Female leaders for ‘Männerparteien’? A comparative and explorative study of populist right-wing leaders Pia Kjærgaard, Marine Le Pen and Siv Jensen

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Abstract

Research about populist right wing parties’ leadership and support emphasizes that most of these parties are charismatic and male-dominated, both as regards their leadership and voters. However, while studies about the gender gap mainly focus on demand side factors, still sporadic is the research on the way populist parties deal with gender. Even less researched is how populist female leaders can influence the positions, rhetoric, discourse and image of these parties. The two Scandinavian populist right wing parties Dansk Folkeparti and the Norwegian Fremskrittspartiet offer interesting elements from where to look at female leadership and gender from the perspective of two well established and long lived radical rightwing populist parties. This paper also refers to the case of Marine Le Pen and the Front National, to consider whether the Nordic cases shape a particular framework of female leadership, highly influenced by context, opportunity structure and role of gender equality and gender issues in the Scandinavian countries. The paper focuses on the role of female leaders Pia Kjærgaard, Siv Jensen and Marine Le Pen to discuss and investigate whether gender influenced their party leadership, media representations and self-representations.

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The two Scandinavian parties Danish People’s Party, Dansk Folkeparti (DF) and the Norwegian Progress Party, Fremskrittpartiet (FrP) are undoubtedly among the electorally most successful and politically consolidated radical rightwing populist parties in Europe. Under the leadership of Pia Kjaersgaard, the DF was started in 1995 by a splinter group of the Danish Progress Party (Meret 2010). Initially unwelcomed and marginalized by mainstream political parties, the DF has in the past decades secured itself a solid parliamentary representation and support among the electorate (12.3 pct. at last elections, see table 1 below). The Norwegian FrP originated from the anti-tax and protest wave of the 1970s. Under the present leader Siv Jensen, who succeeded uncontested and long term party leader Carl I Hagen in 2006, the party got 16.6 pct. of the votes and joined the Conservatives into government in 2013. After the elections Siv Jensen was appointed Minister of Finance. These two Scandinavian parties not only offer several interesting elements from where to approach and explore aspects related to female leadership and gender in the populist radical right, but their political engagement and achievements also question much of the existing and mainstream studies on populist charismatic leadership (cf. Eatwell 2011; Mudde 2007; Pappas 2011), often mentioning and emphasizing male charisma as one of the factors contributing to the parties’ electoral and political breakthrough.

Pia Kjærsgaard and Siv Jensen challenge – each in her own way-- readings centered on male/masculine populist charisma (see Meret 2015), thus introducing interesting elements to an analysis of the role played by gender and female leaders in populist radical rightwing movements and parties (Blee and Deutsch 2012), which remain sporadically researched issues in the scholarly studies, particularly in Europe. The little research available more generally dealing with the role of women leaders in politics also tends to offer explanations that highlight the importance of context- and pattern dependent opportunity structures; in this framing, the Scandinavian countries emerge as historically and socio-politically ahead of other countries in facilitating the participation of women in politics and eventually also their opportunity to reach up to leadership positions. While this kind of interpretations can be open to discussion, the case of Marine Le Pen, leader of the Front National (FN) since May 2011, shows that there are no short-cut explanations: obviously Scandinavian countries, with their gender equality tradition and policies are not the only incubators of chances for successful populist radical right wing women to party leadership! Since Marine Le Pen took the lead of the FN from her father Jean-Marie, the party has embarked on a project of political and image restyling, which contributed to increase the electoral support to the FN, seemingly also influencing the party image among the French electorate (reference). Pia Kjærsgaard, Siv Jensen and Marine Le Pen are thus in many ways emblematic of successful radical rightwing female leaders, who not only managed to gain consensus and support among (predominately) male voters, but also widened and consolidated their party electoral pool. In relation to this, some interesting questions arise dealing in particular with the role played by gender: does gender here make a difference? And how does the gender issue intervene in the representation and self-representation of populist radical rightwing party leaders?

This article aims at discussing and investigating how gender is constructed to define the style, rhetoric, discursive strategies and agenda positions of three populist radical right wing leaders: Pia Kjærsgaard, Marine Le Pen and Siv Jensen. In addition, we aim to explore if and eventually how
the Nordic countries constitute a *sui generis* framework supporting particular representations, gender constructions and self-representation of populist female leaders, which can be influenced by context, opportunity, political culture and media in constructing images and repertoires of female politicians. In particular, we think it is valuable to consider what similarities and differences there are in the representation and self-representations of these outstanding radical right populist female leaders: do Pia, Siv and Marine challenge forms of hegemonic masculinities within politics? Or do they rather adapt to already existing framings? And how is gender negotiated from the position of female leaders of radical rightwing parties where men are usually overrepresented?

Departing from a framework defined by the role of women in politics and by gendered constructions of female politicians, the paper aims at investigating: 1) how female populist leaders represent themselves; 2) how mainstream media press coverage represents them in politics. On this basis we comparatively discuss to what extent representations of populist radical rightwing female leaders reproduce, strengthen or challenge hegemonic gendered representations and stereotypes. The research design intends to offer an explorative comparative analysis of how gender is at work in relation to radical rightwing populist female party leaders by intersecting media coverage and self-representations. The paper is based on a variety of primary and secondary empirical sources, including (auto-) biographies, newspapers’ articles, interviews and social media personal profiles.

The article starts with an overview of the available research on women in politics focusing on feminist debates about stereotyping and discrepancies in the representation of men and women in politics as a basis for exploring commonalities and differences in the three countries (Phillips 1995; Krook 2014). Using a varied array of sources allows us to illustrate in a better structured and comprehensive way the issue of gender constructions and stereotypes, particularly in terms of the emphasis given to the characteristics and qualities that media tend to use in covering populist rightwing female leaders. At the same time, the media representations of women politicians is double-sided and if on the one hand, media contribute to disseminate symbolic representations based on stereotypes (Campus 2013), on the other hand, women politicians are not passive recipients of media representations, but actively participate in the construction of their role and image (Fiig 2010). This seems to us particularly the case for radical rightwing populist female leaders, also when taking into account the general low levels of trust in mainstream media and press fostered among members of the populist radical rightwing.

In our analysis we pay attention to main cluster themes/areas emerging from a content analysis of the available sources and drawing upon e.g. constructions of gendered stereotypes; looking especially at e.g. constructions of gendered stereotypes/ideal types of masculinity/femininity; relationships and tensions between public/private life; and gendered media representations of populist female leaders.

This study is explorative, since there is a clear research gap about female leadership in politics in general and more specifically on female rightwing populist leaders. In gender research, women in politics and women’s descriptive and symbolic representations have been major research, but we argue here that there is a lack of studies on women party leaders. This seems surprising particularly
from the perspective of the Nordic countries, where women have for many years made up between 40 and 50 percent of the parliamentary representative and where there is a rather long record list of women politicians on both the left and the rightwing. To this it can be added that since 2011 Denmark got the first female Prime Minister, Social democrat, Helle Thorning Schmidt, and in Norway the Conservative Erna Solberg succeeded to Jens Stoltenberg in 2013. Erna is the second female head of government in Norway since the 1990s, when Gro Harlem Brundtland served in her third administration.

