



Program on
Extremism



Imagined Threats: Demographic Conspiracy Theories, Antisemitism, and the Legacy of the 2018 Pittsburgh Synagogue Attack

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Executive Summary

On 2 August 2023, a federal jury sentenced Robert Gregory Bowers to death for committing the deadliest antisemitic attack in the history of the United States. Five years earlier, on 27 October 2018, he entered the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh and opened fire on worshippers who had gathered to celebrate Shabbat, one of the most important ritual observances in Judaism. Eleven people were killed and seven more injured. While in custody, Bowers reportedly expressed demographic conspiracy beliefs to explain his act. These narratives claim that ethnic, religious or national groups are under threat of eradication by outsiders due to demographic changes resulting from plots instigated by diverse sets of actors.

This report examines the ideological underpinnings of the Pittsburgh synagogue attack and its long-term impact on the extreme right five years later. It does so by delving into the key narratives that motivated Bowers' act and assessing their influence on subsequent attacks and plots. It then investigates the ways in which the attack and the attacker continue to be referenced and glorified in extreme-right communities online.

Key Findings

- This report traces the history of demographic conspiracy theories in the far right in the West back to the 19th and early 20th centuries, when French discourses of “replacement” resonated with fears of miscegenation in the United States. These discourses shaped alternately the figures of Jews, Muslims, immigrants and progressive forces as racialised collectives plotting the eradication of White people and/or Western cultures. Over a number of years, these discursive trends interlaced and merged to produce labelled demographic conspiracy theories, which are known today under various names such as the “White Genocide” and the “Great Replacement” theories.
- An analysis of Bowers' activity on the social media platform Gab highlights the role demographic conspiracy theories played in Bowers' interpretations and representations of social realities. These narratives helped shape the image of Jews as enablers of an alleged invasion of migrants endangering the future of White people.
- In the context of White supremacist attacks, Bowers' influence is linked to broader conspiracy beliefs that view the alleged struggle for the survival of the “White race” against concerted annihilation attempts as central. Other attackers who cited Bowers as a role model displayed various demographic conspiracy beliefs, picked different targets, but praised one another as committed “ethno-soldiers” sacrificing themselves for the cause of preserving the “White race”.

- Despite his relatively modest popularity, Bowers remains regularly commemorated and glorified within extreme-right communities online five years later. “Screw your optics, I’m going in”, his last words on Gab, turned into a popular slogan used as a catchphrase to incite violence. Bowers was also introduced into militant accelerationists’ pantheon of “saints” and was regularly promoted as a holy figure within these online communities.

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1 Introduction

Friday 27 October 2023 marked the fifth anniversary of the deadliest antisemitic attack in the history of the United States. On that day, in 2018, Robert Gregory Bowers drove to the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He entered the synagogue carrying several weapons and opened fire on worshippers who had gathered to celebrate Shabbat, one of the most important ritual observances in Judaism. Eleven people were killed and seven more injured.¹ While in custody, Bowers told a law enforcement officer that Jews “were committing genocide to his people”, according to the police criminal complaint.² The shooter’s profile and online records emerged in the media over the following days. They revealed Bowers’ White supremacist convictions and his profound and obsessive hatred towards Jews, which he often expressed in conspiratorial terms on social media.³ On 2 August 2023, a federal jury sentenced Bowers to death.⁴

Over the past five years, the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting has been regarded by many in extreme-right communities as a heroic act for White racial survival. This report will examine the ideological underpinnings of the attack, its legacy and its impact on the extreme right. It will do so by exploring the key narratives that motivated Bowers’ act and by assessing their influence on subsequent attacks and plots. It will then investigate the ways in which the attack and the attacker continue to be referenced and glorified in extreme-right communities online.

Specifically, this report will explore the role demographic conspiracy theories play in shaping Bowers’ interpretations and representations of social realities. These narratives claim that ethnic, religious or national groups are under threat of eradication by outsiders due to demographic changes resulting from plots instigated by diverse sets of actors.⁵ Over recent decades, demographic conspiracy theories such as the “White Genocide” or the “Great Replacement” have been instrumental in sustaining extreme-right narratives. First, they racialise target groups into recognisable, homogeneous and coherent collectives, acting in concert and governed by their malevolent essence.⁶ This discursive logic enables demographic conspiracy theories to shape the ultimate Other – individuals bound by allegedly shared characteristics determined to eradicate the in-group. Second, they ascribe target groups with extraordinary

1 United States District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania. “Superseding Indictment,” no. 18–292.

2 Saeed Ahmed and Paul P. Murphy, “Here’s What We Know So Far About Robert Bowers, the Pittsburgh Synagogue Shooting Suspect,” *CNN*, October 28, 2018, accessed September 21, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/10/27/us/synagogue-attack-suspect-robert-bowers-profile/index.html>.

3 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, County of Allegheny – Pittsburgh Municipal Court. “Police Criminal Complaint – Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Vs Robert Gregory Bowers,” no. 18213087.

4 “Jury Recommends Sentence of Death for Pennsylvania Man Convicted for Tree of Life Synagogue Shooting,” *US Department of Justice – Office of Public Affairs*, August 2, 2023, accessed September 21, 2023, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/jury-recommends-sentence-death-pennsylvania-man-convicted-tree-life-synagogue-shooting>.

5 Paul Stocker, “The Great Replacement Theory: A Historical Perspective,” *Open Democracy*, September 19 2019, accessed July 4, 2023, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/countering-radical-right/great-replacement-theory-historical-perspective/>.

6 Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, “When the Elders of Zion Relocated to Eurabia: Conspiratorial Racialization in Antisemitism and Islamophobia,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 52, no. 4 (July 2018): 331–332.

agency and the power to bring about the collapse of a civilisation.⁷ By doing so, they portray the existential threat posed by out-groups as imminent or ongoing, increasing the sense of urgency and the need for response. Finally, demographic conspiracy theories help to strengthen in-group cohesion. As Per-Erik Nilsson suggests, racialisation is “an identificatory logic by which subjects and objects are attributed an essential identity which is indistinguishable from their bodies”.⁸ By shaping a uniformed Other, demographic conspiracy theories in turn construct in turn the in-group based on equally essential and allegedly universal features.⁹

This paper will trace Bowers’ influence on several attacks and within online communities affiliated with the extreme right. It is thus essential to set out a clear definition of the “extreme right”. On the right of the so-called “mainstream right”, which includes conservatives and liberals, Cas Mudde identifies the “far right” as composed of actors that oppose liberal democracy.¹⁰ He divides the far right in two sub-categories: the “radical right”, which accepts the essence of democracy but rejects elements of liberal democracy such as separation of power or minority rights, and the “extreme right”. The “extreme right”, he argues, rejects the very principles upon which democracy is founded: popular sovereignty and majority rule.¹¹ Tore Bjorgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal build on this classification, adding that the legitimization of violence and other illegal means to achieve their goals is a core feature of the extreme right.¹² They stress that the extreme right is predominantly composed of racial and ethnic nationalisms. Racial nationalists usually believe in White racial superiority, view race-mixing as an existential threat, endorse conspiratorial antisemitism, and identify racial enemies that must be defeated. Ethnic nationalists, on the other hand, tend to support anti-immigration and segregationist ideas as a way to preserve distinct “ethnic identities”.¹³

This report will also look at Bowers’ influence within neofascist militant accelerationist (NMA) channels online as part of the broader extreme-right sphere. According to Matthew Kriner, militant accelerationism is a “set of tactics and strategies designed to put pressure on and exacerbate latent social divisions, often through violence, thus hastening societal collapse”.¹⁴ This set of tactics and strategies includes various ideological strains, the most dominant being neofascism. NMA is a decentralised and fragmented movement which regularly incites violence online and has inspired several terrorist attacks in recent years.¹⁵

7 Zia-Ebrahimi, “When the Elders of Zion Relocated to Eurabia,” 332–334.

8 Per-Erik Nilsson, “Manifestos of White Nationalist Ethno-Soldiers,” *Critical Research on Religion* 10, no. 2 (2022): 224.

9 Nilsson, “Manifestos of White Nationalist Ethno-Soldiers,” 225.

10 Cas Mudde, *The Far Right Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 7.

11 Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, 7.

12 Tore Bjorgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal, “Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patterns, and Responses,” *ICCT Policy Brief* (The Hague: The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, September 2019), 3–4, <https://www.icct.nl/sites/default/files/import/publication/Extreme-Right-Violence-and-Terrorism-Concepts-Patterns-and-Responses-4.pdf>.

13 Bjorgo and Aasland Ravndal, “Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patterns, and Responses,” 3–4.

14 Matthew Kriner, “An Introduction to Militant Accelerationism,” *The Accelerationism Research Consortium*, accessed September 22, 2023, <https://www.accelresearch.org/shortanalysis/an-introduction-to-militant-accelerationism>.

15 Kriner, “An Introduction to Militant Accelerationism.”

Methodology

The methodological approach used in this project is twofold. First, using discourse analysis, the historical formation of demographic conspiracy theories in the Western far right and their influence on Bowers' representations and interpretations of social realities is explored.¹⁶ In addition to the existing literature on the topic, sources include records of Bowers' social media activity, court documents, press articles and political speeches. Bowers' influence on subsequent terrorist violence is then assessed using manifestos and, where possible, online records of attackers who explicitly referred to the Tree of Life shooter as a role model.

Second, a non-participant online ethnography is used to determine the ways in which Bowers and his attack continue to be referenced and glorified in extreme-right communities online. This was conducted over the course of July and August 2023, on a range of social media platforms and chan sites.¹⁷ Posts referencing Bowers and the attack were collected and coded, mainly – but not exclusively – on Telegram and 4chan. These platforms were chosen for their relevance to Bowers' online footprint and ease of access to posts, ensuring accuracy and efficiency of data collection. Relevant posts include visuals and direct references to Bowers, references to phrases associated with him, and related memes. Only English-language material from the day of the Tree of Life attack onwards is examined as part of this report. This analysis is therefore largely limited to English-speaking contexts.

Structure of the Report

This report is divided into four sections. The first will trace the development of demographic conspiracy theories in the far right in the West. It will show that their various labelled iterations originate in discourses of fear of cultural and racial annihilation emerging from the end of the 19th century, principally in France and the United States. The second will analyse Bowers' online activity prior to the attack. It will explore the ways in which demographic conspiracy theories played out and shaped the figure of Jews as “enablers of death” in Bowers' online discourse. The third section will examine the influence of Bowers on several subsequent attackers. Finally, the fourth section will examine the ways in which Bowers continues to be referenced and glorified in extreme-right communities online. It will show that despite his relatively modest popularity, he continues to be celebrated in various ways on social media.

¹⁶ David Howarth and Yannis Stavrakakis, “Introducing Discourse Theory and Political Analysis,” in *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies, and Social Change*, ed. David Howarth, Alletta J. Norval, and Yannis Stavrakakis (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 1–23.

¹⁷ Robert V. Kozinets, *Netnography: Redefined* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2015).

2 Demographic Conspiracy Theories and the Far Right in the West

The intellectual history of demographic conspiracy theories in the Western far right goes back to ideas which emerged principally in France and the United States in the late 1800s. In the following decades, these theories increasingly influenced far- and extreme-right discourses. This section will trace their development from their origins onwards.

