

Understanding the current rise of the far right using Marx and Lacan

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As the end of 2018 approaches, a year that celebrated 200 years of the German philosopher Karl Marx, new research detailing core concepts coined by Karl Marx and French psychiatrist Jacques Lacan offers a fresh perspective on the rise of the far right.

We live in an age of increasing far right groups supported by a variety of media outlets which sympathize with their ideology. Researchers are curious as to how, in this day and age, and in light of recent history, we got to where we are.

New research presented in the [article](#), "Mystified Consciousness: Rethinking the Rise of the Far Right with Marx and Lacan" by Claudia Leeb from Washington State University published in De Gruyter's journal *Open Cultural Studies*, posits several arguments suggesting that we must turn to thinkers Marx and Lacan and the philosophical concepts they coined to understand the rise of the far right. In the article, Leeb uses the theory of psychoanalysis to explain why white working classes—in the US and throughout the world—seem to have turned to the far right instead of forming an anti-capitalist emancipatory proletariat.

Marx and Lacan's concepts have largely been ignored in literature on the rise of the far right, but Leeb's article draws them together to argue that not only economic, but also psychological factors, brought about its rise.

According to psychoanalytic theorists, our identities are fundamentally

incomplete or non-whole, which generates our desire to have whole identities along with fears that we remain incomplete or non-whole. Furthermore, in the ideologies of neo-liberal capitalist societies, we are only considered to be complete and whole if we have achieved economic success. However, since achieving economic success has become so difficult for most people in neo-liberal capitalist societies, such as the United States, the article posits that large groups of citizens may have heightened feeling of being incomplete and thus inadequate. White, male working-class Americans, says Leeb, embrace the ideology of the far right to fulfil the unconscious yearning to be whole again. This ideology provides them with fantasies that compensate for feeling non-whole or inadequate, such as achieving the American Dream of economic success, finding fulfillment in an afterlife through religion, hatred of ethnic minorities and disdain for women.

The far right fantasy is that of being more whole than "the Other". By branding certain groups of people such as Muslims, immigrants, women as limited or non-whole, the far right displaces the anxieties of the white male working classes on others, allowing them to feel superior and therefore, whole and "great again".

"The article provides an alternative explanation for the far right that the mystification and division in the working classes has to do with the expression of white, masculine supremacy, more so than economic dislocation," says political scientist Laurie Naranch from Siena College in Albany, New York.

The recent resurgence of far right extremism demonstrates just how much more study and research must occur in this field if it is to be curtailed.

More information: Claudia Leeb, *Mystified Consciousness: Rethinking the Rise of the Far Right with Marx and Lacan*, *Open*

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