

Contesting the Far Right

A Psychoanalytic and Feminist Critical Theory Approach

Claudia Leeb

Why have so many people responded to the insecurity, exploitation, alienation, and isolation of precarity capitalism by supporting the far right? In this timely book, Claudia Leeb argues that psychoanalytic and feminist critical theory illuminates how economic and psychological factors interact to produce this extreme political shift.

Contesting the Far Right examines right-wing recruitment tactics in the United States and Austria, where people discontented with the status quo have turned to far-right parties and movements that further cement capitalism's adverse effects. Leeb contends that Freudian psychoanalytic theory and early Frankfurt School Critical Theory provide analytical tools to explain this apparent contradiction in psychological terms. Living under precarity capitalism generates feelings of failure and anxiety, which people experience as non-wholeness, because it has become difficult if not impossible to live up to the fetish of economic, interpersonal, and bodily success, and the far right preys on such feelings. Its psychologically oriented propaganda tactics produce the illusion of wholeness and a positive sense of self while leaving the socioeconomic conditions that cause people's suffering intact. At the same time, they remove the inhibitions that keep people's repressed aggression and racist and sexist attitudes in check. To demonstrate the workings of this process, Leeb compares cases including Trump and the alt-right in the United States and the Freedom Party and the identitarian movement in Austria. At once theoretically rich and politically engaged, this book also offers ways to resist the far right and counter the psychological appeal of its propaganda techniques.



CLAUDIA LEEB is associate professor of political theory at Washington State University. Her recent books include *The Politics of Repressed Guilt: The Tragedy of Austrian Silence* (2018) and *Power and Feminist Agency in Capitalism: Toward a New Theory of the Political Subject* (2017).

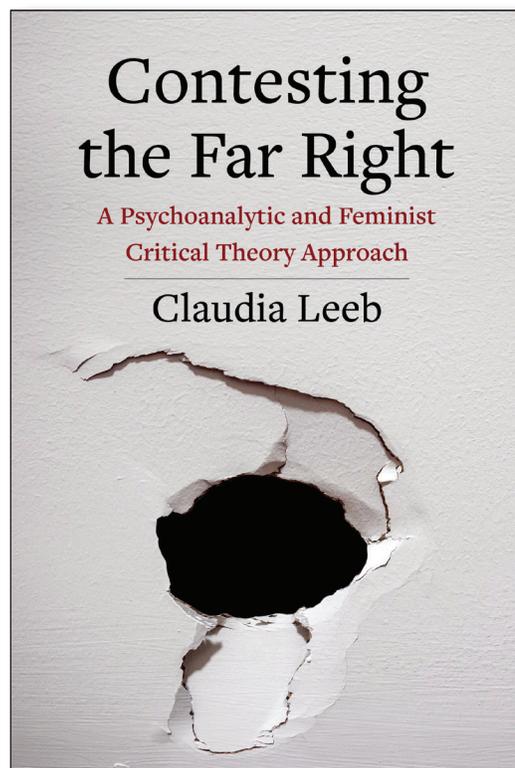
\$35.00 / £30.00 paperback · 978-0-231-21307-3
\$140.00 / £117.00 hardcover · 978-0-231-21306-6
\$34.99 / £30.00 ebook · 978-0-231-55970-6

APRIL 2024 320 pages

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“Claudia Leeb masterfully recuperates early critical theory’s fecund use of Freud to illuminate a hard-right social turn. Drawing as well on feminist and anticolonial insights, she analyzes the white male psyche forged in the crucible of neoliberal precarity. This work is an important inquiry into the psychological drive toward fascism today.”

—Wendy Brown, Institute for Advanced Study

“*Contesting the Far Right* offers an essential framework for understanding and resisting the resurgence of fascist movements today. Leeb offers a combined approach that involves both psychoanalytic theory and structural analysis of capitalism, racism, and masculinity. This book should be discussed and read by all scholars and researchers seeking to understand the fascist threat today.”

—Joan Braune, author of *Understanding and Countering Fascist Movements: From Void to Hope*

“How does precarity capitalism redefine identity? How are ideals of success our collective undoing? Drawing on the Frankfurt School, Claudia Leeb forcefully analyzes the psychological investments that hold the structures of precarity capitalism in place. With a sober assessment of the United States and Austria, Leeb explores the curious desire for wholeness that attracts many to right-wing politics.”

—Nancy Luxon, University of Minnesota

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