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Francesca Scrinzi, *The Racialization of Sexism: Men, Women and Gender in the Populist Radical Right*, New York: Routledge, 2024, 214 pp., \$190.00 (hardback), \$54.99 (paperback), \$49.49 (e-book)

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[T]he goal of biographical research is not only to understand individual cases in the context of individual life histories, but to gain an understanding of societal realities or of the interrelationship between society and life history.

—Gabriele Rosenthal (2004, 62)

This book provides insights into how the populist radical right (PRR) provides its members with a framework for understanding their gendered lives and experiences (7). Going beyond a study of women's and men's mobilization and the members' biographies, it is an analysis of organizations and an in-depth analysis of the relationship between PRR ideologies and gender/sexuality issues, helping us understand the shifts in PRR gender ideology and societal gender relations. The study challenges simplistic views of these parties as uniformly sexist and antifeminist by examining the nuanced ways they mobilize and appeal to members through gender-specific propaganda and ideologies.

To reveal the complex relationships between PRR ideologies, societal gender relations, and socioeconomic developments, Francesca Scrinzi uses an intersectional scope combined with a biographical and ethnographical approach. She focuses on the members' biographies to get an inside view into PRR parties and to understand how mechanisms of mobilization work. Therefore, she also consistently takes national political discourses into account. For this reason, her study is designed as a case comparison between the French party Front National (National Front, renamed Rassemblement National / National Rally in 2018) and the Italian party Lega Nord (Northern League). In this way, it is possible to take into consideration not only different organizations but also the impact of different national gender regimes.

In the first chapter, "Beyond the 'Mothers of the Nation' and the 'Brothers in Arms,'" Scrinzi provides a comprehensive and fruitful review of the research on gender and the PRR since the 1990s. She shows that the research has identified a variety of roles that

women can play beyond the traditional mother figure. At the same time, she outlines how women's rights have been used against immigration in recent years. Sexism, and sexual violence in particular, are externalized onto the Muslim "Other," which she defines as the racialization of sexism. An egalitarian understanding of gender in the Western world is often contrasted with that of Muslims. In this context, the far right positions itself as the supposed guardian of women's rights. She also links changes in gender regimes, neoliberal globalization, and the rise of the far right. The far right fills the void left by the disruptions caused by the demands made on women in the twenty-first century. This includes, for example, the expectation of successfully combining career and family, which often leads to conflicting demands—especially as pop-feminist debates have primarily focused on the career prospects of upper-middle-class women, neglecting issues of class and broader structural inequalities. The phenomenon can be described as "emancipation fatigue" (30). Moreover, Scrinzi outlines the literature on men and the far right. She identifies a gap in the literature: gendered perspectives on right-wing women focus primarily on symbolic and cultural issues, while research on men sees right-wing ideology primarily as a socioeconomic matter. With this book, she aims to fill this gap by integrating these aspects and taking an intersectional view.

As the next component of her analysis, Scrinzi presents the ways in which Lega Nord and Front National have politicized gender issues. In chapter 2, "The Racialization of Sexism," she elaborates on her main argument that sexism is externalized onto the migrant Other. Scrinzi shows how the different political cultures in Italy and France, in particular different relationships between church and state, influence these debates. She also describes the historical shifts in positions on sexuality and gender within both parties. She shows, for example, how the relationship between a traditional PRR gender image and the role of Front National's Marine Le Pen as female leader can be understood as a neoliberal revision of PRR ideologies and the narrative of "free choice" (55). Scrinzi illustrates the interplay between changes in political positions and national discourses, systematically preparing the background for the comparison that follows.

In chapter 3, the focus shifts away from questions of ideology to the different ways in which women and men are mobilized. Scrinzi argues that the PRR is a "gendered social movement" (72) and highlights the importance of emotions in mobilization, which are addressed differently according to gender. She presents quantitative data showing that there is a gender gap in both parties. The gender gap among party members is higher than the gender gap among voters, although the latter has increased. Scrinzi also provides insights into the history and the substantive shifts within the women's organization of Lega Nord, called "Donne Padane." Interestingly, the Front National used to have a group exclusively for women, but it no longer exists. She argues that this is connected to the changes in the Front National's positions on gender issues and the organizational restructuring of the party. Scrinzi illustrates how central the question of

protecting “our women” from the threat of immigrants—the racialization of sexism—is for the parties and their support from women.

In chapter 4, titled “PRR Women Negotiating Gender (In)equality and Feminism,” Scrinzi points out the gendered division of work, roles, and spaces as major mechanisms in marginalizing women in social movements. She finds that PRR women make sense of feminism in different ways depending on generational differences, namely on whether or not they have personally experienced the second-wave feminist movement and its major advancement in women’s rights (117). If they did, they tend to recognize the progress brought by feminism and actually see gender inequalities while still criticizing the movement for having gone too far, whereas younger generations take this progress for granted and do not see gender-specific differences. For the latter, emancipation is seen as an individual choice and responsibility, imposing a neoliberal perspective on gender and inequality (111). Scrinzi concludes this chapter with the insight that women’s negative emotions of fear (concerning economic issues and native cultural identity) are being activated and amplified by how parties frame their messages. Through their engagement in the party, these negative emotions change into positive emotions, which in turn contribute to building internal cohesion and attachments to the party as a “defender of women” and their rights (116).