Delimitation of search on newspapers’ articles
Our empirical material consists of official and non-official life biographies, articles and videos, supplied by an exploration of relevant social media personal pages (facebook). For the mainstream press, our search was limited to relevant newspapers’ articles published in the period immediately following the leadership turnover. For the Danish case we searched the newspaper database Infomedia for the period from the DF press announcement of Pia Kjærsgaard resignation and Kristian Thulesen Dahl succession on August 7, 2012 until end of month. The search resulted in more than 270 articles, covering the DF leadership shift in mainstream press; most of the articles were published in the days just after the press release. A search based on the on the Norwegian database Atekst using the entry word ‘Siv Jensen’ and limited to the period May 1 – May 31, 2006 resulted in a total of 250 articles, of which we selected the most relevant (91 articles). For the French case on Marine Le Pen case, we looked at online articles published in the period between January, 1 – January 31, 2011 by the newspapers Le Monde, Le Figaro and Libération. This online preliminary search produced 45 relevant articles. However, we aim at improving the reliability of the French media search, by consulting a newspapers’ database.

Representations of Women in Politics

Introduction
Recent scholarly studies underline the influence and impact that mass media have in covering/framing women leaders for ‘good’ and ‘bad’, at least in terms of the impact this may have on women as a whole and on their opportunities, when engaging in politics and aiming at leadership positions. On a general plan, it can be argued that mass media and television offer interesting framings and references of today’s women in politics. The internationally famous Danish TV series Borgen /‘The Castle’ features for example the charismatic politician Birgitte Nyborg Christensen, leader of the moderate party, as unexpectedly being appointed first female Prime Minister. Birgitte performs the role of a modern, dynamic and morally and tactically aware female politician, who needs to confront a world made of political spinning and compromises, often going against her moral and ethical standpoints. Birgitte emerges as the politically talented leader, clothed in purple, carefully listening to her rivals, before addressing herself the public passionately, telling voters what they expect and want to hear. At the same time, her assertiveness and self-confidence hide her uncertainty and doubts about her role as a leader. Interestingly it is her (male) spin doctor Bent Sejrø, often prompting her to ‘lead [the electorate], because they want to be led … and you will learn how to [do this] along the way’. In this sense, Borgen offers a curious ‘cliché’ of a female
Prime Minister in a Nordic country striving to find a balance between traits such as toughness and resoluteness and caring attitudes, honesty and irresoluteness when it comes to deal with compromises between real politic and personal standpoints. Besides, the TV serie shows how anno 2014 in Denmark (and outside), the life, style and role of a female Prime Minister still represent an interesting and popular plot. Although the main character of the script is said to be inspired by Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning Schmidt, Birgitte’s style and role show that there is hardly any pre-defined ideal type or model for women in contemporary politics, compared to the more acknowledged and conventional male ideals: dressed in grey suit, sharp, entertaining, self-confident and somehow brutal in style and with a tendency to thrive in adverse situations\(^1\). This, as Campus argues (Campus 2013), suggests that ‘the association between successful leadership and masculine characteristics still prevails, and gender equality in this regard has yet to come in contemporary society’.

Notwithstanding the oversimplification of the leadership ‘models’, it seems apparent that the Birgitte in Borgen’s representation of the woman in politics, including her rhetorical talents and ‘style’, cannot be directly put in comparison to past and present ‘real’ women politicians and leaders. This also allows us here to indulge on a reflection of what issues are at stake, what is emphasized and identified as focus-subjects when it comes to female political leaders; appearances and dress-style, for example seem to be an interesting matter (too sexy, feminine, masculine, neutral?) as also concerns about the relationship public/private, where private family issues play an important role in constructing and developing the environment of TV serie women in politics.

With an eye again to the scholarly literature, it can be argued that similarly to other popular television genres, Borgen also contributed to articulate, construct and disseminate representations of women political leaders, also reproducing and maintaining gendered stereotypes. Studies on the representation of the women in politics often underline for example the propensity to construct and judge women in politics and in leadership positions vis-à-vis forms of hegemonic masculinities: leaning too much towards dominant masculine representations is perceived as being an excess, but ‘inappropriate’ for a woman is also to incline towards excessive markers of femininity when appearing publicly. These opposed poles are also recreated by past and present stereotyped models, such as the iron-lady, the ‘cold-warrior’, the ‘I must-prevail’ type typically referred to and epitomized by Margaret Thatcher. Yet, if masculine ‘copycat’ models are criticized, so do glamorous excesses of consumerist femininity, which also offer matter of stereotyping, such as in the case of French Ségolène Royal, or Danish PM Helle Thorning Schmidt, nicknamed ‘Gucci-Helle’ at the beginning of her administration, used by the press and media to exemplify the sociopolitical and economic contrast between the glamorous, posh habits and upper-middle-class academic background with her social democratic standpoints and average voters’ background.

*Theoretical approaches to gender and political leadership*

\(^1\) It would be interesting a comparison with the main male protagonist of American TV series House of Cards.
Among the (few) theoretical approaches that can be distinguished in relation to issues dealing more or less directly with women political leaders and the media, we find Nancy Fraser’s concept of the public sphere and Judith Butler’s concept of performativity useful to start framing our analysis and to introduce some key concepts.

Nancy Fraser’s approach to the public sphere developed in ‘Rethinking the public Sphere’ (1990) has reformulated the public sphere and presented a new post-bourgeois conception of it. This approach is based upon a criticism of Habermas’ democratic model of the public sphere premised upon the exclusion of women, marginalized together with other social groups. Fraser offers an alternative understanding of a democratic public sphere based upon conflicts and pluralism. Her criticism is based on four main points:

1. Habermas’ liberal model idealizes the bourgeois public sphere based on the exclusion of gender and marginalized social groups.

2. It neglects the analysis of competing public spheres based on unequal relationships of power, where ‘weak publics’ opposes dominant ‘strong’ publics.

3. It neglects to consider the plurality of public spheres, in which counter publics contest the exclusionary norms elaborating alternative styles of political behavior and alternative norms of public speech.

4. It disregard to consider that the public sphere is constituted by conflict and based upon the separation between public and private; civil society and the state

Fraser’s approach to democracy based on critical theory undermines the liberal model as a normative ideal and presents an alternative democratic model based on social equality; a multiplicity of publics.; on the inclusion of private interests and issues from the private sphere. Finally it allows for both strong and weak publics and encourages conceptualizing and studying the interrelations between them. This approach allows addressing some key characteristics of the public sphere and media landscape. However contemporary changes in the public arena and media landscape question to what extent this model still holds in today’s media landscape dominated by the social media.

