



**Book Review – *Nazism and Neo-Nazism in Film and Media*, by Jason Lee.**

**Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018. 200 pp. €95.**

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More than 70 years after the defeat of Nazism, right-wing ideas once again appear to be omnipresent. In his publication *Nazism and Neo-Nazism in Film and Media*, Jason Lee argues that Nazism and neo-Nazism are at the centre of Western media culture and have become a significant point of reference in the means by which the West builds, judges and discusses identity. Central to these developments, according to Lee, is the continuous reworking of conceptions of Nazism and neo-Nazism in film and news media which contributes to the normalisation of right-wing ideas in mainstream culture.

The introductory chapter outlines two movements linked to neo-Nazism. Firstly, Lee examines the phenomenon of football hooliganism, whose gangs display a similarly fragmentary organisation structure to European neo-Nazi groups. Lee then turns his attention to white separatists in the United States in order to highlight neo-Nazism's propensity towards both violence and celebrity culture. Throughout, Lee focuses on right-wing voices mainly from the UK and the US, concentrating for the most part on concerns over anti-Semitism in the British Labour party and on the appeal which Trump has for right-wing groups in the US. Lee thereby assumes the reader to have considerable understanding of both contexts and clearly offers an Anglo-centric perspective on the perceived rise in right-wing attitudes in politics and media. The examples of film and television productions discussed in the subsequent chapters are also mainly from the UK and US, but also see the important inclusion of some relevant examples from Germany. The complexity of (neo-)Nazism in Germany, however, is not illuminated.

Chapter two considers several examples of film and television representations of both Nazism and neo-Nazism, examining the various understandings of these movements which they may relate to their viewership. Lee's attempt to give this chapter a historic dimension is hardly achieved by his short overview of 1970s 'Nazisploitation' films. This section offers little new insight and only sketchily makes the contentious claim that, based on similarities of voyeurism and fascination, every film about Nazism, including, for instance, those on the

History Channel, can be considered Nazi pornography. Without further differentiation, however, this contention is overreaching. Despite his somewhat eclectic selection of films, this chapter yet offers some new and pertinent analyses of filmic productions such as *The Reader* (Stephen Daldry, 2008) and *NSU German History X* (3 episodes, 2016). The latter, for instance, is perceived to frame neo-Nazism as the only choice for young people, even romanticising the movement as a form of rebellion, thereby not only justifying the appeal of right-wing extremism but also providing a promotional platform for its ideology.

Chapter three continues with an analysis of the German comedy *Look Who's Back* (David Wnendt, 2015), touching on interpretive approaches to this complex film as well as aspects of the debates surrounding comedy representations of Nazism more generally. Unfortunately, spatial constraints in this chapter limit a more thorough exploration of the multi-layered relationship between Nazism and comedy.

While the first two chapters essentially provide a survey of a small selection of recent film and television representations of Nazism and neo-Nazism, chapter four is probably the central chapter in this book because it presents a philosophical consideration of the role of the media in shaping and informing mainstream culture. Here, Lee argues that the media informs our moral reference system not merely by the way Nazism and neo-Nazism are framed but by embodying many aspects of (neo-)Nazism in their own operations: the media relies on violence to attract consumer attention and also serves as a form of “theatre of distraction” (p. 100). Moreover, the media picks up on and promotes ideas of the occult which were not only part of Nazism but have in fact always played a role in mainstream culture. Most importantly, the rhetoric of demarcating an outsider threat is another practice that is in parallel with (neo-)Nazism, and one which should be familiar to the reader because it can be readily observed in Western media and society.

The book aims to offer a transnational perspective on neo-Nazism in film and media. Indeed, chapter five argues that neo-Nazism is a transnational phenomenon by giving a brief overview of right-wing movements across the globe from Taiwan and Turkey to South Africa and Peru. Lee also briefly discusses the phenomenon of international ‘Nazi hunters’, especially relevant in the context of Latin America, and the plethora of video games in which Nazism serves as backdrop. The latter can, however, only be said to be popular in Western markets, particularly in the US and in Europe and not, for instance, in Asian markets. As mentioned above, the majority of this publication is, in fact, about the UK and US contexts; consequently, the fifth chapter appears somewhat disruptive to the book’s overall structure.

The concluding chapter again emphasises points made in chapter four, primarily that Nazi rhetoric can be found in mainstream media and culture, noting, for instance, that the

framing of people in receipt of welfare benefits as a burden to society harks back to Nazism's core value of hard work. Moreover, online and social media facilitate the networking of neo-Nazi groups and the promotion of their ideas, creating a sense of larger numbers and greater influence, which, in turn, is utilised by filmic and news media to create and perpetuate a culture of fear. A prominent example used here, again, is Donald Trump and his appeal to right-wing groups, further supporting Lee's argument that right-wing thought is, in fact, mainstream and not located at the fringes of society.

While the reader may associate many of the ideas expressed in current political discourses with Nazism and now neo-Nazism, it is important to note that these ideas are actually much older than Nazism. Consequently, when Lee hints at the question of whether we all have the innate potential to be a Nazi, the question is really one of terminology. Right-wing ideas expressed by any group can be called Nazi, fascist or racist, but simply ascribing right-wing ideas of any kind and form to Nazism or neo-Nazism may be a generalisation which could serve to minimise the scale of what is essentially a philosophical problem of humanity. Moreover, this is symptomatic of the sensationalist use of the term, which ultimately contributes to the linguistic normalisation of Nazism. What is missing from the outset of the book, therefore, is a more structured discussion of the difficulty of defining neo-Nazism and a reflection on the issue of calling just any form of right-wing ideas part of neo-Nazism. As a result, terminology of racism, anti-Semitism and (neo-)fascism are used in a seemingly undifferentiating manner throughout this publication.

Overall, Jason Lee presents an extremely timely contribution to media studies and offers important reflections on the relationship between media and politics in times of Brexit and Donald Trump. The book will be enjoyed by media scholars from the US and the UK or anyone who has been following American or British media coverage of the countries' political landscape over the past few years.

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