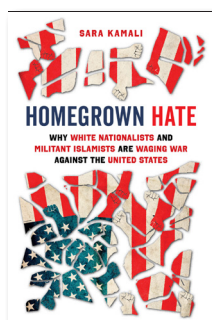


BOOK REVIEW

Homegrown Hate: Why White Nationalists and Militant Islamists Are Waging War Against the United States. By Sara Kamali.

University of California Press, 2021. 440 pages. \$29.91 (hardcover), \$24.95 (paperback), and 29.95 (e-book). ISBN 9780520360020.



Sara Kamali's *Homegrown Hate: Why White Nationalists and Militant Islamists Are Waging War Against the United States* is an important and extensively researched contribution to the study of terrorism in the United States. Her comparative approach analyzes two domestic threats to the United States: White nationalism and militant Islamism. The book is based on a careful mining of archival sources and two years of interviews with militant Islamists and White nationalists. Kamali's novel comparison of

these disparate domestic terrorist movements allows for a critical analysis of what the actors in these movements share: misogynistic, patriarchal views about women, a sense of collective and individual victimhood, and claims to various religious frameworks, the combination of which culminates in terrorism directed at their own country. Kamali's methodological approach to interviewing—epistemic worldview analysis—allows the scholar to empathize with the interviewee and understand their motivations, aspirations, and logics. This approach enabled Kamali to put aside preconceived notions about her interviewees' worldviews and motivations, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of their respective ontologies without dismissing them as simply irrational extremists (17).

The book has four parts. Part One, "Who They Are," describes each movement's creeds, religious motivations, and internal diversity. Chapter One provides an overview of the Far Right, including the Evangelical antiabortion movement's relationship to White nationalism. It focuses on "The Fourteen Words," a 1988 mission statement written by David Lane that grounds White nationalist ideology: "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children" (42). Kamali notes that movements

sharing this mission may differ as to their “primary rhetorical emphasis” which she characterizes as “(1) conspiratorial, antigovernment sentiment; (2) religious adherence; (3) a combination of antigovernment and religious views; (4) neither antigovernment nor religious” (64). Having analyzed the religious worlds of Wotanism, Creativity, the militant expressions of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, White nationalist evangelicalism, Christian Identity, the Ku Klux Klan, Neo-Nazis, and Neo-Confederates, Kamali ends this chapter by arguing that “adherents often cloak their shared quest to realize a White ethnostate by sanctioning violence under the mantle of religion” (81).

The second chapter “Loyalty and Disavowal” focuses on the ideology of militant Islamists, underscoring the global tenets of militant Islamism and its post 9/11 history in the United States. While the White nationalist movement has dozens of disparate sects and groups, followers of militant Islamism in the United States can be characterized under two movements—al-Qa’ida and the Islamic State and their shared emphasis on *al-wala wa’l-bara*, loyalty and disavowal (87). Kamali ends this chapter with a comparison of the ideological contours of White nationalism and militant Islamism that focuses on their shared victimhood (109).

Part Two, “Why They Fight,” analyzes each group’s motivations (religious and otherwise) for waging war against the United States. Chapter 3, “#WhiteGenocide,” covers “the conviction that White people are threatened and marginalized—indeed, that they are on the precipice of racial and cultural extinction” (115). Chapter 4, “The Crusades Redux,” covers the militant Islamist resurrection of the Crusades, which frames their conception of an ongoing war with the United States (141). Part Three, “What They Want,” interrogates the vision of a racial Holy War waged by White nationalists and a religious holy war (*jihād*) by militant Islamists and their respective goals for government: a white ethnostate or a caliphate in the United States. In Chapters 6 and 7, Kamali seeks to draw parallels between how respective narratives of victimhood are mobilized by these movements, who position themselves as the righteous saviors of a deteriorating world. Chapter 8 ends this part by deconstructing the “lone wolf” myth. Kamali reminds us that “terrorists who are falsely perceived as lone wolves are never completely devoid of support.” She highlights how perceived single actors such as Dylan Roof have extensive networks of likeminded companions on the internet (245).