The French Origins of Demographic Conspiracy Theories

France's defeat in the 1870 Franco-Prussian War fuelled nationalistic passion in the country. Driven by the desire for revenge, the nationalist milieu searched for a culprit responsible for the country's situation. Progressively, a virulent antisemitism spread and became increasingly central to far-right discourses. Influential nationalist figures Édouard Drumont and Maurice Barrès portrayed Jews as the ultimate enemy and the cause of all of France's problems.¹⁸

In 1886, Drumont published *La France Juive* [Jewish France], in which he warns of an alleged "Jewish invasion" which would soon lead to the collapse of the French nation.¹⁹ The book was met with immediate commercial success and played a significant role in disseminating antisemitism throughout the country.²⁰ According to Gérard Noiriel, the underlying rhetorical mechanisms of the text display striking similarities to the present-day "Great Replacement" theory.²¹ While the "Great Replacement" targets immigrants and minorities, accusing them of invading Europe from the bottom of society, Drumont describes the invasion of France's elites by an alien Jewish power.²² Barrès expressed similar views in an article published in the daily newspaper *Le Journal* in February 1900.²³ There, he accused "neo-French people" of having infiltrated France and now seeking to culturally overpower "authentic" French people from within.²⁴ Their success, he argues, would mean the collapse of French culture and the emergence of a new people settled on French territory.²⁵

18 Jean-Yves Camus and Nicolas Lebourg, *Les Droites Extrêmes en Europe* [Far-Right Politics in Europe] (Paris: Seuil, 2015), 15–19.

19 Édouard Drumont, *La France Juive* [Jewish France] (Paris: C. Marpon & E. Flammarion, 1886).

20 R. F. Byrnes, "Édouard Drumont and *La France Juive*," *Jewish Social Studies* 10, no. 2 (April 1948): 165–184.

21 Gérard Noiriel, "Le 'Grand Remplacement'. Réflexions sur la Fabrique des Discours de Haine," [The 'Great Replacement'. Reflections on the Making of Discourses of Hate] *Le Populaire dans tous ses États*, September 18, 2019, accessed July 7, 2023, <https://noiriel.wordpress.com/2019/09/18/le-grand-remplacement-reflexions-sur-la-fabrique-des-discours-de-haine/>.

22 Drumont, *La France Juive*, 3–137.

23 Maurice Barrès, "Les Etudes Nationalistes au Quartier Latin," [Nationalist Studies in the Latin Quarter] *Le Journal*, February 15, 1900, accessed July 8, 2023, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7625225g/f1.item.r=%22grand%20remplacement%22.zoom#>.

24 Barrès, "Les Etudes Nationalistes au Quartier Latin."

25 Barrès, "Les Etudes Nationalistes au Quartier Latin."

This rhetoric of lethal invasion by foreign bodies resonated with the broader nationalist landscape found in France at the time. For instance, nationalist writer Emile Driant wrote in 1894 and 1905 two novels – *L'invasion noire* [The Black Invasion] and *L'invasion jaune* [The Yellow Invasion].²⁶ Both accounts depicted a foreign military invasion of France and Europe – by sub-Saharan Muslim populations in the former and Asian populations in the latter – symbolising the fear of national eradication by racialised Others.

The idea of a “replacement” of indigenous French people by alien populations continued to develop during the interwar period in France and, as Patrick Weil notes, appeared rather complete by the end of the 1920s.²⁷ An op-ed of the then-director of the newspaper *Le Figaro* François Coty published in August 1927 is illustrative of this.²⁸ Vehemently opposing a new nationality law designed to boost naturalisations, Coty accused an “occult government” of having “decided to replace the French race by another race”.²⁹ By portraying that “replacement” as orchestrated by a third party, Coty shifted the focus of the conspiracy from a racialised Other to an imagined enabler who consciously planned and executed the annihilation of French people.

The Intellectual Seeds of the American Eugenics Movement

In the United States, during the Reconstruction era, the end of slavery, combined with attempts to legitimise Black people’s political rights, disrupted the racial boundaries and hierarchies that had prevailed until that point.³⁰ The advent of institutional segregation and the Jim Crow era aimed to limit the possibilities of Black political emancipation. According to Alexander Barder, it was also meant to prevent unregulated social contact out of fear of sexual equality and its imagined consequences on “White America”.³¹ This context proved fertile ground for the development of demographic conspiracy theories. While the French framed the existential threat posed by racialised Others mostly in terms of invasion and substitution, this American strain, which originated in “race science” and eugenics, mainly focused on miscegenation, or race-mixing.³² Indeed, *eugenics* refers to a set of beliefs and practices which aims to improve the innate “quality” of humanity, notably via the control of hereditary factors.³³ It is a form of biological determinism premised on the idea that behavioural commonalities and socio-economic differences are the result of inherited features.³⁴ From a eugenics perspective, the menace was therefore portrayed as emerging from the introduction of genetically “inferior” bodies that would alter the alleged quality of the “White race” and lead to its extinction.

26 Elio Panese, “Des Mots aux Actes. L’Extrême Droite et la ‘Théorie du Grand Remplacement’,” [From Words to Action. The Far Right and the ‘Great Replacement Theory’] *Archipel* 43 (December 2021): 49–57.

27 Patrick Weil and Nicolas Truong, *Le Sens de la République: Essai*, [The Sense of the Republic: Essay] (Paris: Grasset, 2015).

28 François Coty, “La France aux Autres!,” [France to Others!] *Le Figaro*, August 23, 1927, accessed July 11, 2023, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k295236v/f1.item.r=vermine.zoom#>.

29 Coty, “La France aux Autres!”

30 Alexander D. Barder, *Global Race War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 234.

31 Barder, *Global Race War*, 234.

32 Adam Serwer, “White Nationalism’s Deep American Roots,” *The Atlantic*, April 2019, accessed July 12, 2023, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/04/adam-serwer-madison-grant-white-nationalism/583258/>; Rosa Schwartzburg, “No, There Isn’t a White Genocide,” *Jacobin*, April 9, 2019, accessed July 12, 2023, <https://jacobin.com/2019/09/white-genocide-great-replacement-theory>.

33 Kenneth L. Garver and Bettylee Garver, “Eugenics: Past, Present and the Future,” *American Journal of Human Genetics* 49 (May 1991): 1109.

34 Marius Turda, “Race, Science, and Eugenics in the Twentieth Century,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, ed. Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 62–63.

Economist and anthropogeographer William Ripley was among the early thinkers whose ideas later influenced the development of demographic conspiracy theories in the country.³⁵ In 1899, he wrote *The Races of Europe*, in which he argued there were only three European races: Teutonic (which includes Anglo-Saxon), Alpine and Mediterranean.³⁶ He subsequently claimed the racial superiority of the Anglo-Saxon over other groups.³⁷ More importantly, Ripley endorsed the belief that race-mixing causes the resurgence of ancestral, allegedly less evolved, biological features.³⁸ According to Charles Alexander, this idea attracted racist American circles, where people began to fear that further intermixing of racial groups would lead to a regression towards more “primitive” forms of being.³⁹ At the time, the context of mass immigration spurred some American eugenicists to view immigrants as an existential threat.⁴⁰ In 1901, sociologist and eugenicist Edward Ross coined the term *race suicide* to describe the perceived danger of White Americans’ declining natality compared to allegedly inferior immigrant groups.⁴¹

This combination of hostility to miscegenation and fear of foreign subversion was particularly salient in the thoughts of Madison Grant.⁴² A zoologist and eugenicist, he published *The Passing of the Great Race* in 1916.⁴³ Building on Ripley’s ideas on race, Grant referred to “Teutons” as “Nordics” and asserted their superiority over other ethnic groups. He claimed that, despite their dominance, the Nordics were heading towards voluntary “race suicide” because of social and demographic changes. In particular, he believed that miscegenation with allegedly inferior immigrant stocks would lead to the extinction of “White America” through reversion to “lower racial types”.⁴⁴ Accusing democracy of favouring race-mixing, Grant advocated for complete racial segregation to prevent “contamination” by “inferior” races.⁴⁵

Grant did not write from the margins. *The Passing of the Great Race* was a tremendous success that both resonated with and further shaped existential fears of large segments of the American society of the time. The book also found admirers in the American elite. It was praised by US presidents including Teddy Roosevelt, Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge, and helped in rallying nativist congressmen to pass major anti-immigration policies in the early 1920s.⁴⁶ Grant’s book also gained international attention and was translated into several languages.⁴⁷ It had a particular resonance in Germany, where it influenced the ideological formation of Adolf Hitler.

35 Charles C. Alexander, “Prophet of American Racism: Madison Grant and the Nordic Myth,” *Phylon* 23, no. 1 (1962): 77.

36 William Z. Ripley, *The Races of Europe: A Sociological Study* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1899).

37 Heather Winlow, “Mapping Moral Geographies: W. Z. Ripley’s *Races of Europe* and the United States,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96, no. 1 (March 2006): 133.

38 William Z. Ripley, “The European Population of the United States,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 38 (July–December 1908): 234.

39 Alexander, “Prophet of American Racism,” 77.

40 Serwer, “White Nationalism’s Deep American Roots.”

41 Edward A. Ross, “The Causes of Race Superiority,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 18 (July 1901): 88.

42 Alexander, “Prophet of American Racism,” 74–75.

43 Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race, or the Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2nd edition, 1918).

44 Alexander, “Prophet of American Racism,” 78.

45 Alexander, “Prophet of American Racism,” 79–82.

46 Serwer, “White Nationalism’s Deep American Roots.”

47 Alexander, “Prophet of American Racism,” 77.

The Influence of Nazi Germany

During his time in prison following the 1923 Beer Hall Putsch attempt in Munich, Hitler expanded his knowledge of eugenics and engaged with the writings of American eugenicists. *The Passing of the Great Race* made such an impression on him that he wrote a letter to Grant in the early 1930s in which he called the book “his Bible”.⁴⁸ The influence of Grant’s doctrine was later reflected in Hitler’s obsession with racial purity and the survival of the Aryan race.⁴⁹

In Hitler’s view, the world was divided into races constantly competing for the planet’s limited resources. This interracial struggle was the very expression of human nature and international politics.⁵⁰ The survival of the “Aryan race” was thus central to Nazi military conquests and racial policy. This is notably illustrated by the project for the creation of *Lebensraum* – a self-sufficient racial homogenous space to secure the future of the race.⁵¹ The antisemitic conspiratorial element, representing Jews as a racialised threat, catalysed the need for survival in Nazi ideology. Akin to Drumont, Hitler saw Jews as a powerful invasive species determined to eradicate what it invaded.⁵² As Timothy Snyder notes, Jews were not a race in Hitler’s mind.⁵³ He viewed them instead as a “counter-race”, or as Barder puts it, an “antithetical element to [Hitler’s] racial ontology”.⁵⁴ In other words, Hitler treated anything that contravened his racist logic of nature as a product of deadly and secret Jewish dominion. Ideas such as antiracism and universalism were inherently “Jewish” in that they threatened the existence of racial communities by denying their right to fight for survival.⁵⁵ Germans, as members of the “superior” race, would therefore always be in danger unless they defeated that imagined Jewish power.⁵⁶

Hitler’s obsession over the preservation of the “Aryan race” – associated with the continued existential threat posed by a diffuse, supernatural, Jewish entity – influenced the formation of demographic conspiracy theories. Neo-Nazis in the West revisited this idea after World War II and produced various conspiratorial accounts of racial extermination, often placing Jews at their centre.