In democratic theory the public sphere has a double role, as an arena where citizens participate together and influence politics. The media is perceived to be an important part of the public sphere which plays a key role as a forum for society’s collective dialogue with and about itself (Keane 1991). From this perspective the media site is not a neutral arena but an arena for ex/inclusion and empowerment/ disempowerment of women and marginalized social groups (Fiig 2010). Some approaches of the media as a specific site for female politicians aim to combine Fraser’s approach with Butler’s concept of performativity (Butler 2010; see also Fiig 2010). In this case, women’s political representation are better defined as two-sided: if in fact on the one hand mainstream media tens to reproduce symbolic representation based on inequality, exclusion and often gendered and racialized stereotypes, on the other hand media offer an opportunity for women in politics to
develop agency and forms of empowerment as a result of their media exposure. We find this dynamic approach to the media representation of women politicians useful, since it is premised on a dynamic understanding of female politicians as both agents/subjects and objects/victims. In the specific of our analysis, this approach can help us considering to what extent female leaders of radical right-wing populist parties are objects/victims, or agents that can influence/manipulate the media presentation of them. In this respect, self-representations, self-portrayals and images promoted by right-wing populist female leaders can also have an impact on the media and public perception of them, rather than only the other way around. The empirical study of the three cases aims to explore this point.

Masculinity research has addressed from another interesting theoretical angle the public power structure, by focusing on the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Norocel 2013). The concept of hegemonic declined in this way is still matter of debate within the field, but it also proved useful when studying multiple masculinities in relation to power relationship in different domains, such as political leadership and media representation. Messerschmidt (2010) defines the concept as ‘as the pattern of practice that allow men’s dominance over women to continue’ and emphasizes its relational character, which implies that the concept has no meaning outside its relationship to emphasized femininity – and to non-hegemonic masculinities – that is to those forms of femininity that are practiced in a complimentary, compliant, and accommodating subordinate relationship with hegemonic masculinity. According to Messerschmidt (2010: 9) researchers have started to expand the concept in four main ways: by documenting the consequences and costs of hegemony, by uncovering mechanisms of hegemony, by showing greater diversity in masculinities and tracing changes. This approach can address to diversities and hybridity of masculinities and femininities, to what extent female leaders in Rightwing populist parties comply or attempt to break up with models of hegemonic masculinity, also considering the predominately male representation of both party members and voters.

The following section gives a brief overview of selected studies on media representation of female politicians and female leadership.

**Women in politics, women as party leaders and media representations**

Comparative studies of women in politics with leadership positions and their gendered constructions and representation are sporadic (Apfelbaum 1993; Thomas and Wilcox 2005; Blee and Deutch 2012; Krogstad and Storvik 2012) and often different in aims and scopes. This research field relies on a scholarly approach that often embarks upon broad-scope analyses of ‘gendered’ media representations of women in politics (Braden 1996; Norris 1997; Eide 2010; other) by also considering the issue from country-based perspectives and with studies aimed at disclosing the relationship between mainstream media and gendered representations of female politicians and candidates (Campus 2013; Ross 2003; Rainbow in Murray 200x; Ross & Sreberny 2000; [other]). Concerning women political leaders, international studies find that in spite of the developments that have taken place in society and politics over the last several decades, women who aspire to leadership positions still face the dilemma concerning gender norms (Rudman and Phelan 2008). According to traditional beliefs about gender roles, women are more ‘communal’, concerned with
welfare and care than their male counterparts. Contrarily, men are more assertive, controlling, and confident (Eagly and Karau 2002). Since women in general are still believed to have less ‘agency’ than men, female leaders often have to present themselves as ‘atypical’ women. Female agency can, however, also provoke negative reactions (Rudman and Phelan 2008), causing women to be held to a different standard than male politicians (Eagly and Karau 2002; Okimoto and Brescoll 2010). Krook (2014) suggests that this “lack of fit” between feminine stereotypes and leadership qualities limits women’s self-representation: They can either frame their participation as an extension of their roles as mothers (Chaney 1979), decide not to have children, or wait until their children have grown up before pursuing a political career (McKay 2011). In the first instance, women’s entry does not challenge traditional gender roles, while in the second women are better equipped to conform to the male norm that does not necessarily need to take family responsibilities into account. The empirical study of the three cases aims to develop this point further.

Other research approaches insists instead upon context rather than gender-related factors, where the socio-political and cultural background is considered to directly, or indirectly, influence the reception of women in politics and contribute to shape the media representation as well as their self-representations (e.g. Norris 2005; Krogstad 2012; other). By weighting more context dependent opportunities, developments and patterns, these studies tend to create an automatism between the quantity/descriptive representation (number of women in politics, e.g. elected female MPs) and substantive representation (women-friendly policies) to comparatively higher acceptability of women in government positions. Similarly, other studies propose essentialised and static national typologies, or stereotyped models of women in politics that are determined by historical patterns defined by national political culture. This path-dependency frequently results in support or opposition to past and present hegemonic models of masculinities in politics (e.g. Krogstad & Storvik 2012; Moustgaard 2004; Fiig 2010). Research however has also shown that there is no magic in numbers and that a high representation of women in parliament (numerical/descriptive representation) is no guarantee for that these women are acting ‘for women’ (substantial representation) and that representatives claiming to act in the ‘name of women’ may in fact be anti-feminists (Childs & Webb 2012). The question is whether the Nordic countries represent in this case a special ‘model’ in terms of women leaders in politics. These countries have since the 1970s had a high representation of women in Parliament and many female political leaders and are generally believed to have gender-friendly policies (Freidenvall, Dahlerup and Skjeie 2006), but this does not mean that the media representation of female political leaders is less biased (Fiig 2010).

We argue that it is problematic to conduct the analysis on the basis of already outlined prototypes or models of women’s representations or images, responding to constructed types such as the ‘iron-lady’, the ‘witch’, the ‘blue-eyed’ the ‘pit bull’, the ‘glamorous’, seductive type (see e.g. Moustgaard 2004; Krogstad & Storvik 2012; Ross 2003). This approach sees female politicians either as victims of the press/hegemonic masculinity, or reinforce assumptions that countries characterized by a welfare and gender system with historically stronger traditions for social rights and gender equality, generate less biased and stereotyping mainstream media representations of women than say countries where gender equality rights are weaker. But Nordic research indicates
that this is not necessarily the case (see e.g. Fiig 2009, 2010; Andreassen 2005; Eide 2000) and that
gendered stereotyped constructs, representations and self-representation still take place (often
intersecting with other social categories such as class, race, ethnicity, religion) albeit constructions
of gender have evolved and may focus on new aspects (Fiig 2010).

Research documents that women still tend to be treated differently than male politicians in the
political arena. However, the role that media play in labelling and constructing popular images and
public opinion/attitudes and the representations of female politicians has also dramatically changed
in the past decades. The media presentation is not only characterized by antagonism, stereotyping
and discrimination; women are no longer primarily ‘victims’ of media coverage, but they also have
become active players on the media site. In contemporary politics media outlets are too important
for constructing images to be left alone and many female politicians have understood the need and
opportunities of contributing to these representations, by personal engagement and direct influence.
Several examples can be mentioned in relation to this such as the writing life biographies, being
active on the printed and social media, choosing how to profile themselves.

