
Book Review

Youth and the Extreme Right by Cas Mudde, ed., Idebate Press 2014. 249 pages.

The terms 'extreme right' and 'youth' are mostly associated with neo-Nazis, skinheads and violence. The cover of the book 'Youth and the Extreme Right' edited by Cas Mudde reflects these stereotypical images visually with the shouting faces of young people presenting the Nazi hand salute. The book aims to investigate the relation between youth and extreme right attitudes, their engagement in organisations and in violent racist acts. The studies explore the possible connections and correlations between these three groups of phenomena from different perspectives using a multidisciplinary approach and various methods. The book is divided into three thematic sections. 'Explanations' gives the general reasoning for the attraction of certain youth to extreme right groups and ideas, including studies at the macro-, meso- and micro levels. 'Issues' deals with prejudices and violence marked as the main issues regarding youth and the extreme right, while 'Prevention and Intervention' describes prevention and intervention strategies.

The first study in 'Explanations', 'Youth, Unemployment and Political Marginalisation' by Ann-Helén Bay and Morten Blekesaune seeks the influence of unemployment on political marginalisation. Political confidence, political interest and political extremism were measured in relation to marginalisation. Although results have shown differences among countries regarding the extent of marginalisation between employed and unemployed youth, weak empirical evidence supports that unemployed youth in general are politically more marginalised than their employed peers.

The study 'Parenting and Right-Wing Extremism: An Analysis of the Biographical Genesis of Racism Among Young People' by Thomas Gabriel focuses on the impact of family and the immediate social environment on the development of racist attitudes and behaviour among young actors. Using a multi-generational analysis the author examines the genesis of extremism, arguing that it is not a simple transmission of attitudes from one generation to another, but it is influenced by various factors. An important finding here is that racist attitudes or behaviour do not result from a bad socio-economic background, but more from family conflicts and their impact on the family.

Stéphanie Dechezelles discusses the different cultural frameworks of two Italian extreme right groups. These frameworks are constructed and composed of three elements: the vision of an ideal model of society, legendary narratives, and perceptions of symbolic territory. Highlighting the differences in the history, narratives, activities, symbols and meanings of the youth groups of *Lega Nord* and *Alleanza Nazionale*, Dechezelles reveals the cultural dimensions of political involvement. Focusing on the similarities and differences this leads to a more profound understanding of the motivations and self-positioning strategies of the organisations and their members.

Michael Kimmel presents a piece of research at the individual level of youth engagement in the neo-Nazi scene in Sweden from a gender perspective. Both entrance to and exit from the right wing are interpreted less as politically motivated acts, but more as expressions of masculinity for young males, which the author calls 'rite of passage' (p. 79). For young boys who feel emasculated, a neo-Nazi gang could appeal as an embodied gender practice to express a hypermasculine identity.

Although Islamophobia is labelled as the strongest prejudice in contemporary Western Europe, there is little evidence about what this exactly means, to what degree and how this prejudice works among youth. The first study of the second part called 'Issues' by Pieter Bevelander and Jonas Otterbeck presents the results of a survey conducted on non-Muslim youth in Sweden divided by gender, regarding their attitudes towards Muslims. After the authors carefully lead us through the theoretical explanations, a number of background factors are included in a multiple regression. They conclude that many factors influence the formulation of the attitudes of youth towards Muslims. At each level different factors have an impact: at the individual level socio-psychological and socio-economic background, at the meso level friendship networks and at the local level a high proportion of immigrants in the surrounding environment.

Conducting a comparative analysis of Canadian and Belgian samples of young populations, political tolerance is addressed in 'The Limits of Tolerance in Diverse Societies: Hate Speech and Political Tolerance Norms Among Youth'. Allison Harrell argues that the current measurement of political tolerance is limited to the two extreme cases of absolute tolerance and absolute intolerance and offers a third type called 'multicultural political tolerance' (p.112). As found in both samples, people who are of this latter type are able to distinguish between hate speech by skinheads and racists and other types of objectionable speech from groups like gay rights activists or Flemish/Quebec separatists. However, this type's profile is not 'in the middle' between absolute tolerance and intolerance regarding its socio-economic and democratic background. For instance they share the democratic qualities of absolute tolerators, while their social background is closer to that of the intolerants.