Post-War neo-Nazis and the Centrality of the “Jewish Plot”

The end of the war marked the beginning of a new era, in which supporters of the Nazi regime in the West perpetuated and renovated the antisemitic narrative of racial extinction and survival developed by Hitler. In France, neo-Nazi René Binet wished to federate European nationalists to combat what he saw as “a new occupation” instigated by Jews, namely the deadly invasion of the continent by migrants.⁵⁷ This pan-European claim resulted in Binet relinquishing classic

48 Edwin Black, “Hitler’s Debt to America,” *The Guardian*, February 5, 2004, accessed July 22 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2004/feb/06/race.usa>.

49 Black, “Hitler’s Debt to America.”

50 Barder, *Global Race War*, 126–127.

51 “Lebensraum,” Holocaust Encyclopedia, *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, accessed July 24, 2023, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/lebensraum>.

52 Timothy Snyder, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (London: Vintage, 2015), 4.

53 Snyder, *Black Earth*, 5.

54 Barder, *Global Race War*, 127.

55 Snyder, *Black Earth*, 5.

56 Snyder, *Black Earth*, 6.

57 Nicolas Lebourg, “René Binet, The French Father of White Nationalism,” *Illiberal Studies Program*, November 2, 2020, accessed July 27, 2023, <https://www.illiberalism.org/rene-binet-the-french-father-of-white-nationalism/#17>.

nationalism and Aryanism for the notion of “White race”.⁵⁸ It allowed him to expand his eligible in-group to European groups previously despised by the Nazis, such as Slavic people. Additionally, he attributed to Jews the ultimate responsibility of the ongoing collapse he describes, accusing them of orchestrating the miscegenation – and thus, extermination – of White Europeans. Binet provided a proto-articulation of the “White Genocide” conspiracy theory as early as December 1948. Writing in the nationalist periodical *L'Unité*, he accused “the Zionists” – the embodiment of an imagined Jewish power – of “the crime of genocide because they claim to be imposing on us a crossbreeding that would be the death and destruction of our race and civilisation”.⁵⁹

In subsequent years, the idea that immigration and race-mixing were the result of a Jewish plot – which inspired Bowers’ attack more than half a century later – continued to develop in extreme-right movements in the West.⁶⁰ In the US, for instance, the National Socialist White People’s Party (NSWPP) described governmental efforts to implement desegregation busing policies in terms of “genocide” and “race-murder by race-mixing” in a 1972 issue of its periodical *White Power*.⁶¹ The text included violent antisemitic language, accusing Jews of being “mixmasters” bringing about the eradication of “White America” via the busing campaign.⁶² While neo-Nazis viewed Jews as the force driving White people to miscegenation and placed them at the heart of their concerns, other streams of thoughts in the Western far right focused directly on immigration.

The Focus on Immigration

In the decades that followed World War II, Binet influenced elements of the French far right that continued his rhetoric of “White Genocide” by race-mixing. In particular, the periodical *Europe Action*, founded by Dominique Venner in 1963, was instrumental in perpetuating his ideas.⁶³ There, Venner and Alain de Benoist claimed the superiority of the “White race” and viewed miscegenation as a path towards annihilation. Out of fear of race-mixing, *Europe Action* vehemently opposed Algerian immigration to France in the 1960s and called for the forced expulsion of foreigners from the country. An article published in April 1964 clearly articulated this existential fear in genocidal terms, asserting that “systematic miscegenation is nothing but slow genocide”.⁶⁴

The 1960s also marked the introduction of discourses of “replacement” into post-war mainstream politics in the West. In 1968, in Birmingham, former Health Secretary of the United Kingdom Enoch Powell delivered his infamous “Rivers of Blood” speech.⁶⁵ There, opposing

58 Lebourg, “René Binet.”

59 Lebourg, “René Binet.”

60 Dominique Albertini, “Le ‘Grand Remplacement’. Totem Extrême,” [The ‘Great Replacement.’ Extreme Totem Pole] *Libération*, October 13, 2015, accessed July 28, 2023, https://www.liberation.fr/france/2015/10/13/le-grand-remplacement-totem-extreme_1403361/.

61 “White Power. The Newspaper of White Revolution, No. 24,” [National Socialist White Peoples Party publication] *Social Welfare History Image Portal*, February 1972, accessed July 28, 2023, <https://images.socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/items/show/270>.

62 “White Power.”

63 Stéphane François and Nicolas Lebourg, “Dominique Venner et le renouvellement du Racisme,” [Dominique Venner and the Renewal of Racism] *Fragement sur les Temps Présents*, May 23, 2013, accessed August 4, 2023, <https://tempspresents.com/2013/05/23/dominique-venner-renouvellement-racisme-stephane-francois-nicolas-lebourg/#sdfootnote13sym>.

64 François and Lebourg, “Dominique Venner et le renouvellement du Racisme.”

65 Enoch Powell, “Fifty Years On: Read Enoch Powell Divisive Rivers of Blood Speech,” *Sky News*, April 20, 2018, accessed August 5, 2023, <https://news.sky.com/story/fifty-years-since-enoch-powells-rivers-of-blood-speech-11338513>.

the newly adopted Race Relations Act, he deployed a similar rhetoric to today's "Great Replacement" in his portrayal of the future of the country.⁶⁶ Suggesting that parts of England would be "occupied" by unassimilable immigrants and their descendants by the end of the 20th century, Powell accused immigration of fragmenting English society and causing the collapse of the country.⁶⁷ He called for drastic limitations on non-White immigration to the UK – particularly from the Commonwealth – and encouraged the "re-emigration" of immigrants.⁶⁸

Similar discourses continued to resonate in France as well. In 1973, Jean Raspail published *Le camps des saints* [The Camp of the Saints], a dystopian novel filled with anxiety about the collapse of Western civilisations due to immigration.⁶⁹ The plot narrates how masses of poor Indians sail to Europe, aspiring for Western standards of living. Throughout the book, Raspail portrays migrants as primitive hordes characterised by their high natality and refusal to adapt to Western laws and customs.⁷⁰ This eventually leads to a demographic shift which brings about the cultural and ethnic subversion of Europe and the collapse of the West. Raspail's fictional account thus illustrates the narrative of "replacement" articulated in Powell's speech. For Elio Panese, its main contribution to demographic conspiracy theories lies in the introduction of the claim that the demographic changes caused by the foreign "invasion" are the product of a deliberate plot.⁷¹ In Raspail's account, this transformation is fomented by progressive forces in the name of a cosmopolitanism that is doomed to be fatal. As such, *Le camps des saints* notably influenced the inventor of the term "Great Replacement", Renaud Camus, who applied Raspail's lens to 21st century France.⁷²

The Crystalisation of the "White Genocide" Conspiracy Theory

It is in the American White supremacist movement that the "White Genocide" conspiracy theory emerged in the 1980s. David Lane, a neo-Nazi activist, promoted the idea that White people were heading towards eradication and that Jews were the driving force behind that process.⁷³ Interestingly, his first pamphlet, "The Death of the White Race", conflated discourses of "replacement" with fear of race-mixing to portray this existential threat. There, he pointed to the danger of "lower-than-replacement White birth rate" combined with "high non-White birth rate" and mixed-race marriages.⁷⁴ In 1985, Lane was imprisoned for a string of federal offences as a member of the terrorist group "The Order".⁷⁵ While in prison, he produced writings that were disseminated across White supremacist circles.

In 1988, Lane wrote the "White Genocide Manifesto", an essay in which he revisited the argument found in prior neo-Nazi discourses

66 Barder, *Global Race War*, 217.

67 Powell, "Fifty Years On."

68 Barder, *Global Race War*, 218.

69 Jean Raspail, *Le Camps des Saints* [The Camp of the Saints] (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1973).

70 Barder, *Global Race War*, 222.

71 Panese, "Des Mots aux Actes," 47.

72 Marc-Olivier Bherer, "Raspail, Maurras, Drumont... Des écrivains pour légitimer une parole raciste condamnée par la loi," [Raspail, Maurras, Drumont... Writers who Legitimise Racist Speech Condemned by Law] *Le Monde*, January 28, 2022, accessed September 25, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2022/01/28/raspail-maurras-drumont-des-ecrivains-pour-legitimer-une-parole-raciste-condamnee-par-la-loi_6111329_3232.html.

73 "David Lane," *Southern Poverty Law Centre*, accessed August 10, 2023, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/david-lane>.

74 David Lane, "The Death of the White Race," *The Collection of the Works of David Lane*, READ database.

75 Paul Jackson, "White Genocide," in *The Routledge History of Genocide*, ed. Cathie Carmichael and Richard C. Maguire (London: Routledge, 2015), 213.

that White people are subject to a deliberate attempt to eradicate them.⁷⁶ Consisting of 14 points, the manifesto claims that all Western governments are controlled by a “Zionist” conspiracy – a conspiracy known as the “Zionist Occupation Government” (ZOG) – which stands behind the genocidal plot.⁷⁷ Lane accused Jews of imposing miscegenation of White and non-White, homosexuality, and other practices he believed would make White people an “extinct species” over time.⁷⁸ To prevent this scenario from happening, White people should commit to the survival of the race and endorse Lane’s “14 Words” slogan: “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for White Children.”⁷⁹ The manifesto aimed to mobilise White people by emphasising the existential imperative of the struggle against the forces of evil embodied by Jews.⁸⁰

Lane’s manifesto structured and labelled conspiratorial narratives of genocide against White people and further established Jews as the cause of all threats. This idea influenced White supremacist movements across the world. In particular, the number 14 – representing both Lane’s credo and the number of points in the manifesto – became a classic cult sign of ideological identification and a conveyer of the “White Genocide” theory in White supremacist circles.⁸¹ In the years that followed, additional demographic conspiracy theories crystallised, accusing other racialised groups of bringing about the destruction of Western civilisations. Notably, the conspiracy theory known as *Eurabia* was influential in bringing Muslim populations to the centre of the far and extreme right’s existential concerns.

Eurabia and the Shift to Islam

Published in 2005, the book *Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis* proposed a narrative that, in many regards, recalls Raspail’s *Le camps des saints*.⁸² In the book, writing under the pen name Bat Ye’or (in Hebrew, daughter of the Nile), British-Swiss author Gisèle Littman, who was born in Egypt to European Jewish parents, claims to have uncovered a plot to turn Europe into Eurabia – an imagined reality in which Muslims subvert the continent. Littman argues that Muslims would then impose the rule of Shari’a law and force non-Muslims into a state of submission.⁸³ According to Littman, the conspiracy began in the early 1970s when the European Economic Community (EEC) and Arab League states launched the Euro-Arab Dialogue (EAD), a platform to enhance multilateral cooperation.⁸⁴ She believes that the EAD and other organisations were the force behind the ongoing “Islamicisation” of Europe which, she argues, was progressively becoming a political satellite of the Arab and Muslim world.⁸⁵ Akin to *Le camps des saints*, *Eurabia* explains the foreign subversion of Europe in both cultural and demographic terms. Immigrants are portrayed as bearing a monolithic and unchangeable culture that makes them unable and/or unwilling

76 David Lane, “White Genocide Manifesto,” *The Collection of the Works of David Lane*, READ database.

77 Lane, “White Genocide Manifesto”; “Z.O.G. (Zionist Occupied Government)”, *Anti-Defamation League*, accessed September 4, 2023, <https://extremismterms.adl.org/glossary/zog-zionist-occupied-government>.