An implication of the above said is that representations and images of female politicians are
dynamic relations; influenced both by how they decide to represent themselves and how they are
received and ‘constructed’ by the mainstream media. This applies also to populist radical right
female leaders, whose role is further influenced by studies that until recently have in particular
highlighted the traditional views on gender and the gender inequality (as regards to ideology,
electorate, leadership) characterizing the populist radical right parties (e.g. Norocel 2010, 2013;
Norris 2005; Akkerman and Hagelund 2007; Amesberger & Halbmayr 2002). It is thus interesting
to consider to what extent the leadership style of female populist radical right leaders is gendered,
both from the perspective of the subject involved and from that of the mainstream media.

In the following we propose to study representations and self-representations of the three populist
radical right-wing leaders: Pia Kjærsgaard, Marine Le Pen and Siv Jensen focusing on similarities
and differences between the cases. The analysis refers to a few frameworks and domains that tend
to recur in media analyses of female political leaders focusing on the tensions between; public and
private sphere; media representations and self-representations; masculinity and femininity; feminine
domain/intimate life/motherhood. These issues are some of the thematic fields of reference
characterizing our preliminary content analysis approach to our comparative and explorative
material dealing with the three female leaders.

These issues have been selected as the thematic fields of reference for the preliminary content
analysis of the empirical material dealing with the three female leaders, which forms the basis for
the explorative comparative analysis and reflections of the characteristics of Right wing female
leadership in the three countries.

**Empirical analysis**

*pia kjærsgaard: a prototype of woman-led radical rightwing populism?*
In light of the electoral support and stability garnered by the DF since the 1990s, the party’s long time and uncontested leader Pia Kjærsgaard should be taken as emblematic for the successful radical rightwing populist leader. In the nearly two decades she was the DF party leader, Kjærsgaard was able to attain loyal followers, political success and leadership longevity. As the first female leader founding and leading a party, Pia Kjærsgaard pushed the DF from the margins to the mainstream of Danish politics. It is therefore worth of notice, that her name hardly appears in the list of the populist radical right wing leaders with charisma and popularity often named by studies within the field. This is even more difficult to understand, when considering that Pia Kjærsgaard was the first female politician in Denmark to launch a new party, besides being, for quite a long period the only woman leading a radical rightwing populist party in Europe.

This section tries to address some questions on gendered role in populist right wing parties by looking at how Pia Kjærsgaard’s role, style and image have been communicated, mediatized and debated both by the official party literature (biographies, authorized books, articles) and in Danish mainstream media. This section is provisionally still strongly grounded upon the research done by one of the authors in the already published ‘Charismatic female leadership and gender: Pia Kjærsgaard and the Danish People’s Party’ (2015). The research will be enriched and deepened also by looking at other source material, such as social media and recently published books.

Pia Kjærsgaard had joined the Danish Progress Party in 1978. She was elected party MP in 1984 and made a rapid political career within the party. In the early 1990s internal party divisions, disagreement and struggles for power eventually split the party group up. As a result Kjærsgaard and four other members left in protest in 1995 and launched the DF. At the 1998 parliamentary election, the DF received more than 7 pct. of the votes and from 2001 the party secured a decade of Liberal-Conservative government (2001-2011) supporting the minority government.

In terms of voters’ socioeconomic profile the DF has until recently been a party of (male) manual workers with lower education (see Meret 2010). The start of the DF was difficult, but the electoral breakthrough came at the 1998 election, where the DF gained 13 seats in the Danish parliament. This ensured the party a rather solid parliamentary representation. Between 2001 and 2011 the DF played a key role as a support party for the Liberal-Conservative coalition government and exerted its influence on the political and public media discourse in the ‘othering’ of immigrants, especially Muslims. At the November 2011 elections, the DF lost relatively little in terms of support (-1.6 pct.) compared to the Conservatives and the Liberals. On August 7, 2012, Pia Kjærsgaard resigned as DF party leader and Kristen Thulesen Dahl took over. But contrary to what some expected, the leadership shift did not affect the party popularity. At the municipal elections of November 19, 2013 the party for the first time had a breakthrough also at municipal level, winning around 10 pct. of the votes and thus stabilizing its position as the Danish third largest party, now also locally. And at the past May 2014 European elections the DF got 26.6 pct. of the votes, which granted the party three mandates in the EP, among them the majority voted at the Danish elections.
Pia Kjærsgaard has always generated polarized feelings and reactions among (the many) people not susceptible to her appeal. During her years in the party leadership, Pia Kjærsgaard was a controversial politician, who divided opinions. But this did not prevent her from being considered a charismatic party leader. As observed by a Danish journalist:

‘Pia Kjærsgaard is not only known, she is feared. Many are with her, but even more against her. For many she is the symbol of all the worst. For others of all the best. (…) But nobody remains indifferent [to her] and she has learned to live with it’

Another of the characteristics often attributed to her by the press and by the party literature is her stubbornness, her determination and dictatorship style in steering the party. While these features do not seem to differ from the authoritarian style often attributed to radical rightwing populist male leaders, in her case the accounts seem to have engaged both the media and herself. Explanations of her style essentially revolve around two narratives: 1) Kjærsgaard’s personal experiences within the Danish Progress Party, oftentimes described as anarchic and uncontrolled; 2) her personal ‘hard’ storylife. In the narrative, a central role is given to the way her strong temperament and personality were shaped by her parents’ divorce, when she still was a young girl. The unfolding of these events and the resulting psychological and personal consequences on her and her younger brother’s upbringing are frequently reported in great detail in Kjærsgaard’s biographies, seemingly as a way to justify her self-confessed nature as ‘a control freak’, as ‘system obsessed’ behind the façade.

This also explains her need to have all spheres of her private and public life under control and order, a condition reminiscent of the proper and scrupulous housewife, keeping both home and family economy tidy: ‘I must have order in my office, home, in my personal economy, order in the parliamentary group’.

Authoritarian leadership style, but in a motherly disguise

The ‘total control’ image of Pia Kjærsgaard emerges particularly in relation to her leadership-style, aimed at centralising, disciplining and consolidating power about her person, thereby showing the qualities of an inflexible, determined and undemocratic leader. Additionally, her retreat, planned into detail and behind closed doors months in advance, was a way to secure her an exit at the top of her career. For Kjærsgaard, politics is primarily an arena of conflict, opposition, struggles: ‘In the struggle for power one must take advantage of the others’ weaknesses’ and ‘in some situations one must be brutal and I have no problems to be such’. Kjærsgaard thus considered ‘top-down control’ and party discipline essential conditions to keep the party together. She aptly delivered this by establishing order, cohesion and discipline within the party’s own rank and file.

The mainstream press contributed to strengthen the image of a totally controlling Pia Kjærsgaard dictating, organizing, directing everything and everybody in the party. The DF is often described as Kjærsgaard’s ‘own private creation’ and a place ‘where everything is calculated, nothing left out to coincidence’, thus endorsing Kjærsgaard’s ‘obsessive need to know everything’.

Juxtaposed against the intransigent style and rhetoric of Pia Kjærsgaard’s leadership, we find accounts that underscore her emotional being and over-empathic nature, suggesting a somehow
stereotyped idea of a woman that can hardly be in control of her feelings or reactions. She also openly admits to being ‘a very emotional being’, featuring in this, an aspect of spontaneity, frankness and straightforwardness.

