

Book review: Hate in the Homeland: the new global far right by Cynthia Miller-Idriss

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Published in late 2020, *Hate in the homeland: the new global far right* could not have been released at a more critical junction. In an era of increased hate crimes (BBC News, 2020), the prolific spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories (Bergengruen, 2021) and direct acts of white supremacist (Byman, 2020) and anti-government violence (Bogel-Burroughs, Dewan and Gray, 2021), such as the storming of the U.S. capitol, Miller-Idriss' work is the book to read for anyone seeking to understand the manifestations of modern far-right extremism. Given the book's close inspection of the ordinary, and often surprising, places people encounter far-right extremist messaging, this book review addresses Miller-Idriss' accounts of the myriad of ways far-right rhetoric seeps into our daily lives. While previous scholars have also focused on the mainstreaming and normalisation of far-right propaganda (Mudde, 2019), *Hate in the homeland* stands out by centring the attention on the youth found on the margins of the far-right movement. By comparison, past literature has focused on the mainstreaming of far-right extremism through right-wing populism (Ford and Goodwin, 2014; Malice, 2019). Further, much of the existing literature hones in on one particular facet of the far right, namely its historical development in the U.S. (Belew, 2019). *Hate in the homeland*, however, offers a comprehensive overview of the global far right that allows those with no pre-existing knowledge about the rise of the new far-right movements to follow along easily.

The book should, therefore, be regarded as a primer, since readers more knowledgeable on the subject may find it less informative. Nevertheless, both Miller-Idriss' critical analysis and excellent synthesis of her extensive research offer all readers novel insights into the scope of the global far-right's landscape.

From the beginning, Miller-Idriss is quick to emphasise that the far right is not a monolithic but rather fluid assemblage of groups, representing a spectrum of ideas and approaches (p. 18). For Miller-Idriss, the far right encompasses four main elements: anti-government and antidemocratic practices and ideals, exclusionary and dehumanising ideology, existential demographic threats and, finally, acceleration, destabilisation and apocalyptic fantasies (pp. 4–15). This expansive conceptualisation of the far right proves advantageous in its ability to capture overlaps between groups, such as conspiracy theorists, white supremacists and doomsday preppers, while simultaneously underscoring the challenges of terminology. Here, “doomsday preppers” can be understood as “survivalists” who prepare for a catastrophic future in which governmental and civic structures collapse. Such a failure may result from economic collapse, foreign invasion or civil war, particularly occurring along racial lines. Accordingly, preppers often take pragmatic measures required for survival from the perceived impending disaster. For the reader, this definition of the far right clearly demonstrates Miller-Idriss' recognition of the nuanced, multi-faceted nature of the global far right. Readers can also appreciate Miller-Idriss' critique of the misleading nature of terms such as ‘white nationalism’ (p. 17), which she argues conceals the ‘global interconnectedness of the far right’, and her identification of problems that global developments within the far right pose for national law enforcement approaches and classifications of extremism (p. 17).

While today's far right has captured the attention of a bewildered public longing for answers behind the how and why of recent spurs of violence, *Hate in the homeland* is unique in its specific focus on *where* and *when* radicalisation takes place. In other words, Miller-Idriss uses cultural places, like college campuses, social media and clothing brands, and symbolic places such as ‘national homelands’, to depict how extremism is concentrated and found in our day-to-day lives. Her thorough examination of how the far right has come to permeate mainstream channels illustrates how these ‘new gateways’ (p. 3) to far-right extremist radicalisation increase our exposure to extremist messaging. Readers may be surprised to learn, for example, that the mixed martial arts scene is an ideal incubator for far-right ideas; the combination of a physical location with an ‘entertainment culture that valorizes violence and hypermasculinity’ (p. 101) allows for experimentation and intensified ideological messaging. Similarly, both food and clothing are readily weaponised as forms of ‘edible extremism’ (p. 70) and ‘wearable hate’ (p. 78) by today's far right. Right-wing vegan cooking shows, for example, convey broader messages about identity and lifestyle (pp. 70–78), while nationalist streetwear (‘certified white boy clothing’) and ‘right brand’ clothing embody hate, signal membership and advance a shared ideology among far-right insiders (pp. 78–87). This mainstream aesthetic, Miller-Idriss argues, is characteristic of the permeable membrane

of today's far right; the packaging of extremist messaging into consumable, watchable, doable and wearable forms effectively blurs the lines between "outsiders" and "insiders", while simultaneously reducing entry barriers that may have originally inhibited youth from entering the far-right scene.