78 Lane, “White Genocide Manifesto.”

79 Lane, “White Genocide Manifesto.”

80 George Michael, “David Lane and the Fourteen Words,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 10, no. 1 (July 2009): 49.

81 Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 269–270.

82 Bat Ye’or, *Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005).

83 Zia-Ebrahimi, “When the Elders of Zion Relocated to Eurabia,” 314.

84 Zia-Ebrahimi, “When the Elders of Zion Relocated to Eurabia,” 324.

85 Eirikur Bergmann, “The Eurabia Conspiracy Theory,” in *Europe: Continent of Conspiracies*, ed. Andreas Onnerfors and André Krouwel (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2021), 39.

to adapt to Europe. This would inevitably lead to substitutions of local cultures by Islam and, eventually, to the collapse of the continent.⁸⁶

Littman's conspiracy theory removed the figure of Jews from the conspiratorial equation and erected the figure of Muslims at its centre instead. This narrative echoed ideas that circulated elsewhere at the time. In particular, writer Oriana Fallaci articulated similar arguments in the early 2000s, arguing that Muslims were subjugating Europe through mass immigration combined with high birth rates.⁸⁷ *Eurabia* nevertheless significantly contributed to bringing conspiratorial concerns about Muslims to the fore of European politics. Its influence on far-right populist discourses denouncing the alleged Islamisation of the continent is still present today.⁸⁸ Littman's book also helped to inspire violent acts. In July 2011, Norwegian terrorist Anders Behring Breivik explicitly referred to *Eurabia* in his manifesto as one of the core ideas prompting his attacks.⁸⁹

The “Kalergi Plan” Conspiracy Theory

In 2005, the year of the publication of *Eurabia*, another demographic conspiracy theory – this time, rooted in Lane's “White Genocide” – came into existence. In a self-published book called *Rassismus legal? Halt dem Kalergi Plan!* [translated to: Practical Idealism? The Kalergi Plan to Destroy European Peoples], Austrian Holocaust denier and neo-Nazi activist Gerd Honsik claimed to have discovered a secret plot to eradicate White Europeans.⁹⁰ The conspiracy included a combination of mass immigration, integration and race-mixing campaigns deliberately orchestrated by Jewish elites in Europe.⁹¹ Akin to Bat Ye'or, Honsik anchored his conspiracy theory in contemporary European history and rewrote past events to underpin his theory. According to him, this plan was produced by Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi, an Austrian-Japanese politician and early promoter of European integration.⁹² In 1925, Coudenhove-Kalergi published *Practical Idealism* in which he argues that races as we knew them were doomed to vanish and that miscegenation was the future of mankind.⁹³ Nazis and neo-Nazis later interpreted his assertion as a statement of intent which they associated with his support for a broad political union in Europe.⁹⁴ This combination gave birth to the “Kalergi Plan” under Honsik's pen decades later. Honsik actively promoted his conspiracy theory, producing hundreds of newsletters and open letters in different languages, alerting politicians and followers of the alleged plot.⁹⁵ Over time, the “Kalergi Plan” gained popularity and became an increasingly common reference in extreme-right circles.

⁸⁶ Zia-Ebrahimi, “When the Elders of Zion Relocated to Eurabia,” 325–326.

⁸⁷ Bergmann, “The Eurabia Conspiracy Theory,” 39.

⁸⁸ Zia-Ebrahimi, “When the Elders of Zion Relocated to Eurabia,” 329–330.

⁸⁹ Bergmann, “The Eurabia Conspiracy Theory,” 36.

⁹⁰ “Kalergi Plan,” *Conspiracy Watch*, March 13, 2021, accessed August 11, 2023, <https://www.conspiracywatch.info/notice/plan-kalergi>.

⁹¹ David Lawrence, “For Britain and the ‘White Genocide’ Conspiracy Theory,” *Hope Not Hate*, April 18, 2019, accessed August 11, 2023, <https://hopenothate.org.uk/2019/04/18/exposed-for-britain-and-white-genocide-conspiracy-theory/>.

⁹² Lawrence, “For Britain and the ‘White Genocide’ Conspiracy Theory.”

⁹³ Jared Holt, “TPUSA Shares Photo with Visual Nod to ‘White Genocide’ Conspiracy Theory,” *Right Wing Watch*, April 12, 2019, accessed August 12, 2023, <https://www.rightwingwatch.org/post/tpusa-shares-photo-with-visual-nod-to-white-genocide-conspiracy-theory/>.

⁹⁴ Luiz Romero, “No, There is No ‘Kalergi Plan’ to Replace Europeans with Migrants,” *PolitiFact*, January 24, 2023, accessed August 12, 2023, <https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2022/jan/24/tiktok-posts/no-there-no-kalergi-plan-replace-europeans-migrant/>.

⁹⁵ Romero, “No, There is No ‘Kalergi Plan’ to Replace Europeans with Migrants.”

Renaud Camus and the “Great Replacement”

The term “Great Replacement” was coined in 2011 by French writer Renaud Camus to describe the alleged massive invasion of immigrants on French territory.⁹⁶ In Camus’ writing, Jews are no longer the primary concern in the alleged eradication of French culture and civilisation. Like Raspail or Powell, the figures of Muslim and African immigrants embody the threat of disappearance by “replacement”.⁹⁷ Camus’ “Great Replacement”, in contrast with Lane’s White Genocide’s racial framing, articulates the demographic threat in terms of cultural subversion.⁹⁸ For him, social inclusion is tied to cultural identity. Only by endorsing and immersing in a particular cultural identity can one truly integrate within it. However, in a line of arguments that echoes Powell, Raspail and Bat Ye’or, Camus accuses Muslims and Africans immigrants of being unwilling or incapable of doing so.⁹⁹ As a result, he stresses they can only “conquer, submerge and replace” the French nation.¹⁰⁰

Beyond mere criticism of ethnic and cultural demographic changes occurring in the country, Camus’ “Great Replacement” theory exaggerates these transformations, presenting them as inevitably deadly.¹⁰¹ Indeed, Camus views cultural features as transmittable commodities which can be passed from one generation to the next within a chain of shared historical heritage.¹⁰² The threat of cultural subversion therefore includes the descendants of Muslims and African immigrants who, he believes, would perpetuate their parents’ inability to adapt to French culture. Additionally, similarly to *Eurabia*, Camus imagines this threat as originating in features that are “constitutive of Islam” and commands Muslims to engage in further conquests.¹⁰³ Arguing that these populations display soaring birth rates, he claims that they will inevitably supplant “indigenous” French people over time.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, Camus stresses that this alleged “replacement” is the fruit of a concerted and concealed effort, accusing “replacist” elites of supporting and encouraging the process.¹⁰⁵

The “Great Replacement” offers an efficient conspiratorial framework of demographic replacement narratives focusing on Islam and the Global South. In recent years, it has significantly influenced far-right populist discourses across the world by constructing and amplifying the theme of cultural subversion.¹⁰⁶ It also gained traction in extreme-right circles, where it inspired terrorist attacks. Notably, Australian terrorist Brenton Tarrant used “The Great Replacement” as the title of the manifesto he uploaded prior to the Christchurch mosques shootings in 2019.¹⁰⁷

96 Renaud Camus, *Le Grand Remplacement* [The Great Replacement] (self-published, 2012).

97 Barder, *Global Race War*, 226.

98 Barder, *Global Race War*, 227.

99 Barder, *Global Race War*, 227.

100 Camus, *Le Grand Remplacement*, 20.

101 Valérie Igounet and Rudy Reichstadt, “Le ‘Grand Remplacement’ Est-il un Concept Complotiste?,” [Is the ‘Great Replacement a Conspiratorial Concept?], *Fondation Jean Jaurès*, September 24, 2018, accessed October 3, 2023, <https://www.jean-jaures.org/publication/le-grand-remplacement-est-il-un-concept-complotiste/>.

102 Camus, *Le Grand Remplacement*, 20.

103 Camus, *Le Grand Remplacement*, 41.

104 Camus, *Le Grand Remplacement*, 40.

105 Camus, *Le Grand Remplacement*, 36–37, 61.

106 Steve Rose, “A Deadly Ideology: How the ‘Great Replacement Theory’ Went Mainstream,” *The Guardian*, June 8, 2022, accessed August 16, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/08/a-deadly-ideology-how-the-great-replacement-theory-went-mainstream>.

107 Matthew Kriner, Meghan Conroy, Alex Newhouse, and Jonathan Lewis, “Understanding Accelerationist Narratives: The Great Replacement Theory,” *Global Network on Extremism and Technology*, May 30, 2022, accessed July 4, 2023, <https://gnet-research.org/2022/05/30/understanding-accelerationist-narratives-the-great-replacement-theory/>.

The “South African Farmers” Theory

Demographic conspiracy theories related to violence against White farmers have emerged in South Africa. There, attacks on White-owned farms and accusations of hostility to Whites made against some politicians have encouraged the rise of a local variant of “White Genocide” narratives.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, since 2007, websites reporting attacks on White farmers have begun labelling them as “genocide”, often suspecting governmental involvement in these acts.¹⁰⁹

While these accusations have fallen flat, far-right personalities in South Africa and abroad have actively promoted this narrative.¹¹⁰ It spread worldwide in 2018, when Fox News presenter Tucker Carlson talked about the alleged plight of South African White farmers on his show. This prompted a tweet from then-US President Donald Trump calling for investigations into “expropriations and the large scale killing of farmers”.¹¹¹ Reports of attacks on South African farmers particularly resonated among White supremacists, for whom the years of White rule in South Africa and Zimbabwe are viewed with nostalgia.¹¹² There, the narrative is used as a rhetorical device that spurs racial existential anxiety by describing what happens when a White minority is ruled by a non-White majority.

As this section demonstrates, discursive strains of racial and cultural anxiety interlaced and merged throughout history to produce various conspiratorial accounts of extermination by foreign bodies. This intellectual tradition profoundly influenced White supremacists who turned demographic conspiracy theories into an important component of their narratives. At the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, White nationalists chanted “Jews will not replace us”, combining some of Lane’s accusations against Jews with Camus’ rhetoric of “replacement”.¹¹³ The following year, Robert Bowers slaughtered eleven people at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh because he believed Jews instigated a plot to eradicate White people through immigration. Archives of his social media activity show the clear impact of demographic conspiracy theories on Bowers’ perceived reality.

108 Justin Ward, “The Dangerous Myth of ‘White Genocide’ in South Africa,” *Southern Poverty Law Centre*, August 23, 2018, accessed August 18, 2023, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/08/23/dangerous-myth-white-genocide-south-africa>.