This image was reproduced and emphasised by the press; Pia Kjærsgaard’s rigid and domineering party leader image counterbalanced by a private Pia, portrayed as the simple, unpretentious family woman and mother. The ‘huffy domestic worker’ as the broadsheet Politiken nicknamed her in 1995. The DF leader is thus described as ‘an emotional person’ showing what and how she feels, no matter whether ‘she is angry, disappointed, mad or touched’. She is seen as the politician ‘standing up for issues that expose her emotions to the Danes’. And this is also considered part of her personal communicative style and rhetoric, which articulates what DF voters think and feel, in a way not necessarily underpinned by facts, analysis or research. It is the image of an ordinary person speaking for the majority, or as Pia Kjærsgaard observed: ‘I can be completely surprised to see the reaction to my words sometimes. I only say aloud what I mean. I give voice and act as spokesperson for all those people, who perhaps do not dare to speak up and expose themselves in the public debate’.

The border between private and public life has always been a very thin line in the case of Pia Kjærsgaard. While at the leadership, she was often portrayed in homely informal situations and plain surroundings: a housewife ‘wearing the overall’ with a preference for ordinary/everyday life and things, represented in a familiar background of ordinary items and identifiable motifs. She also strived to keep different roles and images together: The Pia Kjærsgaard wife, mother, friend, politician and private person, where ‘the political and the private hang closely together (…)’ and where all spheres become part of the Kjærsgaard’s public profile and being.

In the accounts hitherto analysed, the aspects related to Kjærsgaard’s populist style and behaviour seem often drawn from gender constructed attributes and features. To put it simply, she appears to be more a populist than charismatic leader.

But the most evident gendered construct is the one featuring Pia Kjærsgaard as the ‘mother of the party’. The representation and construction of the maternal female body and behaviour is here put at work in terms of motherly care, upbringing, devotion, ‘soft’ values. In several occasions Pia Kjærsgaard is defined as ‘the mother of us all’ by party members; a role she willingly replies to, addressing some of her collaborators as ‘my boys’ and by recognising her motherly role within the party.

Pia Kjærsgaard offers an alternative profile that challenges the Scandinavian model of womanhood and motherhood associated to gender equality and to ‘overall’ liberal feminist approaches and practices to questions of gender. She is portrayed as the responsible and caring mother, who stayed home to take care of her children until they grew up, before becoming the mother of a whole party which she ‘gave birth to’ and cared for until this was consolidated enough into Danish politics. Her status of caring mother, housewife and social worker are deliberately put in contrast to the professionalised, educated, political elite and particularly to current Danish female politicians with an academic background, a political career and little direct experience in the Danish labour market.
Newspaper articles commenting on the DF leadership shift in August 2012 also create interesting and contrasting gendered portrayals of the resigning Pia Kjærsgaard and succeeding Kristian Thulesen Dahl. When examining their style, nature, behaviour and functions, Pia Kjærsgaard is often defined by words such as ‘talented’, ‘clever’, ‘efficient’, ‘competent’ and ‘one of the most powerful women’ in Danish politics. At the same time, her leadership style is often termed as ‘brutal’, ‘determined’ and her ‘unique success and personal achievements’ as being the result of her own talents. But Pia Kjærsgaard is also associated to a nature and temperament that makes her ‘speak from the heart’ and to ‘talk directly to people’s feelings’. Several articles assessing Pia Kjærsgaard’s past draw a portrayal of a woman with intense, at times uncontainable, feelings: a politician inclined to ‘drive politics more through gut than with her mind’ as articulated by one of the pieces.

On the contrary, Kristian Thulesen Dahl is often portrayed as the party ‘number cruncher’, also due to his academic background in economy, but mainly by virtue of his role as the DF ‘person in charge’ at every financial law negotiation in the years 2001-2011. His style and personality are sketched out by words such as ‘analytical’, ‘structured’, ‘professional’, ‘talented negotiator’, ‘tactician’ and ‘good communicator’. His personal political skills and expertise are sometimes considered to outmatch Kjærsgaard’s; one article in particular argues that ‘under the position of main negotiator, Kristian Thulesen Dahl has ‘de facto’ been for a long time the daily leader of the party, whereas Pia Kjærsgaard position has been of a more general character’. Thulesen Dahl is described as ‘less temperamental’ than Kjærsgaard, although his ‘uncle tie dry style’ is considered to challenge the informal leadership approach hitherto and still run by Pia Kjærsgaard. But at the same time, some of these accounts also underscore the fact that Thulesen Dahl embodies the phase of normalisation, mainstreaming and political routinisation of the DF in Danish politics with a leader whose background, formation and style ‘look like the other party leaders at Parliament’ and make the DF a ‘more ordinary party’. It still remains to observe whether this banalisation of radical right wing populism will accomplish the goals of political influence and power set by the DF back in the 1990s.

The Norwegian case

**Siv Jensen: As the new queen in Norwegian politics**

The analysis of Norwegian mainstream media reception of FrP leader Siv Jensen reveals that media are relatively positive towards the populist leader, even comparing her to well-known and praised Gro Harlem Brundtland, Norwegian Prime Minister in the 1980s and 1990s and leader of the Social Democrats [Arbejderpartiet]. At least two extensive portraits of her in the Norwegian daily *Dagbladet* and *Dagsavisen* (05-06-2006 and 06-06-2006) clearly illustrate this point. This comparison to Gro Harlem Brudtland must be seen as a huge compliment from a mainstream perspective but may be not within the Progress Party.
Dagbladet describes her as ‘the new Queen in Norwegian politics’ (5-5-2006) elected in a male dominated party about to take up the heritage after Gro Harlem Brundtland. This is an interesting comparison, since Brundtland is well-known internationally as a strong Norwegian Social Democrat and feminist, who later became an ardent advocate for the environment as the Director-General of the World Health Organization WHO in 1998. Norwegians remember that Brundtland headed the first female led Norwegian Ministry with 40 percent women in the government in 1986 that became the model for the Norwegian scholar Helga Maria Hernes’ influential concepts about ‘a women-friendly welfare state’ and the start of Norwegian era of ‘state-feminism’ as a state that “would not force harder choices on women than on men, or permit unjust treatment on the basis of sex” (1987, 15).

In a similar vein, the article in Dagsavisen goes as far as labeling Siv Jensen as Gro’s illegitimate daughter (06.06.2006), thus referring to both similarities and differences. In terms of similarities the article argues that both have a direct style of political communication and there are similarities between their hoarse voice, language and master suppression technic [herskerteknik]. Both are self-confident and may appear arrogant, since they are not afraid to use their own authority against journalists and political opponent. Both do not care much about personal appearance in hair and clothing and take gender equality for given. As formulated in the article:

“[Siv Jensen] walks like Gro, talks like Gro, dresses like Gro, may be even thinks like Gro – but she is not Gro. She may be the worst enemy for the Workers Party [Arbeiderpartiet, AP]. Gro has four children; Siv is single and childless… Siv is Gro’s fifth child - and it adds with a reference to Doris Lessing’s book - a thorn in her side” (Dagsavisen 06.06.2006).