Thus, Miller-Idriss' exploration into the emergent global far right is exceptionally enticing in its focus on the 'youth on the periphery of extremism' (p. 26). This novel approach to analysing individual experiences with extremism presents readers with a new lens of understanding the myriad of ways in which extremism is diffused within our daily lives, illustrating how easy it is to slip in and out of the porous site of the new global far right. In this respect, Miller-Idriss takes an empathetic approach to people drawn in by extremist aesthetics, activities, rhetoric and ideology. By demonstrating how extremism and radicalisation are no longer confined to a sub-cultural fringe, but rather deeply interwoven in today's mainstream, *Hate in the homeland* is distinctive in its call for mainstream-targeted approaches for the prevention of extremist radicalisation.

A particularly noteworthy feature of the book is Miller-Idriss' explicit demonstration of the interconnectedness of today's far-right extremist culture. Each chapter is peppered with specific examples, primarily from the U.S. and Europe, that support the respective arguments. For example, Miller-Idriss shows how dystopian fantasy theories, a characteristic of the far right, have different manifestations on a global, American and European level. The great replacement theory is shared on a global scale, while the fear of a 'white genocide' is characteristic of the U.S. and the fear of an upcoming 'Eurabia' remains specific to Europe (p. 9). At the same time, Miller-Idriss underscores how, through a communal sense of white victimhood, all three theories arouse a collective mission among the global far right: the defence of the "homeland". Likewise, in Chapter 2, which is focused on the mainstreaming of extremism, Miller-Idriss points out the anti-elite discourse that has gained strongholds in Europe, Brazil, India and the U.S. (p. 49). This, Miller-Idriss writes, acts as an ideal 'channel for the far right to frame anti-globalization and anti-migration sentiments as logically pro-nation and anti-elite at the same time' (p. 51). Here, as she does throughout the book, Miller-Idriss shows how the far right employs, and sometimes co-opts strategies or symbols used by the left. This case in point is exemplary of Miller-Idriss' recurring emphasis on the importance of context.

Nowhere, however, are the implications of a globalised far right made clearer than in the direct linkages among the 2011 attack in Norway, the 2019 Christchurch violence in New Zealand and the 2019 El Paso shooting. The Christchurch shooter was inspired by the attacks in Oslo, while the El Paso gunman was directly inspired by Christchurch (p. 157). This cascade of far-right extremist violence spanning three continents underpins the lethal domino effect that can ensue from the sharing of far-right manifestos. Here, Miller-Idriss pays particular attention to the role of online spaces in the global online economy of hate.

The ‘weaponization of online spaces’ (p. 138) – through algorithmic radicalisation and toxic “echo chambers” – is a widely recognised problem and has become a prominent topic of public debate (Letzing, 2021). In this discussion, especially in light of the 6 January insurrection, special attention is given to the role and responsibilities social media platforms hold in combating the unfettered proliferation of hate, misinformation and conspiracy theories (Shepardson, 2021). With respect to this discussion, Miller-Idriss offers two valuable points of insight. First, she shows how memes and emojis themselves can become appropriated by the far right. The milk emoji, for example, quickly becomes a symbol of the far right when deployed with a white supremacist intent (p. 152). This finding is significant in that it highlights the playful game of extremist messaging and its creative use as a means of provocation. This fluidity of far-right symbols and the necessity of “insider knowledge” to detect the implicated meaning thereby reiterates the importance of context; the milk emoji acquires different meanings when used by members of neo-Nazi and white supremacist organisations, such as the Atomwaffen Division or Identity Evropa.

The second notable contribution to the discussion of online spaces and radicalisation is Miller-Idriss’ call for a more nuanced understanding of radicalisation in both virtual and real-life contexts (p. 160). While many discussions have focused on the technological steps needed to combat online radicalisation, Miller-Idriss argues that ‘online radicalization’ is a misnomer because there are always interactions between the online and offline worlds (p. 159). Thus, her identification of the ever-changing manifestations of online far-right behaviour underscores the limitations of well-intentioned regulations in cyberspace. In fact, Miller-Idriss’ commentary on the potential backfiring of banning policies and de-platforming was prophetic of recent developments: the banning of former President Trump from Twitter ultimately led to a migration of users from Twitter to alternative platforms such as Parler and Gab (*Al Jazeera*, 2021). Evidently, regulation such as banning policies unintentionally ‘fuels an entrepreneurial spirit within the far right’ by contributing to the appeal of evading detection through creation and innovation (p. 142).

