

Fielitz, Maik; Laloire, Laura Lotte (Hrsg.): *Trouble on the Far Right. Contemporary Right-Wing Strategies and Practices in Europe*. Bielefeld: Transcript – Verlag für Kommunikation, Kultur und soziale Praxis 2016. ISBN: 978-3-8376-3720-5; 208 S.

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In recent years, together with the electoral rise of particularly populist radical right parties across Europe, the scholarly output on this particular political inclination has gradually expanded, mainly focusing on the political parties.¹ *Trouble on the Far Right* writes itself into this burgeoning literature with a refreshing approach. It thus encompasses a multitude of aspects that shed light on the great diversity of the far right scene. A scene that is constantly evolving and entailing several other types of actors besides from the political parties.

The e-book derives from an online article-series on the academic blog *sicherheitspolitik-blog.de*, where 25 European researchers of the far right (including scholars, journalists, and documentary producers) provide timely insights on the practices, organisation, and political opportunities of some of Europe's current far right actors. The scope of the book is large, as it considers a diverse range of actors (including political parties, protest groups, media outlets, ideologists, and vigilante groups), various forms of right-wing expression (from the populist radical right to neo-Nazi actors), and the entire European continent (including Turkey). The chapters thus delve into the given actors' „practices, strategies, and their instruments to mobilize support“ (p. 19).

The first entry of the book consists of an introductory chapter by Fielitz and Laloire, where they contextualise the book, and define the 'far right' as „a political space whose actors base their ideology and action on the notion of inequality among human beings, combining the supremacy of a particular nation, 'race' or 'civilization' with ambitions for an authoritarian transformation of values and styles of government.“ (p.16)

Yet, due to the contentious nature of the

subject of study, the authors of the various entries have been allowed to employ the approach and views on „the political nature and impact of far right actors“ (p. 17) that they see fit, leading to a plurality of different analyses throughout the book.

The introductory chapter is followed by an overview of the European far right scene, and the recent ongoing changes in terms of political activism (Fekete). The remaining part of the book is divided into five sections, according to the political settings, or 'terrains' (p. 20), where the actors are active. The first part considers the *electoral setting*. Here, van Kessel sets out by taking a closer look at the appeal of the welfare chauvinist claims of populist radical right parties. This is followed by three entries, which consider the *Austrian Freedom Party* (Weidinger), the *Greater Romania Party* (Stoica), and the Ukrainian *Svoboda* party (Schmidt) and the competition, opportunities, and constraints they face in each of their respective national contexts.

The second section focuses on the *street level*. It sets out with two entries on Germany: one focusing on the mechanisms leading to the normalization of far right discourse and actors (Marcks), while the other considers the rise in vigilant activities, and explains how this can lead to far right terrorism (Saal). The following two entries focus on the openly neo-fascist party movement *Casa-Pound Italia*. Koch describes the movement's organizational and ideological hybridization strategies, while Froio zooms in on the movement's discourse on migration. The section's final entry is written by the documentarist Kourounis. She provides a fascinating 'behind the scenes' in regards to accompanying a far right party for research purposes, as she filmed *Golden Dawn* for a five year period.

The third section concentrates on the more intellectual *metapolitical level*. The first three entries focus on Western European New Right actors, and their pursuit of cultural hegemony. This includes an entry on the German and Austrian intellectual, street and party political actors (Strobl & Bruns), while Bouron considers the French *Identitarians* and their professionalized communi-

¹ Manuela Caiani, Radical right-wing movements: Who, when, how and why?, in: Sociopedia.isa (2017), p. 1-15.

cation strategy. Bar-on explains the hardship involved in having an academic discussion of political viewpoints with one of the main actors of the French New Right, Alain de Benoist. The focus is then turned to Turkey, and the historical evolution and political strategies of the Turkish nationalist *Gülen Movement* (Laloire). Finally, Gasiorowska zooms in on Poland and the nationalist anti-abortion campaign of 2016, which also contained xenophobic elements.

The fourth section considers the *underground level*, more specifically far right terrorism. It contains two entries. The first focuses on 'counter-state terrorism' (Koehler), and outlines the main features of such attacks, while arguing that both researchers and law enforcers should devote more attention to these types of terrorists. Carter makes a similar point after describing the rise in solo-actor far right terror incidents against civil society in the UK, and explaining how this rise correlates with the increased use of digital media.

The final section focuses on the *internal terrain*, i.e. the far right competition within five European countries. In the UK, Macklin explains that despite the scene's increasingly fragmented nature, the British far right is still highly unlikely to disappear. Silvennoinen paints a similar picture of a fragmented Finnish radical nationalist scene, as the *Finn's Party* is losing political influence, while other actors have appeared, spurred on by the refugee crisis. In his analysis of the Latvian far right scene, Kott has a rather different focus. He explains that ethnicity is the main dividing line of the far right, as it involves radical Latvian ethno-nationalists versus their post-Soviet Russian neo-fascist counterparts, and explores their development over time. Kutyski investigates how the Bulgarian *Patriotic Front* has become a respectable political actor, while still fostering links to extreme right activists. This could become problematic for the party's European ambitions. In the final entry of the book, Fielitz explores the Greek context that fostered the rise of the neo-Nazi *Golden Dawn* party, plus the obstacles and dilemmas, the party currently faces.

The main contribution of the book is its provision of a very encompassing overview of the current diversity of the European far

right scene. This involves consideration of their constraints and opportunities, but also the continuously evolving nature of their activism, and their searches for new avenues of attaining political influence. Refreshingly, the book does not solely focus on 'the usual suspects', such as for instance the main Western European populist radical right parties, like *Front National* or the *Austrian Freedom Party*, but instead allows for investigations of practically all types of far right expression. Furthermore, the contributions are also extremely timely. Due to the respective national contexts, particularly the entries on the Ukrainian *Svoboda* party (Schmidt), the normalization of German far right discourse and actors (Marcks), and the Turkish *Gülen Movement* (Laloire), become highly relevant.

Despite their short nature, each contribution delivers very convincing and interesting findings, and it is remarkable how much information and analysis the various writers manage to convey in such limited space. All the different contributions are thus very well written and concise, but still expressed in a way that is easily comprehensible, also for readers not usually faring in the academic field. In this way, the editors largely achieve their aim of „sharing scholarly research with a broader audience“ (p. 19).

Yet, the entries' great variety in countries, types of actors, approaches, and focus points makes it rather challenging to pinpoint the exact key findings of the book as a whole, leaving one with a bit of an information 'overload'. Moreover, the ambition of making it widely readable of course also has the downside that the scholarly utility of the book suffers somewhat, as the scope for comparison and the main thread between the contributions is missing. This all entails that many questions remain unanswered. The book could thus have benefited greatly from a concluding chapter, which brought the various entries' key points together and potentially distinguished between the actors along other division lines in order to group the various findings. This could for instance be according to ideology (e.g. New Right vs. neo-Nazi actors), geography (e.g. Western vs. Central Eastern Europe), or action repertoires (e.g. non- vs. violent actors).

Despite these weaknesses, the book is an important and highly timely contribution to the research field of far right politics. It truly manages, for better or worse, to convey the heterogeneity of the political settings, the actors making up the scene, and the great diversity in possible analytical, theoretical, and methodological approaches and focus points. The book can thus advantageously be utilized to gain concise insights on the intriguing world of far right activism, while at the same time act as inspiration for future research avenues.

Notes

² Manuela Caiani, Radical right-wing movements: Who, when, how and why?, in: Sociopedia.isa (2017), p. 1-15.

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