Political commentators and experts also refer to important differences. One is in their class background – Gro being from the well-educated elite and Siv from the lower-middle class. The other is between their politics, one being socialist and the other defining herself as a liberal Conservative. But the main difference is in relation to gender politics, as Siv Jensen (and the FrP) is a determined opponent of the Norwegian system of gender quota in politics and economic boards arguing that it should be competences not gender that decides whether you are elected or get the job (See also Meret & Siim 2013).

Siv Jensen’s own response to the comparison to Gro Harlem Brundtland is deliberately ambiguous. On the one hand she claims to have respect for Brundtland’s person as well as for the political results. One the other hand, she disagrees strongly with her gender politics since her position is that women do not need gender politics since they can make it on their own. Asked about the importance of Gro Harlem Brundtland’s women headed government in 1986, Siv Jensen replies:

“Gro Harlem Brundtland did something historical with a women government, which she must get credit for. She proved that it was possible to find competent women for top positions in Norwegian society. You may say that Brundtland’s government presented a new epoch [epokeskift]. At the same time the development of society means that competent women have been able to reach top positions if they have wanted it. Women must be credited for that” (Dagbladet 06.05.2006).
Siv Jensen claims that she likes to break barriers. Although she disagrees with Brundtland’s politics, she agrees that gender equality has indeed gone far in politics, but at the same time she complains that women and men are still treated differently in the media. She is for example annoyed and disturbed by having to answer personal questions because she is a woman, not married and with no children.

Feminization of Norwegian politics – tensions between gender equality and feminism
The above media framings indicate some tensions in Siv Jensen’s position on gender equality and feminism. As noticed by the Norwegian journalists: ‘On the one hand she is a declared antifeminist in the sense that she is against Norwegian equality legislation, which includes gender quota, equality-ombud and official celebration of the women’s day, March 8’. She explicitly challenges the dominant Norwegian self-understanding about gender equality, and this is not popular with the political elite, journalists and feminists. The journalist asks whether this is a sign that Norwegian women are tired of mainstream Norwegian state-feminism – a feminist saturation. The article claims that Siv Jensen has become a symbol for many ordinary people that it is possible to succeed and reach all positions in society without any special treatment.

According to the media debates, Siv Jensen’s antifeminism is not the whole story. Asked whether she calls herself a feminist she answers: “Yes, but I am tired of the left trying to monopolize the concept of feminism” (VG Helg 06.05.2006). Siv is a popular lecturer to women’s fora and organizations. Her message to women is clear: If you want something, you can get it! (Hvis du vil, så kan du]. The people seem to like her, and many women joined the party after she became leader. (Aftenposten Morgen 07.05.2006) Some commentators even find that in spite of her criticism of the dominant version of feminism, she herself expresses many feminist ideas. One indirect ‘feminist’ position is that she does not accept traditional conventions about family life, but clearly expects to be accepted as a single childless woman with ambitions and power. Being young and women has made it easier for her to attract young women to the party. (Dagbladet 06.05.2006)

Media debates explicitly point towards the contradictions between Siv Jensen’s public position on feminism and gender equality and her self-presentation as a woman who herself had to fight her way to the top. If on the one hand feminists find that Siv Jensen is against everything they stand for, on the other hand she presents herself as a woman who has fought her way to the leadership of a male-dominated party, with an overrepresentation of male voters with lower education and wages. One journalist reminds Norwegian feminists that they have to accept that Siv Jensen has become one of the most powerful persons and a model for many (Conservative) women. She is not a feminist, but at the same time she realizes that the party needs more active women. The article concludes that Siv Jensen may become a feminist when she works in top politics. (Aftenposten morgen 07.05.2006)

One interesting commentator calls her postfeminist Jensen because she is now the female ‘foreman’ of a political incorrect party. (Dagens Næringsliv Morgen 20.05.2006) The author, Hege Skjeie, finds that Siv Jensen is the first post-feminist in Norwegian politics without a program. The official
party position is that Norwegian women do not need any gender equality law, but immigrant women do, especially from Muslim countries. She does, however, propose that it is necessary to adopt equality legislation when it is linked to integration politics.

Some political commentators on female leadership stress that her image as a woman economist can make her threatening to the public. Others find that Siv makes the Progress party more ‘sexy’ and more willing to compromise than under Hagen’s leadership (Dagbladet 06.05.2006). Asked by Aftenposten whether it is unfair/unjust, that the more power women get the more frightening you seem to many men, she replies: “Not unfair but we have more steps to go on this field”. She believes, however, that Norwegian society is gradually moving towards a society where women in high positions will become less and less threatening. Asked whether she is tougher than most women she answers. ”No, but it is a problem that girls feel that they have to master 120 % before they try something. But everybody who has struggled with challenges knows that most times you land on your feet. More girls ought to try that.” (Dagsavisen 05.05.2006)

Media presentations referring to her gender emphasize that Siv Jensen is an ambitious politician who knows what she wants. One example is when she entered parliament in 1996 as 28 a journalist asked her where she wanted to be and she answered ‘in the committee of Finance’ – and she ended up as the Minister of Finance in the Norwegian government in 2014 (Aftenposten 05.06.2006). Political commentators agree that Siv Jensen is ‘bossy’ and finds that she does the right thing in political debates, which is hiding her femininity playing ‘like a man’. This media strategy is praised as a wise strategy in public debates (Aftenposten Morgen 09.05.2006).

The political commentators and experts notice that the new leader of the party expresses a different rhetoric than Hagen but they agree that the politics are the same. The party is described as a ‘new’ Conservative party with a liberal agenda and presents Siv Jensen as more liberal than Hagen with reference to her main message ‘less state and more private initiative’. It is emphasized that in politics a change in political leadership may lead to a shift of political climate for the non-socialist parties, especially between Højre/the Conservative Party, led by Erna Solberg, and the Progress party led by Siv Jensen (Dagsavisen 10.05.2006). Erna Solberg commented that it was easier to gather the four non-socialist parties in government with Siv Jensen as the leader of the Progress Party (VG 5-05-2006). Siv Jensen declared publicly that her biggest project would be to prepare the road for entering the government (Dagbladet 6-05-2006).

One example of the differences in Hagen’s and Siv Jensen’s rhetoric and leadership style is the attempt to change the title of the head of the party. The media coverage of the party’s decision to keep the title ‘foreman’ - literally ‘for men’- when referring to the party leader and chair [formand], was reported to be a blow for Siv Jensen. (Dagsavisen 08.05.2006) In spite of her wish to modernize the party by getting rid of the old title, the party voted to keep the official title ‘foreman’ when referring to their female leader. She responded, however, that the most important thing was that the party agreed to elect her as their leader – not what they call her (Dagbladet 08.05.2006). She is also called the leader of the parliamentary group.
Siv Jensen’s self-representation of her private and public life

Siv Jensen was selected to party leadership as a young, blond and sporty woman of 28 years after many years of being one of the party’s vice-chairs. The media has described Siv’s leadership style as the colorless and competent administrator compared to the charismatic leadership style of Carl Hagen. She presents Hagen as her ‘father’ and has always been loyal to him, always following the party line. She presents herself an (emotional) idealist and a dedicated politician who will step down when she loses the passion for the job. She describes herself as a workaholic who can get by with 5 hours of sleep. She likes to break barriers and go against the tide. Although she disagrees with Brundtland’s politics, she agrees that gender equality has indeed gone far in politics but at the same time complains that women and men are still treated differently in the media. She is annoyed that she has to answer personal questions because she is a woman.

