Shameem 2017; Datta 2018; Ramme 2019). Concepts of “family protection” and “family autonomy” are presented by ultraconservative lobby organizations (e.g. Family Watch International and *Ordo Iuris*) and religious actors (the Vatican, Christian Churches, Muslim organizations) as alternatives to gender mainstreaming in order to remodel international human rights frameworks. Family—usually imagined within religious fundamentalist, right-wing and far-right politics as a heterosexual married couple with biological children—is a scalar concept of organizing community based on the priority of family autonomy and internal hierarchy within the family (Ramme 2019). Family therefore appears as an exclusive concept that is directed against the possible diversity of forms of living together and against LGBTIQ\* and women’s liberation that are thus seen as a threat to the reproduction of religious, national and other types of communities. The “continued idealization of the nuclear, biologically connected family” in the USA (Suter 2016: 1) and Europe lays fertile ground for right-wing political familism expressed by nationalist movements or international organizations such as the Vatican, the Tradition Family and Property network (see, for example, Power 2010) and the World Congress of Families (see, for example, Stoeckl 2020).

The studies presented in this volume show many similarities in terms of right-wing far-right and ultraconservative discourses and political strategies and describe their transnational transfers. However, they also reveal various tensions within a wide spectrum of right-wing environments. Disagreements might appear between particular approaches regarding the acceptance of LGBTIQ\* people and non-heterosexual social practices, the level of approval of women’s liberation and rights, and non-essentialist concepts of gender. Despite many differences between various right-wing positions, the focus on gender and sexual politics contributed to the success of the European far right in some local contexts and helped to bridge other topics of disagreement among conservative, right-wing and far-right actors on migration, the economy or religion. This allowed for the mainstreaming of far-right ideologies and politics. Some have called the focus on “gender” that helped building alliances between different conservative, right-wing and far-right actors a “symbolic glue” or “a cover up” (Pető 2015: 127). In contrast, we argue that this focus is not merely symbolic, nor should it be seen as a temporary stopgap or a kind of masking strategy that only serves to distract from other more

profound systemic changes. Rather, sexuality and gender are integral and very central building blocks of right-wing ideas about community and serve the governing of populations. Although the European right wing is not homogeneous in terms of their approach to gender and sexuality, still a vast number of local, national and transnational right-wing, far-right, conservative and religious actors often share certain conservative beliefs and values in terms of gender, sexuality and family. Those communalities enable transfer and translations of discourses, campaigns, strategies or even cross-sectional cooperation, thus contributing to amplify similar right-wing discourses on gender and sexuality. The worldwide “anti-gender ideology” campaign (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017) exemplifies the successful merging of various right-wing agendas towards a common enemy: gender and sexual diversity and self-determination. Nevertheless, the success of “anti-gender” campaigns itself varied.

## CONCLUSION

This book is part of broader research efforts by European researchers to analyse ongoing socio-political changes in far-right expressions and the ways that feminist and LGBTIQ\* politics react to these changes. While many publications have been focusing on homophobia and sexism in far-right organizations and parties, or on the lesbian and gay leaders in far-right parties (like Florian Philippot in France or Alice Weidel in Germany), or on how organizations take on nationalist or even racist discourses (Puar 2007; Yılmaz-Günay 2014), this book aims to extend the field of research by focusing on ultraconservative and far-right strategies of mainstreaming their ideas. The underlying assumption being that sexual politics play a great role in the success of far-right mainstreaming, the contributions in this book examine this strategy in looking at the particular paradoxes at work in a wide spectrum of right-wing sexual politics and at their production of fear in discourses of crisis. Political ideologies like racism, familism, antisemitism, nationalism and heterosexism are being mainstreamed partly by sexual politics. And while feminist and LGBTIQ\* struggles have strongly marked and produced sexual politics in the history of many European societies, so do conservative and right-wing actors.

Some preliminary conclusions can already be drawn from the experience of editing this volume. Firstly, research on far-right politics and organizations and research on gender and sexuality studies should start

cooperating more strongly for the benefit of both. Unfortunately, we could not manage to bridge this gap but hope for future initiatives to make this happen. Secondly, international research networks need to be created including researchers with academic and NGO backgrounds to understand far-right sexual politics in a more nuanced way and provide knowledge in order to prevent and combat hateful and anti-democratic developments. Thirdly, far-right sexual politics in Europe need to be situated in a more global setting (combined with continuing the study of local dimensions and national contexts) in order to let go of methodological nationalism. So far, most attempts have collected national studies that are very rich and important, yet more transnational and transregional perspectives need to be developed to follow global political developments and allow for a better understanding of local events. The third point is a very difficult enterprise that would allow for a study of the very complex relations that governments entertain with far-right sexual politics in various European countries.

Last but not least, understanding how far-right political ideologies have been mainstreamed via sexual and gender politics is an important step in grasping ongoing political struggles over the meaning of democracy, (academic) freedom and (human) emancipation in Europe and beyond.

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