109 Joellen Pretorius, “‘Dubula Ibhunu’ (Shoot the Boer): A Psycho-Political Analysis of Farm Attacks in South Africa,” *Psychology in Society* 47 (2014): 23.

110 Ward, “The Dangerous Myth of ‘White Genocide’ in South Africa”.

111 Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), “I have asked Secretary of State @SecPompeo to closely study the South Africa land and farm seizures and expropriations and the large scale killing of farmers. ‘South African Government is now seizing land from white farmers. @TuckerCarlson @FoxNews’,” *Twitter*, August 23, 2018, https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1032454567152246785?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etwetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1032454567152246785%7Ctwgr%5E1c363fd6b48d18650c93b1693d1dd0a218143c13%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.bbc.com%2Fnews%2Fworld-africa-45282088.

112 Dan Murphy, “Why Would an American White Supremacist be Fond of Rhodesia?,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 18, 2015, accessed August 19, 2023, <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Security-Watch/Backchannels/2015/0618/Why-would-an-American-white-supremacist-be-fond-of-Rhodesia>.

113 Elle Reeve, “Charlottesville: Race and Terror,” *VICE News*, August 15, 2017, accessed August 19, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P54sP0Nlugg>.

3 Demographic Conspiracy Theories in Robert Bowers' Online Discourse

In the months leading up to the Tree of Life shooting, Robert Bowers was active online, primarily on the social media platform Gab.¹¹⁴ Gab was developed as a “free speech” alternative to Twitter and Facebook, and swiftly gained traction in extreme-right circles, becoming a haven for a range of violent extremist content.¹¹⁵ There, Bowers shared hundreds of posts over the ten months prior to the attack.¹¹⁶ He also engaged with influential figures associated with the American White nationalist “alt-right”.¹¹⁷ Records of his activity are rife with virulent antisemitism and demographic conspiracy beliefs.

While the platform deactivated Bowers' account in the wake of the attack, available archives offer an invaluable insight into his social world. As Karen Douglas and Robbie Sutton suggest, conspiracy theories do not only represent social realities; they also have the capacity to shape them.¹¹⁸ They offer alternative – and creative – interpretations of reality and are highly communicable. In so doing, they structure the social world by identifying and constructing communities of interests, such as the perpetrators and the victims of the plot. Conspiracy theories are thus intrinsically generative of social realities as they contain the seeds of social categorisations that can provide the basis of shared identities, goals and actions.¹¹⁹

This section will dive into Bowers' records on Gab and assess the influence of demographic conspiracy theories on his online discourse. In particular, it will examine their role in shaping the figure of “Jews” as agents of death determined to eradicate the “White race”, a central motive of Bowers' attack.

The Essentialisation of “Jews” as an Evil and Ubiquitous Power

Bowers' posts against Jews on Gab revolved first and foremost around two ideas that are common to antisemitic conspiracy theories: the demonisation of Jews and their extraordinary agency.¹²⁰ Throughout his feed, Bowers represented Jews as a homogeneous and racialised

¹¹⁴ Alex Amend, “Analyzing a Terrorist's Social Media Manifesto: The Pittsburgh Synagogue Shooter's Posts on Gab,” *Southern Poverty Law Centre*, October 28, 2018, accessed August 21, 2023, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/10/28/analyzing-terrorists-social-media-manifesto-pittsburgh-synagogue-shooters-posts-gab>.

¹¹⁵ David Thiel and Miles McCain, “Gabufacturing Dissent: An In-Depth Analysis of Gab,” *Stanford Internet Observatory*, June 1, 2022, accessed August 21, 2023, <https://purl.stanford.edu/ns280ry2029>.

¹¹⁶ Alex Amend and the Network Contagion Research Institute, “On Gab, Domestic Terrorist Robert Bowers Engaged with Several Influential Alt-Right Figures,” *Southern Poverty Law Centre*, November 1, 2018, accessed August 21, 2023, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/11/01/gab-domestic-terrorist-robert-bowers-engaged-several-influential-alt-right-figures>.

¹¹⁷ Amend, “On Gab, Domestic Terrorist Robert Bowers Engaged with Several Influential Alt-Right Figures.”

¹¹⁸ Karen M. Douglas and Robbie M. Sutton, “What Are Conspiracy Theories? A Definitional Approach to Their Correlates, Consequences, and Communication,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 74: 16.

¹¹⁹ Douglas and Sutton, “What Are Conspiracy Theories?”

¹²⁰ Kjetil Braut Simonsen, “Antisemitism and Conspiracism,” in *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories*, ed. Michael Butter and Peter Knight (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 357–367.

collective governed by an imagined essence which commands them to wage war against White people. This feature is particularly salient on his Gab profile where he wrote in the bio section that “Jews are the children of Satan”, a paraphrased quote which takes out of context the Bible verse John (8:44).¹²¹ The association of “Jews” with mythical evil figures is central to the process of antisemitic essentialisation. For Pierre-André Taguieff, this demonological antisemitism rests on two premises: Jews are responsible for humanity’s problems and their eradication represents the path to salvation.¹²² It substantiates conspiratorial accusations against Jews, turning the need to fight their alleged influence into a sacred duty.

Bowers’ belief in the inherent hostility of Jews appears in much of the content he shared on the platform. For instance, a couple of days before the attack, he reposted a satirical post mocking American Christian conservatives for their alleged support for Jews.¹²³ As a reply to an imaginary quote from Christians expressing their love for Jewish people, the post displayed a tweet from an alleged Jewish person displaying hostile views against non-Jews. In particular, the tweet argued that “Jews love persecution” as it provides them with a justification to conspire to “divide and conquer gentiles”.¹²⁴ In another post, Bowers shared accusations, made by popular neo-Nazi Gab account “Farmer General”, that Jews are behind the creation and actions of the Islamic State (IS).¹²⁵ The post includes the picture of an alleged “Jewish ritual murder”, accusing IS jihadists of collecting the blood of Christian girls on behalf of Jews.¹²⁶ The accusation that Jews sacrifice Christian children as part of a Passover ritual to purify their matzah – also known as “blood libel” – refers to an old antisemitic allegation that emerged in 12th century Europe.¹²⁷ Portraying Jews as religiously driven, blood-thirsty child murderers, it successfully diabolised Jews at the time. In Bowers’ post, “blood libel” is the link that connects the figure of the “Jew” with IS, a jihadist organisation which conducted terrorist attacks in the West. This combination further enhances the representation of Jews as demonic figures that should be fought and defeated. Bowers highlighted this idea in the post, suggesting that the revelation of the alleged link between Jews and IS would further make “White kids führerious”, a reference to Hitler and the Holocaust.

Not only did Bowers identify Jews as essentially evil, he also assigned them supernatural powers and the capacity to achieve their will. On his feed, Jews are portrayed as a deceitful entity which secretly rules world institutions. For instance, days before the attack, Bowers reposted a meme promoting the “Zionist Occupation Government” (ZOG) theory.¹²⁸ Entitled “The illusion of free choice”, it represents the political spectrum of democracy as a maze with two entrances: one marked “right” and the other “left”. Standing at one end is a cow representing the voters, who must pick one entrance as part of the

121 United States District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania. “Superseding Indictment,” no. 18–292; Jason Silverstein, “Robert Bowers, Pittsburgh Shooting Suspect, was Avid Poster of Anti-Semitic Content on Gab,” *CBS News*, October 28, 2018, accessed September 3, 2023 <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/jews-are-the-children-of-satan-john-8-44-danger-of-taking-biblical-passages-out-of-context/>.

122 Pierre-André Taguieff, “La Pensée Conspirationniste: Origines et Nouveaux Champs,” [Conspiratorial Thinking: Origins and New Perspectives] in *Les Rhétoriques de la Conspiration*, [The Rhetoric of Conspiracy] (Paris: CNRS, 2010), 296.

123 See Figure 1.

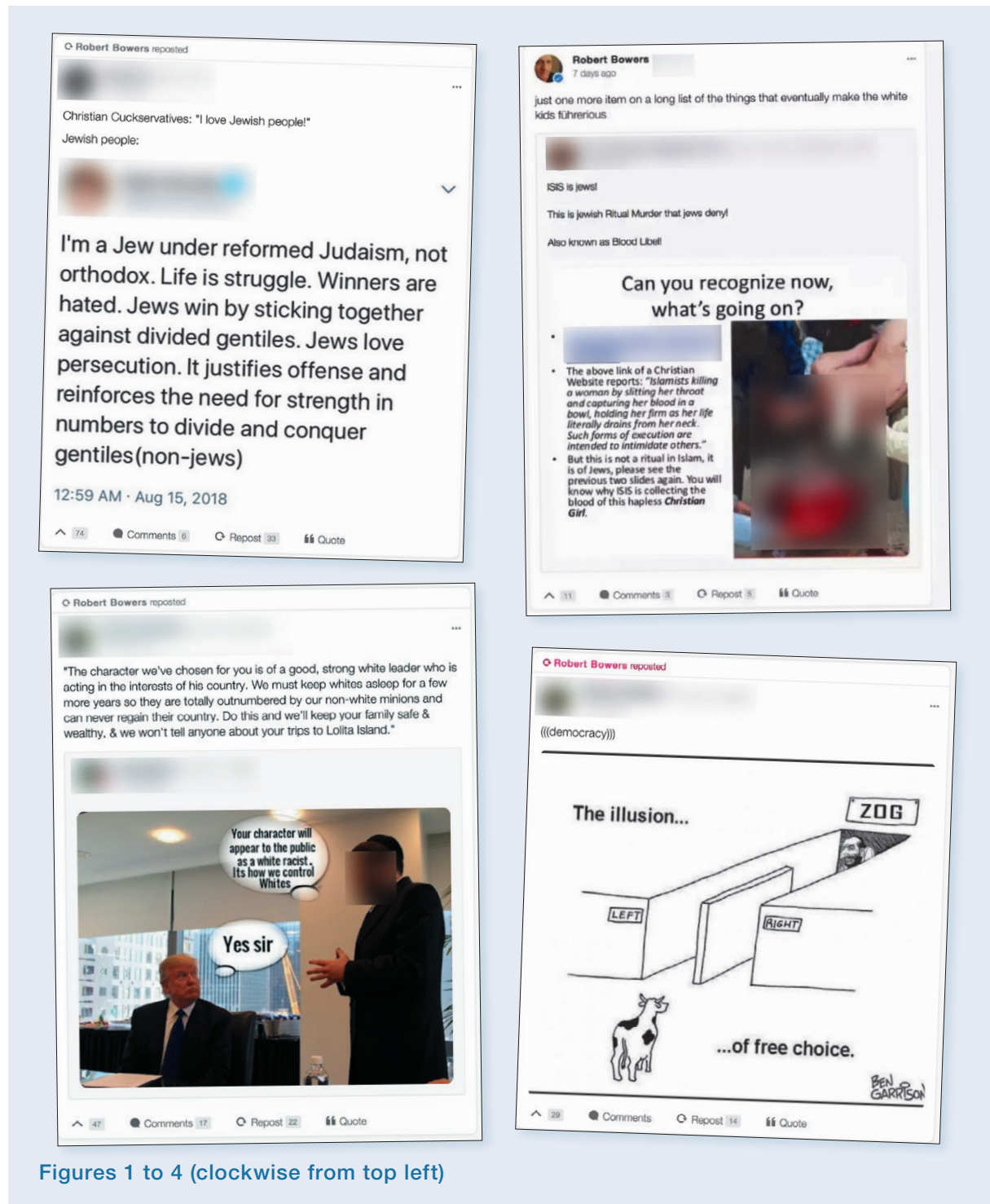
124 See Figure 1.