Siv Jensen’s self-presentation refers to diverse qualities as a private and public person: In private she presents herself as ‘one of the people’ - the daughter of a single mother with four children who had to fight her way up, and is an emotional person and a loving daughter with close ties to her family. Her public image is as a tough, bossy and well-educated economist (VG Helg 06.05.2006). In the media portrait made when she took over the chair of the party, she presents the progress party as the spokesperson ‘for the people’ and as such it must be open and transparent and do nothing behind closed doors. There are tensions in her self-presentations: One the one hand she is single and childless and describes the Sunday dinners with her mother and family as a must. Four years ago she wanted to have a husband and children. Now in her thirties she finds that life is getting better and better and is tired of questions about her personal life. “I will never give ‘home with Siv” – interviews she declared in Aftenposten’s portrait. Askeed whether it is a greater challenge for a woman than a man to combine motherhood and party leadership, her answer is ‘you can do it if you decide to do it’ (VG Helg 06.05.2006). In politics she presents herself as ‘a caring person’. Asked whether the party values solidarity Siv Jensen answers: “Yes, because we care about the individual. People are different and must be able to live in different ways”. She emphasizes that she wants to make sure that people who are not privileged have what they need.

In the interview with Dagbladet Gro Harlem Brundtland is asked what she thinks about the media calling Siv Jensen the new queen of Norwegian politics. Does she see any similarities between her and Siv Jensen. Brundtland answers that there are no similarities in their politics but there may be similarities in the political style/communication and personality traits/qualities – ‘she is unafraid in political debates saying what she believes to be right’ (06.05.2006).

To sum up: Siv Jensen’s political agenda follows Carl Hagen’s radical rightwing populist line, but she adopted a new rhetoric and leadership style. Her relationship to the heritage of Norwegian gender equality politics - and feminism - is often ambiguously defined and commented upon. She acknowledges the results achieved on this issue in Norway, but also claims that now women can make it on their own, except for immigrant women who need gender equality politics.
The French case

*From Le Pen…to Le Pen. What changed in the FN?*

The FN annual congress held at the Centre Vinci in the city of Tours on January 15-16, 2011 was of historic significance for the party: Jean-Marie Le Pen –founder and uncontested leader of the FN since its foundation in 1972-- stepped down and his youngest daughter, 42 years-old Marine Le Pen replaced him at the party leadership by winning over the other candidate, Bruno Gollnisch, with more than 67 pct. of the congress votes.

The study of Marine Le Pen is in many respects interesting when it comes to analysing mainstream media representations and self-representations of her role and style as female leader of one of the oldest radical rightwing parties in Europe. The FN was traditionally considered by scholars as a party for the men and led by a man, appealing mainly to a male electorate with his ‘virilité belliqueuse, l’aspect tonitruant et scandaleux’ (Langrange & Perrineau 1997; see also Mayer 2002: 134). Marine Le Pen is not only the first woman to succeed more than three decades of authoritarian and male-led leadership, but she is also the daughter of the former in chief and the one with ‘the mission’ to show The FN accomplished ‘democratic maturity’ to take power and govern the country (see: Marine Le Pen, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aY-kj-lpnc).

Newspapers articles commenting on the FN leadership shift in January 2011, reveal interesting gendered portrayals of Marine Le Pen, focusing in particular on the differences and similarities between her and her father’s style, rhetoric and behavior. A few frames seem to recur in the data material, dealing with: Marine Le Pen’s vs. Jean Marie Le Pen; Marine Le Pen as architect of a modernization process and of a ‘de-demonisation’ (dédiabolisation) of the FN; aspects of the private vs. public sphere defining the role and style of the new leader. Obviously given by the very near family ties between the two, frequent and accentuated in the articles are the analyses of the similarities and differences between Jean-Marie and Marine, as unambiguously given by titles such as: ‘Le Pen fait ses adieux et assume tout’ (Le Monde, 16-01-2011), ‘La fille monte au Front’ (03-01-2011), ‘Marine Le Pen, fille du chef et femme à poigne’ (Courier Internationale, 16-01-2011), ‘Jean-Marine’ (Le Monde, 05-01-2011), or with statements claiming that ‘the FN will be always lepéniste, blond version and female’ (Libération, 15-01-2011). Marine Le Pen background and leadership style are described as being strongly influenced, but at the same time substantially different from her father’s, due to several aspects related her ability to ‘control herself, her feelings and anger by ‘avoiding provocations, contrary to her father and to the majority of the FN cadres’ (Le Monde, 16-01-2011), but also to her acquired experience and greater familiarity with the media and the press, which give ‘a more consensual and moderate image [of her] than that of her father, [counteracting] the repulsion to vote for the Front National’ (Le Mode, 16-01-2011).

It is also worth noticing in this framing the general lack of articles in our survey that directly refer and deepen associations between Marine Le Pen’s role, her style, image and behavior with her being a woman leader. Apart from her blondness, her weight loss (10 kilos in four years) and
changed haircut and lifestyle (she was nicknamed the ‘nightclubber’), the alleged ‘modern style’, ‘improved media appeal’ are rather attributed to her background experience, her age and her ability to ‘disguise’ her real being, by some considered not markedly different from her father’s. In a portrait article by the leftwing liberal Libération, (‘Elle n’a rien d’une blonde’, 15-01-2011), Marine Le Pen is described by some of her close relatives and colleagues as being ‘the absolute clone of her father’, ‘a would-be boy, leader of the pack from always’, but also influenced by a strong and often absent father and by the wish of his three daughters to get his attention.

The modernization, ‘de-demonisation’ and re-styling of the FN constitute another set of issues framing Marine Le Pen leadership style and image. Le Pen daughter is presented as the architect of a new-course in the FN, attempting to bring the party from the margins to the mainstream of French politics, as Marine Le Pen openly formulates as her mission in the discourse given to the party congress in Tours after her election (see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aY-kj-Ipnwc). Several articles commenting on the leadership shift corroborate this image of Marine Le Pen as the architect and performer of the de-demonisation: a different language, different priorities and a general rejuvenation of the party are mentioned among the attempts made by the new leader to achieve political influence and power. To do this, Marine Le Pen shaped a political message permeated with rhetoric taken from French republicanism, browsing through notions of equality, freedom, resistance to the oppressor, national priority and a strong state supplemented by a rigid understanding of the French concept of laïcité.

