



THE ANTI-FEMINISM OF THE FAR-RIGHT IMAGEBOARD TERRORISTS

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When 27-year-old Stephan Baillet shot and killed two people in the German city of Halle on 12 October 2019, the media focus understandably fell on his outspoken anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim acts.

His attack occurred on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year according to the Jewish faith, and was directed at a synagogue and a kebab shop. Had Baillet succeeded in shooting open the door to the synagogue, everything indicates that his attack would have ended in a massacre.¹

What has been less of a focus in the aftermath of the Halle attack is Baillet's vocal anti-feminism views, even though this is a central tenet of the ideology he subscribes to.

Baillet's attack is the latest in a series of far-right terror attacks, whose perpetrators have drawn inspiration from Brenton Tarrant's attack in Christchurch, New Zealand.²

In March 2019, Tarrant shot and killed 50 Muslims attending the ritual Friday prayers. On the far-right forum /pol/ (short for "politically incorrect") and on the anonymous imageboard discussion site 8chan, he linked to a live-stream of the attack which he filmed with a GoPro camera attached to his body. His 8chan-post also included the 74-page-long manifesto titled "The Great Replacement", explaining his motives for the attack. Since other attacks with similar motives had been announced on the website, it was shut down, although his manifesto is still being shared on numerous internet communities such as the more well-known 4chan. In the manifesto, Tarrant admits to being influenced online and openly nodded to 4chan, gaming culture and alt-right meme communities in his livestream of the attack.

Tarrant's actions inspired multiple clones. In 2019 we witnessed attacks in El Paso in Texas, Poway in California, Bærum in Norway and the latest in the German city of Halle. In these attacks, Brenton Tarrant's ideas, actions and communication strate-

gies are directly cloned. The terrorists have all been exposed to toxic ideas about Muslims, Jews, feminists and women online, on mainstream social media and referred to cultural references within more obscure anonymous online communities such as 4chan and 8chan, or in encrypted chat groups on apps like Telegram.

The digitally influenced far-right terrorists all live-streamed their attacks and distributed manifestos, mimicking the dominant political discourse of the online spaces they are active in. When visiting digital spaces such as certain imageboards that have been referred to by far-right perpetrators, there are multiple threads praising the attacks. There, anonymous users share content such as photographs of the perpetrators and manipulated clips from live-streams, making them into easily shared cultural phenomena, or memes. The memefication of digitally influenced far-right terrorists creates an eco-system of propaganda material that can be used to spread violent ideology and encouragement to carry out terrorist acts to a wider audience.

The Conspiracy Theory of the Great Replacement

The idea of *The Great Replacement* has its origins in the book *Le Grand Remplacement*, written by the French far-right intellectual author Renaud Camus.³ The book was published in 2012, one year after the deadly terrorist attack by Anders Behring Breivik on the Norwegian island of Utøya. The idea of *The Great Replacement* concerns a conspiracy of a financial, political and cultural elite, plotting to replace *Europeans*, understood as white Europeans, with *non-Europeans*, meaning a collectivised group of people of colour.

The digitally influenced far-right terrorists of 2019 pinpoint the undesirable scenario of racial replacement as a tenet in their justifications for their acts of violence.

“White people are failing to reproduce, failing to create families, failing to have children”, Tarrant writes in his manifesto, citing a multitude of Wikipedia-articles on birth rates in various countries in the Global North. He argues how the so called “mass immigration” of other racial and ethnic groups will replace the European ethnicity, culture and race-identity. “This is WHITE GENOCIDE”, he writes.

This is **WHITE GENOCIDE**.

To return to replacement fertility levels is priority number one. But it is no simple task. There are myriad reasons behind the decline in fertility rates and the destruction of the traditional family unit.

We must inevitably correct the disaster of hedonistic, nihilistic individualism. But it will take some time, time we do not have due to the crisis of mass immigration.

The idea of migrants threatening to replace white populations is repeated by the other terrorists. The group identified as the threat varies from one manifesto to another. Brenton Tarrant constructs Muslims as the primary oppressors and performers of White Genocide, while the El Paso attacker Patrick Crusius is obsessed with Hispanics, who he sees as a threat to his home country, the USA.

The perception of women and femininity, however, are common denominators within the writings of far-right attackers. Non-white women are described as an over-fertile breeding stock, busy replacing the white populations by constantly having kids. White women are described as an ineffective breeding stock, who lack the race solidarity and sense of duty to devote themselves to the nuclear family, with the aim of maintaining the nation by giving birth to the “correct” amount of white kids.

The blame for this female betrayal is placed at the feet of feminists. They have, according to the ideas of the terrorists,

distracted women from their true calling of maintaining the nuclear family, and have lured them into being selfish, choosing their career over their home.

“Feminism is to blame for the declining birth rates in the West”, Stephan Baillet says on the video of his attack in Halle, which was live-streamed on the gaming-platform Twitch.

The battle against feminism is, through this lens, a battle of reproductive control. Getting white women to have more children is a central tenet in the fight against the perceived replacement.

Replacement of the Danes

The idea of population replacement has made its way into mainstream political discourse in Denmark, where politicians Pia Kjærsgaard⁴ and Marie Krarup⁵ from the nationalist Danish People’s Party have expressed their concerns over a perceived replacement of Danes. Their comments were in response to the results of the 2019 Danish general election, where areas populated with residents with a non-Danish background had voted in high numbers in favour of socialist and social-liberal parties.

