

The Christchurch mosque massacre and the changing face of extremism

Jews and Muslims find themselves on the same side of the line that separates civilization from barbarism. If we are to achieve greater understanding between our two minority communities, then that is as good a place as any from which to start.

By Ben Cohen

(JNS) By the time America woke up on Friday, Mar. 15, Google's search engine was jammed with news of a mass shooting at another place of worship in the world. Counts of 49 dead and dozens wounded were being reported at the Al Noor Mosque in the city of Christchurch, New Zealand.

Doubtless, many people were looking for the manifesto penned in advance of this atrocity, titled "The Great Replacement," which the gunman had apparently issued. The text was easy to find and nauseating to read. To summarize its ideas and arguments at any length would endow it, and him, with a dignity that is unwarranted; suffice to say, this man believes that what he calls "high fertility rates" among Muslims are at the root of an Islamic war against Western civilization, and therefore justification for the mass murder of innocents worshipping at a mosque. "I only wish I could have killed more invaders (Muslims) and more traitors (western converts to Islam) as well," he wrote chillingly.

Madman? Psychopath? Fool? All of those things are painfully obvious. Still, I would argue that as diseased as the perpetrator's mind is, it is worth dwelling on the way that he depicts himself in his manifesto because it provides an important snapshot of the sorts of influences and obsessions that animate racist violence and terrorism today. The picture that emerges does not sit easily with any political worldview—a fact that might, ironically, help to bridge the many and real

divides that presently exist between Jewish and Muslim communities living in the West.

In both the selection of the target and the justification for the shooting, there was an unmistakable parallel. Last October, white supremacist Robert Bowers chose to express his opposition to immigration by murdering 11 Jews worshipping at a synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pa. Now, just months later, this latest gunman chose a mosque to level the same protest, fueled by conspiracy theories about "invaders" and an uncontrollable rage triggered by Islamist terror attacks in the West (in this case, the truck bomb attack in Stockholm that claimed five lives in April 2017.) Like Bowers, the New Zealand shooter sees himself as a member of a select group of alert white citizens who perceive a critical truth that everyone else is simply too brainwashed to recognize; and that is enough to justify an act of slaughter like that at the Al Noor Mosque.

But unlike Bowers, Jews do not lie at the center of this man's paranoid universe. Whereas Bowers, who now awaits trial, is a true believer in the Nazi caricature of a Jew—the source of all the injustice, decadence and race-mixing in the world—for the New Zealand gunman, Jews are relatively incidental.

This isn't because he likes Jews. As with most anti-Semites these days on right and left, he says in his manifesto that he is not an anti-Semite, and then adds right afterwards that "a jew (sic) living in israel (sic) is no enemy of mine, as long as they do not seek to subvert or harm my people." But subversion and harm, in the mind of the anti-Semite, is precisely what "the Jews" cannot stop themselves from doing! One can safely imagine that were our community's "fertility rates" on the same scale as the world's 1.6 billion Muslims, such contemptuous indifference would mushroom into outright hate.

There is also the matter of the political positions that this man identifies with. What it demonstrates is the strong degree of cross-fertilization between different, even contradictory, strands of extremism on both right and left that has been enabled by the Internet, particularly over the last decade. He tells us he is a fascist, and specifically an "eco-fascist." His main political influence is Sir Oswald Mosely—the British socialist leader who evolved into a blackshirted, fascist anti-Semite during the 1930s. The New Zealand gunman doesn't object to being called a "socialist"; he can be, he says, both right-wing and left-wing depending on the context. The country he most identifies with is the People's Republic of China, but at the

same time he quotes a cult slogan of Neo-Nazi groups—"We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children"—as the basis of his worldview.

For someone who clearly exposed himself to a great deal of information about the world around him and yet properly understood almost none of it, this man underlines an awkward truth with this last aspect of his confession, albeit by accident.

It is this: the ideas, images, buzzwords and symbols of extremism in its present form are interchangeable. That's why white identitarians have come to the fore, for whom Jewish power and influence are not the most pressing concern. But it is also why you have left-wing socialists, like several of the members of the British Labour Party, who conduct social-media campaigns against "the Rothschilds," "the Zionists" and the other alleged instruments of "Jewish supremacism." Similarly, it why two anti-Semites from France with far-right connections, Alain Soral and Dieudonne Mbala Mbala, were warmly welcomed last December in red flag-waving, Communist North Korea. These and countless similar examples explain why it's inadvisable to assume that extremists believe what they believe with any consistency.

There is only one line from the latest gunman's manifesto that I will quote in full, so as to make my last point. "There are no innocents in an invasion, all those who colonize other people's lands share guilt," he writes. Those words convey the torrent of angry emotions that drove, in Friday's case, a white racist, but they can serve a Hamas suicide-bomber or an Iranian military commander just as well. It is an argument that many Islamists in the West, along with their non-Muslim fellow travelers, frequently advance to rationalize, justify and celebrate terrorist attacks against Israel or anti-Semitic violence against Jewish communities in the West.

What the massacre at the mosque in Christchurch shows is that this very same argument, based on similarly warped ideology, can be deployed to justify the murder of Muslims living in a Western city. The doctrine that there are "no innocents" is not so much a political red line, therefore, as a civilizational one.

In that sense, after the horrifying murders in New Zealand, Jews and Muslims find themselves on the same side of the line that separates civilization from barbarism. If we are to achieve greater understanding between our two minority communities, then that is as good a place as any from which to start.

Ben Cohen is a New York City-based journalist and author who writes a weekly column on Jewish and international affairs for JNS.

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