Several columnists and experts agree on the fact that Marine Le Pen strives to achieve this (termed ‘operation seduction de Marine Le Pen, in: Le Monde, 20-01-2011) by switching to other issues such as the Islamisation of the country, the loss of French values and identity, flavored with ‘a more social party image’ and ‘rhetoric’ (Le Monde, 18-01-2011; Le Monde, 16-01-2011) attacking big money power and to the effects of the mondialisation. Interestingly, this mission seems helped by her natural feeling for media appeal and her abstaining to support traditional extreme rightwing positions that had characterized the Jean-Marie Le Pen’s positions and style such as on matters dealing with the WWII, Algeria, French colonialism and racism. In 2005, Le Pen father had commented to the press that ‘Marine is very kind (gentille) but a kind Front National does not interest anybody’; at that time explicitly refusing his daughter’s attempts to restyle the party. Marine Le Pen tried six years later, and recent developments within the party show she seems no longer afraid to contradict her father (Le Monde, 04-05-2015). In this sense, the gendered representations of Marine Le Pen are constructed on the basis of her similarities and differences from her father, rather than on her being the first FN female leader, which seems to have diminished media representations focusing more directly on aspects related to her gender.

Going against the tide? Marine Le Pen’s self-representations
Marine Le Pen is not only the subject of plentiful books on her written by others, but she is herself a very prolific autobiographer. In the relatively short period between 2006-2012, she published two books: À contre flots / Against the waves (Le Pen, 2006) and Pour que vive la France / Because long-live to France (Le Pen, 2012). While the first is an intimate book of confidences (livre de
confidences) about herself in private and public life, the second book is a political manifesto, printed a year after the election as FN leader and dealing with major issues, such as the effects of mondialisation, French identity and values and her views about the country political priorities. The first book in particular seems driven by a wish to blur or bridge the gap between private and public Le Pen, characterized by a narration that comes much closed to Le Pen life from her childhood to her adulthood. Marine Le Pen delves into old family affairs, like the relationship with her parents, the leaver of her mother when she was young and from whom she never heard for more than a decade, the divorce of her parents, the beginning of her political career and her life as divorced mother of three. The style of the book is intimate, direct and detailed; the father and FN leader Jean-Marie Le Pen an ever-present figure in the narration. Being the daughter of what she describes as a demonized and politically marginalized man becomes the leitmotiv behind her political motivations, engagement and reactions. The resulting image is of a woman formed and fortified in an environment threatened by the general hostility and misunderstanding coming from the outside world, represented by mainstream society and politics. She writes: ‘…rien n’était anodin, rien n’était facile. On restait les filles Le Pen, on savait pourquoi on était les filles Le Pen on nous faisait sentir, toujours’ (Le Pen, 2006: x), also maintaining this had consequences on her private affections:

‘…mon statut de fille Le Pen a pesé d’un énorme poids sur les homes qui ont traverse ma vie. Car partagé ma vie, c’était assumer tout ce dans je baignais …depuis l’enfance: l’attentat, le detail, les campagnes électorales, Carpentras, les tortures, la mere à poil dans Playboy et tutti quanti…sortir avec la fille Le Pen, l’emmenez chez des amis, la presenter à son cercle familial…cela requiret un temperament d’acier’ (Le Pen, 2006: 185-186).

This form of self-experienced marginalization becomes in the book also a way to frame private Marine Le Pen closer to other and considerably different marginalized socially and economically in society. Similarly, her experiences as divorced mother of three is put forward as an example of self-experienced life that brings her closer to that of many other ‘lone’ mothers, making herself –argues Le Pen- come closed to what she defines being ‘feminism’:

‘La naissance des petits, mon divorce, cette période seule avec eux me rendit quasi ‘féministe’, tant il est vrai que les femmes ont vraiment du courage, que leur situation est souvent et objectivement bien plus difficile que celle des homes. Les demmes sont en effet soumises à la ‘double peine’: un travail souvent pregnant et une vie de famille à mener, le tout avec le sourire s’il vous plait! Quand on est femme, les trente-cinq heures on ne connaît pas’ (Le Pen 2006: 188).

A quite different narrative, genre and style characterizes Marine Le Pen’s last book, Pour que vive la France, which comes in the form of a more classic personal political manifesto. Quite differently from the previous, this book is devoid of personal and confidential stories and it develops around the double objective of criticizing the present French political situation and the political elite held responsible for this, offering at the same time a rather comprehensive account of the Le Pen political project.

[Conclusions]
**Concluding reflections**

In this concluding section we present some preliminary reflections about the empirical results. The literature debates whether it makes a difference for politics that political parties elect female leaders. We found that in the cases of the three radical rightwing populist parties with present and past female leaders, the gender dimension does not seem to matter for their (gender) politics. They all became leaders in male dominated parties and following strong male leaders (Mogens Glistrup, Carl I Hagen, Jean-Marie Le Pen). They have succeeded men who considered themselves as founding fathers to advance to the top (or creating anew as for Pia Kjærsgaard) and they are still dependent on loyal male supporters to keep the power within their party. The most important thing for being elected seems to be their politics and loyalty to the party line (and lineage..). However, we also found an interesting difference in the rhetoric, language and the style of the political leadership, which is influenced by the differences in political culture/institutions, by their personal characteristics in relation to education/class, age and ethnicity as well as by their personal qualities.

This article aimed to address the research question to what extent the female leaders are primarily ‘objects’ of the media/the political system, and to what extent they are able to be active agents influencing the (re-)presentation of themselves. The preliminary finding is that the three women, Pia Kjærsgaard, Siv Jensen and Marine Le Pen, do not seem to be the passive victims of the media, as sometimes they themselves complain of, but do actively try to influence the media image of them and to some extent well succeed in doing this. There is a gendered representation in the media of the three populist female leaders and the press does tend to treat them differently than their male colleagues. We found, however, that they themselves often participate in this representation. This can possibly be understood as a media strategy, which deliberately seeks to compensate for their image as strong authoritarian women with political power, by presenting themselves as loving mothers, daughters, family members, etc.

Comparing similarities and differences in the three cases we would expect that heritage of strong women in politics would be less threatening in Denmark and Norway than in France, since the two countries have a longer tradition for women in the political elite, experiences with female Prime Ministers and many political leaders, especially among leftwing parties. The media has indeed been relatively friendly towards both Pia Kjærsgaard and Siv Jensen and more hostile towards Marine Le Pen. This could however be explained both by their different politics and by their gender, or by a combination of the two. The parties of Pia Kjærsgaard and Siv Jensen have become ‘mainstream’, accomplishing a process of ‘normalisation’ (or banalisation) of populist radical rightwing politics; this seems not yet the case for Front National. However, to better evaluate this hypothesis we need more comprehensive material about France.

Another and related question is to what extent female political leaders of radical rightwing Männer parties frighten the voters and members?
The final question is whether the three have different relations to feminism and gender equality, and to what extent this is influenced by the difference in political institutions, politics and culture? The three women all present themselves as ‘for the people’ and against mainstream politics and the political elite. The two Nordic populist leaders, Pia Kjærsgaard and Siv Jensen, agree that we do not need (more) feminism and gender equality politics, since women today are strong enough to make it on their own, except for immigrant women and specifically Muslims, who need to be educated in gender equality. Arguably Siv Jensen has the most ambivalent relation to the feminism, gender equality politics and gender quota since Norway has the strongest and longest state feminist heritage; this ambiguity seems best symbolized in our material by the oftentimes cited model Siv Jensen is compared to, namely former socialdemocratic PM Gro Harlem Brundtland.

References


Thomas and Wilcox (2005),