The greatest strength of the book, however, is how Miller-Idriss emphasises that the new aesthetic of the far right is just one of many moving parts. In other words, no components of far-right extremist culture exist in isolation; they must always be situated, scrutinised and understood within the wider framework of global far-right extremism. Miller-Idriss’ emphasis on the importance of context is instructive for people on the lookout for extremism in two ways. On the one hand, the significance of context calls for attention to detail and careful “reading-in-between-the-lines”. After all, an ostensibly harmless milk emoji and the infamous meme Pepe the Frog acquire their far-right extremist element through the human vehicle that deploys them (p. 152). On the other hand, context also implies a need to zoom out and consider all factors at play. As no singular variable explains the appeal of extremist engagement, Miller-Idriss stresses the need to look at the ‘broader socio-political context saturated with populist, nationalist rhetoric, a declining trust in governments and a loss of

faith in democracy' (p. 67).

Miller-Idriss' emphasis on the importance of context and the identification of our current socio-political climate as one that nurtures, fuels and cements the popularity of the far right, is reflected in her nuanced calls for solutions. Considering how the mainstreaming of extremism has rendered certain manifestations of far-right extremism inconspicuous, Miller-Idriss calls on scholars and policy-makers to focus on the intersections of the mainstream and the far right (p. 165). She does not refrain from listing the myriad of blind spots currently inhibiting effective extremist detection and prevention. The proposed solutions are particularly satisfying, as they provide examples of concrete action and address a variety of actors within both civil society and the private sector. Given the transnational connections among far-right extremists, readers can appreciate Miller-Idriss' inclusion of approaches other countries have taken to combat extremism. While Miller-Idriss does a remarkably thorough job in her provision of solutions, however, her final point on the need to recognise that 'prevention of extremism and the protection of democracy go hand in hand' (p. 176) could have benefitted from more elaboration. As safeguarding democracy is inevitably a pressing issue, accentuating the link between the erosion of democracy and the ascendancy of extremism earlier would send readers a clear warning of the ramifications of an unaddressed problem of extremism.

Overall, *Hate in the homeland* successfully fulfils its aspirations as articulated in the beginning of the book. Miller-Idriss' style of writing is frank and transparent, endowing readers with complete trust in her expertise and commentary. The reasoning behind her decision not to dedicate a chapter on gender, for example, makes perfect sense after appreciating her nifty interweaving of gender throughout the book. The implications of gendered divisions are always unpacked, guiding readers through the ways in which hyper-masculinity and clearly delineated female roles are constitutive parts of the far right. The inclusion of personal anecdotes adds an extra touch of intimacy that makes readers value Miller-Idriss' first-hand experience.

While most of her previous writing has been geared towards other academics, *Hate in the homeland* is a unique work for Miller-Idriss in that it is explicitly written *to* and *for* the public. Readers will easily be lured into her fascinating exploration of the quotidian places of hate cultivation. Her engaging and discursive writing style makes the book suitable for readers of all backgrounds. For experts in far-right extremism, the six-chapter book is a succinct, yet thorough, overview of the transnational nature of modern far-right extremism and its manifestations in the mainstream. For curious parents and educators, Miller-Idriss' identification of online gaming chat rooms, college campuses and mixed martial arts gyms as sites of far-right radicalisation may raise concern as it becomes clear that exposure to, and participation in, far-right extremism is no longer as visually obvious as the skinheads of the 1980s.

To some extent, readers may feel immobilised or helpless upon finishing the book. Miller-Idriss' sweeping accounts of the expansive reach of extremist rhetoric underscores the magnitude of the problem. The Covid-19 pandemic almost certainly exacerbates the pre-existing complexities of confronting extremist radicalisation (King and Mullins, 2021). Furthermore, the emphasis on transnational connections underscores the need for collective cooperation. As with Covid-19, the allure of extremist rhetoric will continue to thrive as long as herd immunity has not been reached. That being said, Miller-Idriss' call for a 'public-health approach to hate' (p. 167) is enlightening in that it empowers everyday citizens to become vigilant protectors of both their democracies and immediate communities. Thus, after having read the book, readers will carry on their lives with a newfound awareness of and sensitivity for the potential places of extremist radicalisation around them. Concurrently, the book inspires readers to envision a more inclusive version of their community, one in which everyone feels at home.

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