In chapter 5, Scrinzi discovers the gendered trajectories of PRR women and men. Using their biographies as examples, she shows how biographies grounded in intersecting social inequalities shape political engagement and how activism can have a “socializing effect” (121). Her findings show that professional middle-class women focus on their political career, putting an emphasis on “women’s issues” and emotional work within the party, whereas working-class women perceive their domestic responsibilities and jobs as barriers to political participation. The materialist framing of PRR parties and their emphasis on economic and labor burdens therefore resonate with working-class women’s experience (129). PRR men seem to have different gendered motives for their engagement as well, depending on their generation. Whereas younger men see themselves as breadwinners and heads of the household, older men tend to associate their activism with a fatherly role within the party. Both PRR women and men experience changing patterns of political engagement over the course of their lives, for example triggered by major events such as divorce or the death of a partner. This chapter is summed up by the insight that men’s and women’s different forms of engagement in PRR parties go beyond restoring traditional gender roles (141).

In chapter 6, Scrinzi sums up the findings of her research: women’s and men’s engagement in PRR parties, their motives, and how they (re)produce gendered roles within the parties vary and go beyond the stereotypical notion of the “brothers in arms” and “mothers of the nation.” Men’s and women’s motives for joining and engaging are shaped by life events, class, gender, and religion. Scrinzi even states that PRR activism can bring forms of caring masculinities to the fore (155). These dynamics interact with and change PRR politics. Such politics are affected by structural gendered transformations in society that are informed by a neoliberal project of the self, centered

around self-reliance and personal responsibility. In the context of this transformation, PRR parties have moved away from more traditional family ideology to embrace the neoliberal public gender regime and deploy a new discourse centered on women's freedom (159). This results in construction of a racialized Other that endangers liberal Western society. Finally, Scrinzi calls for seeing PRR activists' trajectories, motives, and practices as inscribed within wider social structures. This means conceiving of PRR activism as an expression of our societies rather than an antiliberal extreme driven by irrationality (163). Referring to the work of Cas Mudde, she calls for perceiving PRR as a "pathological normalcy" of capitalist neoliberal societies (163).

Scrinzi concludes her work with an outlook for further research, for example on new groups such as Fratelli d'Italia, led by Giorgia Meloni (which emphasizes ordinary women as mothers), and Reconquête, led by Éric Zemmour (which emphasizes masculinities and "de-Islamization"). She calls for an approach to gendered counter-extremism that includes gender-aware interventions that challenge stereotypical constructions such as "passive women" and consider the complex roles of women in and outside of the private sphere (178).

Francesca Scrinzi's research provides a comprehensive and at the same time complex insight into men, women, and gender in populist radical right parties, building on a rich empirical base. Her multidimensional approach is convincing. She interweaves questions about political positions and gender ideology with concrete questions about the success of PRR mobilization. A systematic comparison between France and Italy sharpens our view of the phenomenon. The interplay between the political discourses in these countries, shaped by different gender regimes, and the political discussion within the parties is well explained. Her intersectional approach successfully integrates socioeconomic and symbolic issues, illustrating which gender roles operate in which class and age group and what happens in the biographies of individuals who join the party.

Her insight into PRR members' biographies gives a more in-depth understanding of engagement mechanisms. However, her analysis seems to be close to the interviewees' statements. Taking a reconstructive approach into account, it would have been interesting to focus on the level of self-presentation rather than to rely solely on narrated experiences. Biographies exist at the intersection of society and the individual. They can provide information about collective narratives and societal realities (Rosenthal 2004, 62). In a life story we see both, the past's biographical meaning and the meaning of the self-presentation (Rosenthal 2018, 167). The latter is influenced by the present social context of the interviewee. It is here that the narrations of Scrinzi's informants relate to their present engagement in Lega Nord and Front National (now Rassemblement National). Furthermore, the fact that they have been asked to talk about their biography against the background of their engagement in the party influences their narration. They likely present themselves in a particular way, which would be interesting to unravel. To what extent are the narrations shaped by collective party narratives and their ideologies, and how are these narratives being used for (retrospective) meaning making? This analysis

might for instance question Luigi's self-presentation as a fatherly figure in the party and Scrinzi's interpretation of PRR men as expanding gender roles through caring masculinities (140–41). Without getting to the bottom of the self-presentation, one runs a risk of reproducing the interviewees' own arguments.

Nevertheless, Francesca Scrinzi provides us with a fruitful account of the role of women in PRR parties. She also shows how to understand why these parties are becoming more feminine, arguing that PRR parties benefit directly from women's relational and caring skills and their emotional labor (155). She links the changes in PRR parties to a more general societal change. Her analysis thus considers not only the relationship between the state, current political discourse, political positions, gender relations, and individual biographies, but also questions of organizational history. Scrinzi skillfully and insightfully links these different levels in her six chapters. In doing so, the book lays the groundwork for further research, especially comparisons across national contexts.

References

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