125 Rita Katz, “How ‘Screw Your Optics’ Became a Far-Right Rallying Cry,” *Foreign Policy*, October 22, 2022, accessed September 3, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/10/23/far-right-terrorism-white-supremacy-islamic-state/>.

126 See Figure 2.

127 James A. Arieti, “Magical Thinking in Medieval Anti-Semitism: Usury and the Blood Libel,” *Mediterranean Studies* 24, no. 2: 195–197.

128 See Figure 3.



Figures 1 to 4 (clockwise from top left)

democratic game. However, both entrances lead to ZOG, represented by the "happy merchant", an antisemitic caricature depicting a heavily stereotyped Jewish man greedily rubbing his hands together.¹²⁹ In another post, Bowers shared an image of then-US President Donald Trump apparently talking with a religious Jewish man.¹³⁰ There, the

¹²⁹ "The Happy Merchant," *Anti-Defamation League*, accessed August 24, 2023, <https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/happy-merchant>.

¹³⁰ See Figure 4.

Jewish man is giving Trump instructions, commanding him to appear as a “White racist” in order to keep White people under Jewish control and to continue to manipulate them.

As his posts show, Bowers imagined the existence of a malevolent and ubiquitous Jewish entity which shaped his social reality according to its interests. His feed was also rife with existential concerns surrounding the survival of the “White race” over the perceived threats of diversity and immigration in the US.



The Demographic Threat

Bowers’ online activity revealed his obsessive preoccupation with the imagined prospect of the White race’s disappearance in America due to the introduction of non-White populations in the country. This existential anxiety is illustrated in a post he shared promoting the “South African farmer” theory, showing an alleged South African White farmer lying on a hospital bed, severely injured.¹³¹ This theory amplifies Whites’ eradication anxiety by projecting the alleged fate that awaits White people if they cede control to non-Whites.¹³² These existential concerns made way for harsh opposition to the idea of diversity. Bowers, similarly to Madison Grant a century prior, equated diversity

¹³¹ See Figure 5.

¹³² Amend, “Analyzing a Terrorist’s Social Media Manifesto.”

with a path leading towards the genocide of White people. In one of his posts, he expressed this clearly, arguing that “diversity means chasing down the last white person”.¹³³

Consequently, Bowers viewed immigrants as evil figures and agents of chaos. Echoing Camus’ “Great Replacement”, he expressed in a post his satisfaction at seeing people calling migrants “invaders”.¹³⁴ Semantically, the term “invasion” entails an attempt to take control of a territory in large numbers, especially in a harmful or unwanted way.¹³⁵ By associating immigration with invasion, Bowers assigned a negative qualifier to migrants, which implies anxiety-inducing consequences such as deprivation of liberty and destruction. On Gab, Bowers also shared a post from another user calling asylum seekers from Honduras and El Salvador in the United States “illiterate brutal murderers”.¹³⁶ Using a terminology of “invasion” to describe this flow of migrants, the post provided alleged data from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) showing murder rates of several South American countries. The high numbers displayed, especially for Honduras and El Salvador, served as a basis for the essentialisation of South American migrants. There, they are depicted as unassimilable violent criminals whose integration would result in violence and instability.

Jewish People as Enablers of Death

In Bowers’ social world, the conjunction of a ubiquitous evil Jewish power with the existential threat of immigration established Jews as the enablers of the threat of eradication. The Jewish plot, central to Lane’s “White Genocide”, is combined with Bowers’ obsession with migrants and asylum seekers, which echoes Camus’ “Great Replacement”. Jews became the promoters and organisers of immigration to the US, which was often framed in terms of “invasion” on his feed. For instance, a post Bowers shared a week prior to the attack showed a picture of dark-skinned individuals seemingly getting on to a truck.¹³⁷ A shape resembling the Star of David, a symbol of Judaism, is visible on the front door of the truck. While this picture could have been taken anywhere and potentially manipulated, the comment suggested it was proof of Jewish involvement in the flow of migrants to the US. In another post, Bowers shared a meme which recalls the “Kalergi Plan” theory.¹³⁸ The post shows a cartoon of the European continent. A funnel in the colours of the European Union’s flag is pinned on to it. On top of it is a religious Jewish man pushing the whole African continent through the funnel. The idea that European institutions are deceitful entities controlled by Jews determined to destroy the continent via immigration is central to Honsik’s theory. While the image does not explicitly refer to the “Kalergi Plan”, Bowers seems to have been influenced, directly or indirectly, by its core ideas.

His concerns about immigration led Bowers to focus on the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), a Jewish American non-profit organisation which provides assistance to refugees around the world.¹³⁹ Throughout his feed, he depicted HIAS as the visible side

¹³³ See Figure 6.

¹³⁴ See Figure 7.

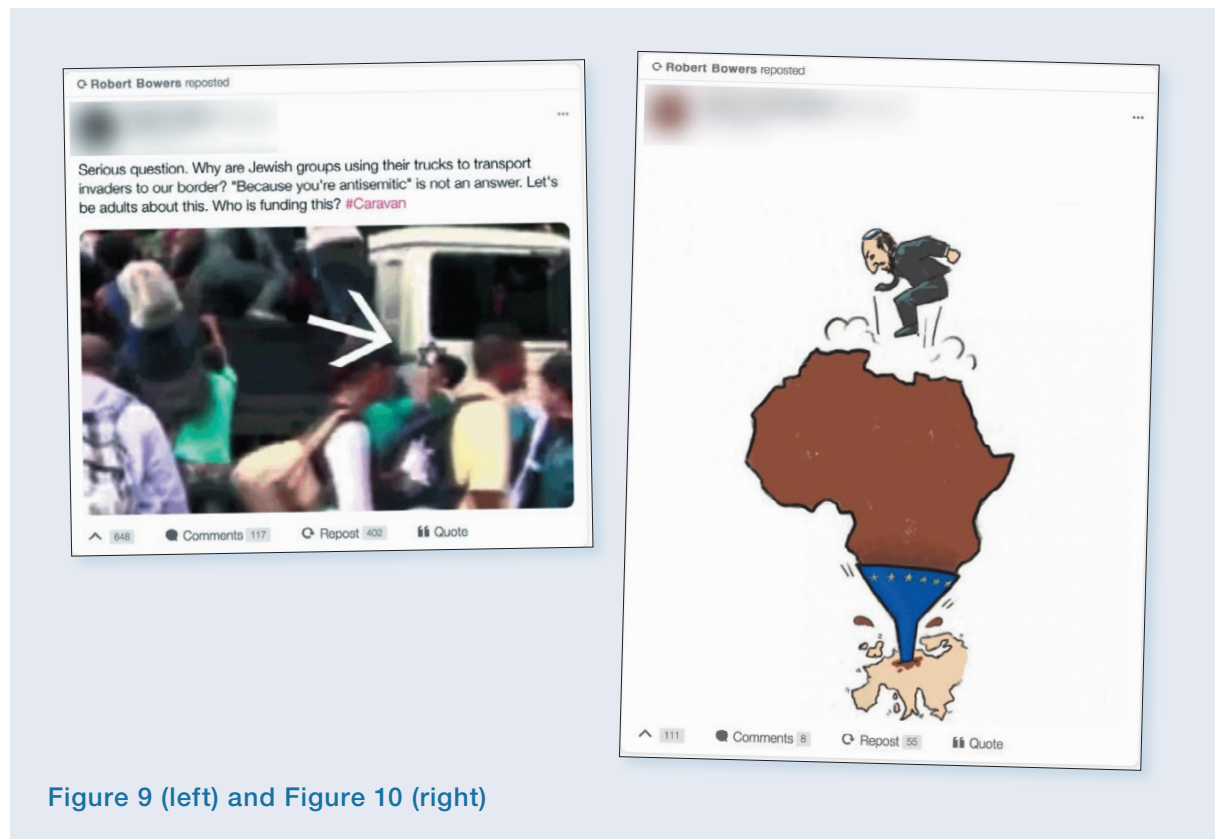
¹³⁵ “Invasion,” *The Britannica Dictionary*, accessed August 25, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/invasion>.

¹³⁶ See Figure 8.

¹³⁷ See Figure 9.

¹³⁸ See Figure 10.

¹³⁹ “Who We Are,” *HIAS*, accessed August 27, 2023, <https://hias.org/who/>.



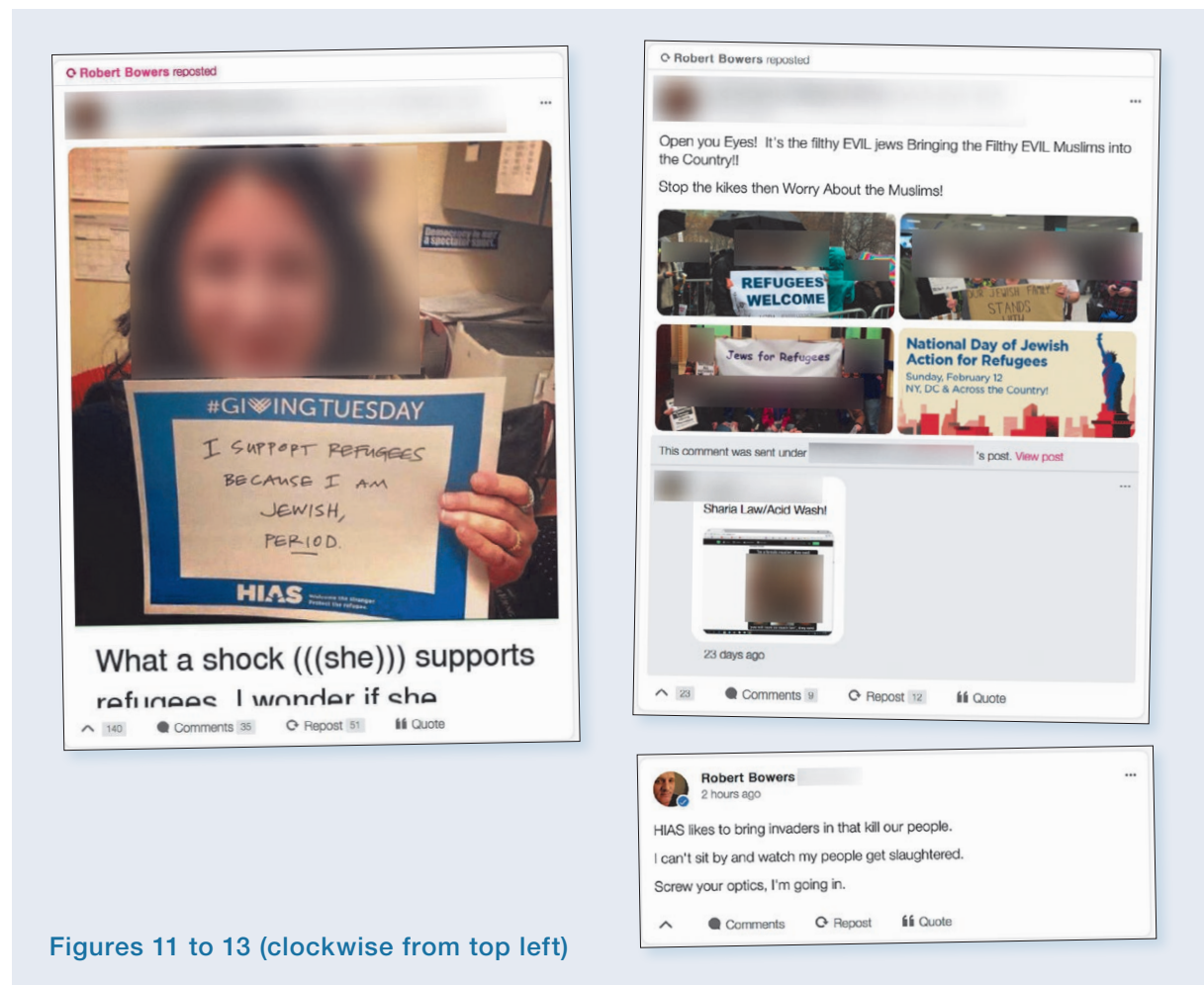
of the Jewish plot to eradicate White people, the structure that facilitates the introduction of “lethal” bodies into the country. Bowers’ obsession with HIAS catalysed his hatred towards Jews. On his feed, several posts targeted HIAS directly in the months leading up to the attack. For instance, one post from “Farmer General” showed a picture of a woman holding an HIAS poster saying she “supports refugees because [she is] Jewish”, reinforcing the image of Jews as immigration enablers.¹⁴⁰ Bowers also shared another post of “Farmer General” accusing “evil” Jews of bringing “evil” Muslims into the country. It featured pictures of HIAS activists holding signs in support of refugees.¹⁴¹ The post demonises Jews and Muslims equally, reducing them to their presumed evil essence. By so doing, it presents the struggle against both as a sacred action. However, the post remains primarily committed to denouncing the Jews’ imagined power as they are deemed to be the facilitators of Muslim immigration into the country.