While Kamali's approach to religion aims to complicate the motivations behind violence and deconstruct the viewpoint that religion alone causes violence, her insistence that religion is merely a rhetorical tool to justify violence is reductive. Kamali's normative claims about religion and violence assume that those who engage in violence with religious motives are "not real" religious people: "for the subjects of this book, irrespective of actual belief, religion is merely a tool to justify violence in order to achieve social and political ends" (15). Kamali misuses the critique that the secular/religious divide and delineation of "religious" versus "nonreligious" is a Western projection to make the reductionist claim that all those who commit violence within religious frameworks are merely claiming religion for social and political ends: "I demarcate a stark difference between violence in the name of religion, which is violence cloaked in religious frames of reference, but only for legitimacy, to achieve sociopolitical aims, and religious violence, or violence motivated directly by religion" (16). In doing so, Kamali falls back into her own critique of Western secularism in assuming that one can disentangle or extricate the sociopolitical from the religious.

By denying the possibility of religious-based violence, Kamali plays into categorizing religion as "good" or "bad," real or not real, which Robert Orsi has critiqued as unintentionally prescribing and reifying the scholars' own normative frameworks.¹ Throughout the book, Kamali takes aim at White nationalists' and militant Islamists' deficiencies in religious knowledge and the non-normativity of their interpretations of beliefs and practices (140). This may be, in part, a result of her methodological approach—epistemic worldview analysis—which effectively takes an interviewee's words at face value and allows for empathy between interviewer and interviewee. However, this kind of empathetic approach can obfuscate the differential power structures in which each movement is embedded because it lacks grounding in the historical and material realities of these viewpoints, taking the subject's phenomenological experience at face value. Kamali does acknowledge these historical and present inequalities and power imbalances. However, her analysis seemingly assumes that the respective victimhood narratives of White Nationalists and militant Islamists can both be understood as fabricated or imagined to the same extent. While acknowledging the disparate histories of militant Islamism and White Christian nationalism, her analysis gives inadequate attention to the structural nature of these movements, especially how White Christian Nationalism is buttressed by powerful institutions of the United States government. For me, this is a

1 Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton University Press, 2013).

product of her theoretical approach to religion. By insisting throughout the book that religion is merely a rhetorical tool to legitimate violence, Kamali misses how religion enacts violence structurally—for example, Christian Nationalist legislation attacking LGBTQ and abortion rights.

However, Kamali’s vision for holistic justice articulated in Part Four “What Can Be Done,” moves beyond anti-racism to anti-oppression, which considers the structural forces behind misplaced counterterrorism measures. This chapter includes Kamali’s unique contribution to the field of counterterrorism—her assertion that White nationalism is as much or more of a threat to the national security of the United States than militant Islamism. She argues that current counterterrorism tactics myopically target American Muslims and absolve White nationalists (250). Her solution is encapsulated in holistic justice, defined as:

the visibility, amplification, and empowerment of all people, in accordance to their needs, so that each person—particularly those who are multiply minoritized, including because of religion, skin color, heritage, citizenship, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, and ability—may have the same rights, resources, protection, benefits, and opportunities afforded to those in positions of power (251).

Kamali calls on White liberals to analyze how structural Islamophobia works together with white privilege, obfuscating how White nationalism is viewed in relation to militant Islamism. Kamali demands that White liberals fully and tangibly enact and embody their commitments to antiracism:

In the anti-oppression, empathy-based approach to counterterrorism that I propose, White people must stand for holistic justice by amplifying and empowering the voices of the marginalized, oppressed, and historically underrepresented, not by speaking up for them, or over them, but by acknowledging the history and condition of all people based on the color of their skin; namely how Whiteness is instrumentalized as a tool of power and how race is a social and historical construct that is weaponized against Black and Brown people so that Whiteness can retain its privilege of power (263).

Overall, Kamali’s study is an impressive survey of domestic terrorism in which a compelling case is made for the use of an “anti-oppression” approach to counterterrorism in the United States.

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