Review of: "From Baking Competitions To Forced Repatriations: Patriotic Alternative And The Hybridity Of The Radical Right"

Salome Ietter[1]

1 Queen Mary, University of London

This article presents an interesting and valuable review of the British far-right group 'Patriotic Alternative' that can be of use to anyone interested in contemporary far-right movements and their ties with the wider political spectrum. Particularly interesting is the exploration of their communication strategies, such as appointing a woman as deputy leader and investing in a tea brand and a baking competition. These initiatives reflect innovative approaches to campaigning and propaganda, as well as echo similar developments on the right / far-right spectrum in other countries and the rise of so-called 'femonationalism' (Möser 2022). However, these changing strategies seem more driven by evolving communication techniques and by the wider political landscape than by a clear dichotomy between 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' forms of nationalism, as the author suggests.

The main issue that prevents the author from making a convincing case for that argument is the lack of a robust and sustained definition of nationalism itself, including what would exactly 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' versions of it be. It seems like a piece is missing - that the author might well have but forgot to integrate in a clear enough way. This leaves us without a base conceptual understanding of nationalism from which to evaluate these arguments and empirical manifestations. There seems to be interesting things to be said about these changing strategies, and perhaps how they reflect other things observed through the 'populist hype' of recent years (which I am not particularly keen to apply either). Recent work on the mainstreaming of the far-right (Mondon 2022; Brown & Mondon 2022) could support the argument by indicating that as far-right beliefs become more accepted in 'mainstream' discourse, far-right individuals may feel emboldened to employ innovative communication tactics, address certain topics, and articulate views in a manner that was previously constrained when traditional political parties held more sway and liberal parties didn't openly adopt far-right themes and rhetoric. The article does indeed briefly touch on the blending of radical right ideologies with the current British government's policies, but this connection could be significantly reinforced by referencing that literature.

The article also argues that nurturing a sense of community and addressing the relative isolation of far-right and right-wing voters represents a 'new' or inauthentic manifestation of nationalism. However, a clearer definition of nationalism and its varied manifestations throughout history and across the political spectrum would be necessary here as well to evaluate this argument. A sense of community has always been pivotal for all forms of nationalism and far-right projects, serving to define a highly exclusive and 'deserving' national group from a constructed 'Other', deemed undeserving. Once again, the ways in which this sense of community is presently being fostered (via pop culture or pseudo gender 'equality') may reflect

more on the evolving landscape of political communication rather than an inherent shift in the essence of 'nationalism' itself.

Additionally, and relatedly, the discussion around traditionalism, conservatism, and racism would benefit from clearer conceptualisation, especially in understanding the intersection between racism and nationalism. The author suggests a shift in focus from 'race' to 'religion' within far-right movements at the turn of the 21st century, yet does not address the link between racism, Islamophobia, and antisemitism in a clear and transparent way. They also note how today 'race' seems to be back on the agenda of the contemporary versions of these movements, notably articulating themselves around a so-called 'threat' to 'whiteness', but again leaves the reader without an understanding of the connections between these arguments and nationalism. There would seem, on the contrary, to be a sort of continuity in the reliance on racism and on violent forms of exclusion and oppression in various nationalist projects throughout history – and this whether they are far-right or not.

Furthermore, the article raises questions about categorising the far right into radical and extreme factions, with violence as a defining factor. For the author, and while both belong to a broader category of the 'far-right', the 'extreme-right' would tend to use a violent framework of action, while the 'radical right-wing' would tend to operate through a democratic framework. While this framework can be useful, it fails to account for how the democratic process itself can facilitate repressive measures, blurring the line between democratic and violent means of achieving political goals (repressive protest laws, nationalist and nativist immigration laws adopted in parliaments, etc.). Violence can and actually more often than not is part of the democratic framework.

I think this is a very interesting article that should be pushed further on these accounts, and generally on specifying its scope: it would indeed be very interesting to know why and how some far-right actors are themselves constructing some nationalisms as good and some as bad, and how that might change through time, and then to draw conceptual reflections on the basis of these discursive constructions. Here, unfortunately, it reads as if the author adopts these categories but does not delve into what they mean for actors involved in political competition on the right.

As a final, more minor note, the article could also delve into the relationship between populism and far-right categorizations, addressing the tendency to conflate these terms and acknowledging the complexity surrounding their definitions, especially when referencing scholars like Mudde.