This conspiratorial representation of Jews embodied by HIAS, paired with the representation of “evil migrants”, came to dominate Bower’s social reality. HIAS turned into a deadly enemy to defeat in order to protect and save White people from immigration. In a post published about two weeks before the attack, Bowers posted a link to the HIAS website listing Jewish congregations that were hosting events in support of refugees.¹⁴² That list included the Dor Hadash Jewish congregation, which is hosted at the Tree of Life synagogue

¹⁴⁰ See Figure 11.

¹⁴¹ See Figure 12.

¹⁴² United States District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania. “Superseding Indictment”, No. 18-292.



Figures 11 to 13 (clockwise from top left)

of Pittsburgh. In the posting, Bowers reasserted the demonisation of migrants, accusing HIAS of bringing “hostile invaders” into the country. On 27 October 2018, he shared his last post, once again blaming HIAS for bringing “invaders in that kill [White] people”.¹⁴³ This time, however, he added that he “can’t sit by and watch [his] people get slaughtered” and decided to put his words into action. The last sentence he posted, “screw your optics, I’m going in”, continues to resonate as a rallying cry in extreme-right circles today.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ United States District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania. “Superseding Indictment”, No. 18-292.

¹⁴⁴ See Figure 13.

4 The Impact of the Pittsburgh Synagogue Attack on Extreme-Right Terrorism

Bowers' murderous rampage at the Tree of Life synagogue helped to inspire other White supremacist terrorist attacks. In particular, the 2019 Poway synagogue shooter John Earnest directly referred to Bowers as a source of inspiration.¹⁴⁵ In May 2022, the Buffalo attacker Payton Gendron listed Bowers among individuals "that take a stand against ethnic and cultural genocide".¹⁴⁶ A few months later, in October 2022, Juraj Krajčík, the perpetrator of the Bratislava LGBTQ+ shooting, included Bowers in a list of people he viewed as "heroes and role models" in a tweet.¹⁴⁷ All three posted manifestos online which were rife with demographic conspiracy beliefs. However, despite these similarities, their choices of targets differed. While Earnest, like Bowers, targeted a synagogue, Gendron chose to attack a grocery store in a predominantly Black area.¹⁴⁸ Krajčík, on the other hand, attacked an establishment frequented by LGBTQ+ communities.¹⁴⁹ These differences illustrate what unites these attacks: the conspiratorial belief that they stand in defence of the "White race" against a plot to eradicate it. This section will dive into Earnest, Gendron and Krajčík's manifestos, assessing Bowers' influence on their views and actions. It will also examine the role of demographic conspiracy theories in connecting these distinctive attacks into what Blyth Crawford and Florence Keen called a "global network of ideologically connected acts of terrorism".¹⁵⁰

John Earnest and the 2019 Chabad of Poway Synagogue Attack

On 27 April 2019, exactly six months after Bowers' attack, John Earnest entered the Chabad of Poway synagogue in California and opened fire, killing one woman and injuring three others.¹⁵¹ Shortly before the attack, he posted a nine-page manifesto on the image-board site 8chan, providing valuable insight into the motivational and ideological foundations of his act. The document, which cites Bowers as an inspirational figure no less than five times, displays discursive and rhetorical similarities with the Pittsburgh shooter's online records.¹⁵² Akin to Bowers' posts, Earnest's manifesto is filled

¹⁴⁵ A copy of John Earnest's manifesto is in author's possession, 7.

¹⁴⁶ A copy of Payton Gendron's manifesto is in author's possession, 9.

¹⁴⁷ Eran Benedek, "The Bratislava LGBTQ+ Bar Shooting and the 'Jewish Occupied System'," *Community Security Trust* (2022), 6.

¹⁴⁸ Amarnath Amarasingham, Marc-André Argentino, and Graham Macklin, "The Buffalo Attack: The Cumulative Momentum of Far-Right Terror," *CTC Sentinel* 15, no. 7 (July 2022).

¹⁴⁹ Benedek, "The Bratislava LGBTQ+ Bar Shooting and the 'Jewish Occupied System'."

¹⁵⁰ Blyth Crawford and Florence Keen, "The Hanau Terrorist Attack: How Race Hate and Conspiracy Theories Are Fuelling Global Far-Right Violence," *CTC Sentinel* 13, no. 3 (March 2020).

¹⁵¹ United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of California, "John T. Earnest Sentenced to Life Plus 30 Years in Prison for Federal Hate Crimes Related to 2019 Poway Synagogue Shooting and Attempted Mosque Arson," Press Release Number: CAS21-1228-Earnest.

¹⁵² Julia Kupper, "The Venomous Rhetorical Web of Far-Right Terrorists," *Global Network on Extremism and Technology*, October 17, 2022, accessed August 30, 2023, <https://gnet-research.org/2022/10/17/the-venomous-rhetorical-web-of-far-right-terrorists/>.

with conspiratorial antisemitism, representing Jews as an omnipresent manifestation of the devil. In accusing them of being a deceitful collective that “act[s] as a unit”, Earnest blames Jews for a series of malicious acts throughout history. These allegations, which include “deceiving the public through their exorbitant role in news media” or controlling world finance “for the purpose of funding evil”, portray Jews as a supernatural satanic entity.¹⁵³ This demonisation is supported through the Christian framing of the manifesto. Portraying himself as a Christian chosen by God, Earnest justifies alleged Jewish evilness by accusing Jews, among other things, of being responsible for the death of Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁴ In so doing, he further encourages the fight against the imagined Jewish power by presenting it as a holy duty.

Like Bowers’ online discourse, Earnest’s demonisation of Jews led to accusations of genocide against White people. In his manifesto, he accused Jews of being “responsible for the meticulously planned genocide of the European race”.¹⁵⁵ Earnest framed his allegation in ways that echo Lane’s “White Genocide” theory, claiming that Jews have a “cruel and bloody history of genocidal behavior” and promote miscegenation.¹⁵⁶ This fear of race-mixing, which resonates with ideas promoted by Madison Grant a century prior, is paired with discursive elements of “replacement” in his manifesto. Among the list of misdeeds, Earnest accuses Jews of supporting “politicians and organizations that use mass immigration to displace the European race”.¹⁵⁷ The conflation of “White Genocide” conspiracy beliefs with references to immigration as a displacing force – a central element of the “Great Replacement” theory – is typical of Bowers’ online posts. The discursive resemblance of Bowers’ posts and Earnest’s manifesto help explain the appreciation of the latter for the former by highlighting the similarities between their perceived social realities. Earnest firmly believed in the conspiracy that Jews were responsible for the alleged ongoing genocide of the “White race”, and, like Bowers, decided he could not sit “idly by as evil grows”.¹⁵⁸

However, Jews were not Earnest’s sole targets, nor was Bowers his only source of inspiration. In his manifesto, Earnest admitted that, a month prior to the Poway attack, he attempted to burn down a mosque in Escondido, California.¹⁵⁹ He claimed that his act was influenced by Brenton Tarrant, who murdered 51 people in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand a week prior.¹⁶⁰ Describing Tarrant’s act as a “sacrifice”, Earnest claimed that he dedicated his attempt to the Christchurch attacker by spray-painting “For Brenton Tarrant -t. /pol/” in the mosque’s carpark.¹⁶¹ The mention “/pol/” refers to the “politically incorrect” message board on 8chan, on which he uploaded his manifesto a month later. In Earnest’s manifesto, Tarrant is cited and praised eleven times, twice more than Bowers.¹⁶² He is presented there as a “catalyst” who showed Earnest that “it could be done”.¹⁶³ While it is not surprising that Bowers inspired Earnest, given their shared antisemitic conspiratorial beliefs, Earnest’s admiration for Tarrant is puzzling. As Dirk Moses explains,

¹⁵³ Earnest’s manifesto, 1–2.

¹⁵⁴ Earnest’s manifesto, 2.

¹⁵⁵ Earnest’s manifesto, 1–2.

¹⁵⁶ Earnest’s manifesto, 1–2.

¹⁵⁷ Earnest’s manifesto, 1.

¹⁵⁸ Earnest’s manifesto, 1.

¹⁵⁹ Earnest’s manifesto, 4.

¹⁶⁰ Graham Macklin, “The Christchurch Attacks: Livestream Terror in the Viral Video Age,” *CTC Sentinel* 12, no. 6 (July 2019).

¹⁶¹ Earnest’s manifesto, 4.

¹⁶² Kupper, “The Venomous Rhetorical Web of Far-Right Terrorists.”

¹⁶³ Earnest’s manifesto, 5.