The conspiracy theory of The Great Replacement was first introduced into mainstream political discourse by the far-right party Stram Kurs, meaning “Hard Line” in Danish. Its party leader Rasmus Paludan advocated the conspiracy theory on live television in one of the big election debates:

“The Great Replacement is about Muslims in Denmark, who don’t belong here, who get married very early and they have a lot of kids. Danes marry late and have very few kids... Because at some point, if this development continues, Danes will risk becoming a minority in their own country”, he said in the debate, which was aired on the Danish television channel DR on 7 May 2019. A few weeks later, the fact-checking team from the Danish programme *Detector* refuted the idea of the threat of ethnic Danes becoming a minority.⁶



Rasmus Paludan, leader of the far-right party Stram Kurs, in a live debate on Danish television channel DR, between the party leaders during the 2019 general election campaign.

Rasmus Paludan has previously made comments along similar lines during a debate on abortion rights. In 2018 he participated in a demonstration against the right to free abortion with the slogan “Save one more”⁷

When asked about why he participated, he said that he was pro-choice, but saw every child aborted by an ethnically Danish woman as a tragedy⁸

This is an example of how a key feminist issue, like access to free and safe abortions, is undermined because it is seen as a threat to the nation.

Feminists as the Enemy of the Cause

Feminists are seen as the enemy in far-right communities, not only because they fight for reproductive rights like abortion and access to birth control, but also because feminism is at odds with the gender ideals of far-right ideas.

These communities produce and distribute hyper conservative ideas of gender; men must be aggressive, competitive, physically strong and protectors of women. Women must be feminine, and their sphere is the home, where they dedicate themselves to raising children and keeping the house in order. Feminist ideas are seen as trying to erase the “natural balance” between the sexes, and therefore considered a dangerous and toxic ideology.

Here, far-right terrorists and their sympathisers have strong bonds with the *Manosphere*.⁹ The term “Manosphere” covers, in a broad sense, digital spaces and communities that evolve around men and masculinity that oppose feminism.

Several studies have underlined how the Manosphere and far-right communities share beliefs of feminism as an enemy of their cause. This can be used as a gateway to digital alt-right environments,¹⁰ which offer a widened understanding of a demonised enemy; here, it is not only feminists who are the perceived enemy, but also collectivised groups of Jews, Muslims, liberals and leftists.

Ideas and concepts are often shared between far-right and Manosphere communities. The idea of being *red-pilled* or *taking the red pill*, a metaphor taken from the movie *The Matrix*, has its origins in the Manosphere. In the context of the Manosphere, the meaning of the concept refers to the “awakening” and understanding of the truth of how feminism is destroying civilisation, how it is a blatant lie that women are oppressed and that there are essential differences between men and women.

In recent years, the term has been adopted within alt-right communities, where it has been given a broader meaning. Taking the red pill equals waking up and realising how Marxism, feminism, liberals, Jews and Muslims are conspiring to destroy civilisation as we know it; hiding in the shadows, there is an elite group orchestrating the replacement of the white race. The metaphor about the red pill has become so popular that it is being used as a breeding ground for digital hate communities.¹¹ For some, it has been part of the processes of radicalisation that have resulted in violent acts.

Invisible Misogyny

From the perspective of anti-radicalisation it is important to understand the essentiality of anti-feminist and misogynist ideas in alt-right communities. These ideas overlap with concepts within the Manosphere, and can be a gateway to violent communities for many frustrated young men.

Unfortunately anti-feminism is often perceived as mainstream and unproblematic to an extent, where it ends up vanishing from the analysis of the threat of the violent far-right.

Inspired by Brenton Tarrant and Patrick Crusius, Norwegian Philip Manshaus attempted to commit an alleged terror attack at Al-Noor Mosque in Bærum, outside of Oslo, in August 2019. Prior to his attack, he announced his plans on an imageboard website, which by design is similar to 8chan: “well cobbbers, it’s my time i was elected by saint tarrant after all”, he wrote, linking to a live-stream that was not functional as well as linking to a page with over 40 images of himself. The images depict his life, with photographs of him as a child waving the Norwegian flag and wearing a Norwegian folk costume, images of him together with other white children as well as images of his teenage years. At the end of the page are the more recent self-portraits, where there are several images of him posing, for example, while flexing his muscles, staring intensely into the camera or standing in a forest-looking environment, wearing boots, blue jeans, and a lumberjack fleece shirt while holding an axe. His images illustrate a mix of ideals of masculinity as well as racial imaginaries of northern-European white men.



An image from Philip Manshaus' collection, chopping wood together with an unknown person.

Before approaching the mosque, Philip Manshaus murdered his 17-year-old step-sister by shooting her three times in the head and once in the chest. Johanne Zhang Zhangjia Ihle-Hansen, who was adopted from China at the age of two, was made a victim of Manshaus' beliefs about race and gender. Joan Smith, who has researched the backgrounds of Islamist and far-right terrorists, points out that terrorists often have a history of domestic violence before committing their terror acts and stresses that this should be taken into account when developing anti-radicalisation strategies.¹²

Far-right perpetrators' imaginaries of feminism and gender are often overlooked. We can ascertain that they are central factors within their ideology, communication and acts of violence.

Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-shooting/german-synagogue-gunman-aimed-to-commit-massacre-prosecutor-says-idUSKBN1WPOY6>
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