Heléne Lööw's study looks at 'Right-Wing Extremist Perpetrators from an International Perspective', while Meredith W. Watts addresses 'Aggressive Youth Cultures and Hate Crime: Skinheads and Xenophobic Youth in Germany'. The significance of these studies is that they distinguish between different groups like racists, skinheads, neo-Nazis and young perpetrators, reveal how these groups are divided by motivations, subcultural logics and organizational features, but also show how they connect and even cooperate with each other. Watts repeatedly highlights that 'only some skinheads are racist, and most racists are not skinheads' (p.152). Both authors claim that in most cases the number one motivation of young people to join such groups is not the attraction to their ideology, but the 'sense of identity - of being part of something much larger' (p.158).

The third part 'Prevention and Intervention' presents existing proactive and reactive programmes about how to avoid youth engagement in the far right. 'Preventing Right-Wing Extremism: European and International Research' by Andreas Beelmann highlights that every strategy should accurately specify the nature

of the problem it intends to solve. Different programmes are applicable to prevent the emergence of extreme right attitudes, violence, or to intervene against crime. It is also necessary to clarify the target group: whether the prevention programme targets a whole age cohort group or a specified extreme right group with already engaged youths who are also divided by many factors such as gender or class. The suspected causes and their development, the possible trajectory of the programme, the risk factors and the optimal time for the implementation are also important questions. Beelmann explains how different comprehensive prevention programmes on prejudice can promote intergroup relations that would have a substantial long-term impact. Other programmes to prevent violence and crime are also discussed in detail. Two country-cases are discussed as existing examples. In-depth interviews of former members of extremist groups are reported in 'Youth Engagement in Right-Wing Extremism: Comparative Cases from the Netherlands' explores the causes of entry into and exit from the extreme right scene. Similarly to Watts and Lööw, Ineke Van der Valk argues that the most common motivation of engagement is not ideology, but the search for social belonging, the wish to make new friends. Many factors may interplay in the decision to leave, but the main motivation is the desire for a more conventional, socially integrated life. Whether these social programmes intending to help offer a chance of a new life has a crucial impact. Violence appears as a factor both when entering and leaving the group, as newcomers have to participate in violent acts and the 'leavers' sometimes have to suffer violence as part of the community's revenge.

Yngve Carlsson's Norwegian case study presents prevention and intervention practices and strategies applied in Norway. Carlsson argues that if the extreme right appears, the danger has to be taken into consideration immediately from its genesis; it must not be denied or belittled. The responsibility of local communities is emphasised suggesting the involvement of local governments, schools, police, and parents. Strategies need to combine police suppression, prevention and intervention programmes, as well as different measures of formal and informal social control. The author notes that most youths are not racist or neo-Nazi for their whole life, their identity is subject to change, so we have to focus on their reintegration, not on their exclusion.

The last study by Cynthia Miller-Idriss 'Raising the Right-Wing Educators' Struggle to Confront the Radical Right' shows the situation from educators' perspective in the German context. The author emphasises the lack of proper curricula and guidelines for teachers on how to talk about xenophobia, how to disperse misinformation and how to be prepared with good arguments. In order to identify young people who are already engaged or at potential risk, Miller states that educators should have relevant information about the different subcultures and subgroups within the radical right scene.

Although there is abundant research on the extreme right, we still have little relevant knowledge about it. This is partly because of the difficulties and sometimes dangers that researchers have to face during research on this topic. Furthermore, there is a lack of complex, well-designed longitudinal and comparative studies with control groups and systematic evaluation. The situation is the same in the case of prevention and intervention programmes. There are good and bad examples focusing on

individual cases, but they frequently lack an accurate design, evaluation and measurement of long-term effects. 'Youth and the Extreme Right' reflects on these problems and reading it is highly recommended for academics and non-academics alike.

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