Tarrant did not actually endorse antisemitic conspiracy theories.¹⁶⁴ He believed that Jews should leave Europe but did not see them as posing a threat to Europeans otherwise.¹⁶⁵ Nilsson notes that in Earnest's manifesto, antisemitic conspiratorial discourses converged with anti-Muslim discourses of "Islamicisation" of the West.¹⁶⁶ This convergence, which appeared to a much lesser extent in Bowers' records, further sustained the conflation of "White Genocide" with "Great Replacement" narratives in his text. It helped structure Earnest's perception that Muslims are "useful puppets for the Jew in terms of replacing Whites".¹⁶⁷ Earnest viewed Jews as the primary evil responsible for the introduction of Muslims, the secondary evil, into the US. This conspiratorial perspective reconciled the figures of Bowers and Tarrant into a broader category of offenders, which Nilsson describes as "self-acclaimed ethno-soldiers on a mission to save the White race".¹⁶⁸

Payton Gendron and the 2022 Buffalo Attack

The term "ethno-soldier" was used by Payton Gendron in the manifesto he posted online the day before his attack. On 14 May 2022, he entered a grocery store in Buffalo, New York, and opened fire, killing ten people and injuring three others.¹⁶⁹ All ten were Black. Similarly to Bowers, Gendron was convinced that White people are the victims of a plot to eradicate them. In his manifesto, he accused Jews and "state and corporate entities" of standing behind mass immigration to the US.¹⁷⁰ He believed the goal of this conspiracy was "to replace White people" who, according to him, failed to "reproduce [and] create the cheap labor [...] corporations and states need to have to thrive".¹⁷¹ By 2050, Gendron held, immigration would lead to an ethnic, cultural and racial "replacement" that would equate to a "White genocide".¹⁷² Consequently, he expressed his support for "ethno-soldiers" or "freedom fighters", namely "those that take a stand against ethnic and cultural genocide".¹⁷³ Bowers, together with Earnest and Tarrant, were cited among the so-called "ethno-soldiers" he listed as models.¹⁷⁴

Like Bowers, Gendron viewed Jews as a homogenous and ubiquitous collective governed by an imaginary evil essence. This demonological antisemitism is clearly expressed in his manifesto, where he calls for Jews to "go back to hell where [they] came from DEMON".¹⁷⁵ For Gendron, Jews are an ethnicity, but their evilness lies in their religion, which commands them to enslave and exploit non-Jews.¹⁷⁶ This is possible through their supernatural abilities, which allow them to "control the mainstream media, many government positions, and international and global banking".¹⁷⁷ In this manner, Gendron accused Jews of being responsible for the alleged ongoing genocide of White people.¹⁷⁸ However, contrarily to Bowers, he viewed them

164 A. Dirk Moses, "'White Genocide' and the Ethics of Public Analysis," *Journal of Genocide Research* 21, no. 2 (2019): 206.

165 Moses, "'White Genocide'," 206.

166 Nilsson, "Manifestos of White Nationalist Ethno-Soldiers," 222.

167 Earnest's manifesto, 6.

168 Nilsson, "Manifestos of White Nationalist Ethno-Soldiers," 224.

169 Amarasingham, Argentino, and Macklin, "The Buffalo Attack."

170 Gendron's manifesto, 1; 13.

171 Gendron's manifesto, 1, 13.

172 Gendron's manifesto, 2.

173 Gendron's manifesto, 9.

174 Gendron's manifesto, 9.

175 Gendron's manifesto, 8.

176 Gendron's manifesto, 24–30.

177 Gendron's manifesto, 24.

178 Gendron's manifesto, 13.

as a secondary target. Replying to a self-asked question “why attack immigrants when Jews are the issue?”, he argued that immigrants, whom he calls “replacers”, are the most pressing issue due to their “high fertility”.¹⁷⁹ He believed that Jews could be dealt with later, despite describing synagogues as potentially desirable targets in the Discord chat log he used to document his attack planning.¹⁸⁰ Gendron eventually decided to conduct his attack in a grocery store because it was mostly frequented by Black residents of the area, whom he viewed as “immigrants”.¹⁸¹ Referring to “ZOG-bot government” and “Blacks of Buffalo”, he argued that “to cleanse an area, both must be removed” and that he is “simply attacking one at a time”.¹⁸²

Juraj Krajčák and the 2022 Bratislava LGBTQ+ Bar Attack

In October the same year, Juraj Krajčák opened fire outside a known LGBTQ+ bar in the centre of Bratislava, Slovakia, murdering two people and injuring one.¹⁸³ The ensuing manhunt ended the following morning when police found him dead.¹⁸⁴ Law enforcement also found a suicide note at his family home.¹⁸⁵ Until his death, Krajčák was active on social media. In a tweet posted two days before his act, he listed Bowers among the individuals he viewed as “heroes and role models”, together with Earnest, Gendron, and Tarrant. He also posted a manifesto online entitled “A call to arms”, which is replete with demographic conspiratorial beliefs and incitements to kill Jews, LGBTQ+ individuals, and others.¹⁸⁶ Like Bowers, Earnest and Gendron, Krajčák viewed Jews as a ubiquitous evil entity responsible for society’s problems. For him, Jews control world government through ZOG (Zionist Occupation Government), a conspiracy theory claiming limitless Jewish power over institutions.¹⁸⁷ In particular, he accuses ZOG of plotting the eradication of White people, arguing that, for Jews, “the destruction and subjugation of the White race is simply logical”.¹⁸⁸ Here again, Jews are portrayed as the instigators of the imagined mass immigration of “enemy races into [White] nations” which will ultimately lead to the “replacement” of White people.¹⁸⁹

Krajčák also depicted Jews as promoters of homosexuality, transness and other sexualities he believed undermined the existence of White people, illustrating the interplay of demographic conspiracy theories, antisemitism and anti-gender attitudes.¹⁹⁰ According to Crawford, Jews are often framed as intentionally spreading sexual practices considered “deviant” throughout the extreme right, especially via their alleged control over mass media.¹⁹¹ For instance, they are accused of actively “converting” White children into gay or trans individuals to erode the traditional nuclear family model, collapse White birth rates, and eradicate them from within.¹⁹² Krajčák imagined Jews not only

179 Gendron’s manifesto, 12.

180 A copy of Payton Gendron’s Discord chat log records is in author’s possession, 74.

181 Amarasingham, Argentino, and Macklin, “The Buffalo Attack.”

182 Gendron’s manifesto, 12.

183 Julia Kupper, Kacper Rekawek, and Matthew Kriner, “Terrorgram’s First Saint: Analyzing Accelerationist Terrorism in Bratislava,” *Accelerationism Research Consortium* (March 2023): 1.

184 Benedek, “The Bratislava LGBTQ+ Bar Shooting and the ‘Jewish Occupied System’,” 5.

185 Kupper, Rekawek, and Kriner, “Terrorgram’s First Saint,” 4.

186 A copy of Juraj Krajčák’s manifesto is in author’s possession.

187 “Z.O.G.”

188 Krajčák’s manifesto, 3.

189 Krajčák’s manifesto, 42.

190 Krajčák’s manifesto, 2–3.

191 Blyth Crawford, “Sleeping with the Enemy: Sex, Sexuality and Antisemitism in the Extreme Right,” *International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation* (2022), 6, 18.

192 Crawford, “Sleeping with the Enemy,” 26–30.

as enablers of immigration, but as influencers of sexual politics who successfully push an “anti-family” agenda to demographically remove White people.

Bowers’ influence on Earnest, Gendron and Krajčák thus exists primarily within a broader system of White supremacist conspiratorial beliefs, which views White people as the victims of diverse plots intending to enact demographic changes. The various social realities produced by these conspiratorial accounts coalesce around the “defence of the White race” as a common denominator. This laid the ground for the formation of a loose network of disparate terrorist attacks in which perpetrators – often portrayed as “ethno-soldiers” – can have slightly different conspiratorial convictions and targets. They all serve the same objectives, however, and praise one another for their commitment to and sacrifice for the cause. Bowers’ ideas and action help sustain this broader construction of shared meaning in part linked by the interplay of White supremacy and demographic conspiracy theories. The following section will examine how extreme-right communities online perpetuate Bowers’ legacy, especially in the context of neofascist militant accelerationism (NMA).

5 The Figure of Robert Bowers in Extreme-Right Communities Online

Despite having perpetrated the deadliest antisemitic attack in US history, Bowers' influence on other self-acclaimed White nationalist "ethno-soldiers" remains relatively limited.¹⁹³ This moderate popularity is illustrated by Julia Kupper et al. who examined the manifestos of ten extreme-right terrorists from Anders Breivik in 2011 to Gendron in May 2022.¹⁹⁴ The study shows that, among the seven manifestos that were posted following attacks that took place after the Tree of Life shooting, only Earnest and Gendron's documents present positive mentions of Bowers. In both cases, however, Bowers appears in fewer references than other attackers.¹⁹⁵ Krajčák did not even mention him in his own manifesto, although he did call him a hero and a role model in a tweet. In contrast, positive references of Tarrant appear in every manifesto of subsequent attackers included in the study.¹⁹⁶ The Pittsburgh shooter's limited recognition is also reflected in Earnest's manifesto where he deplored that "Robert Bowers [...] got such a bad rap".¹⁹⁷ The reasons for this modest popularity are difficult to pinpoint. It is possible however that the absence of a manifesto and the limited number of visuals of Bowers that emerged after his attack contributed to limit his influence.

Nonetheless, this ethnographic research demonstrates that Bowers appears at times in glorifying references from extreme-right communities online. These mentions solidify his place in a broader system that eulogises extreme-right terrorists as soldiers of the "White race". This network connects somewhat distinct attackers, often through their shared demographic conspiracy beliefs and the conviction that their actions represent a sacrifice for the sake of racial survival. Among these references, "screw your optics, I'm going in", the last words Bowers posted on Gab before his attack, became a popular motto in extreme-right social media and spread across countless posts and memes.¹⁹⁸ Bowers was also "sainted" by NMA communities, where he is often represented as a Christian Saint in various graphics that circulate online. This section will dissect the Tree of Life attacker's influence in extreme-right communities online surrounding three main axes: the diffusion of "screw your optics" as a rallying cry, the representations of Bowers in memes, and the role of NMA's "Saints Culture" in commemorating Bowers and his attack.

¹⁹³ Jacob Knutson, "Pittsburgh Synagogue Gunman Found Guilty in Worst Antisemitic Attack in US History," *Axios*, June 16, 2023, accessed September 5, 2023, <https://www.axios.com/2023/06/16/pittsburgh-tree-of-life-synagogue-shooting-gunman-guilty>.

¹⁹⁴ Julia Kupper et al., "The Contagion and Copycat Effect in Transnational Far-right Terrorism: An Analysis of Language Evidence," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 16, no. 4: 11–12.

¹⁹⁵ Kupper et al., "The Contagion and Copycat Effect in Transnational Far-right Terrorism," 11–12.

¹⁹⁶ Kupper et al., "The Contagion and Copycat Effect in Transnational Far-right Terrorism," 11–12.

¹⁹⁷ Earnest's manifesto, 5.

¹⁹⁸ Rita Katz, "How 'Screw Your Optics' Became a Far-Right Rallying Cry."

“Screw Your Optics, I’m Going In”

On 27 October 2018, Bowers shared his last post on Gab, in which he accuses the refugee agency HIAS of bringing “invaders” that “slaughter” White people into the country.¹⁹⁹ The post ends with a sentence announcing his horrific act: “Screw your optics, I’m going in”. As Alex Amend notes, his reference to “optics” reflects an ongoing debate within the racist “alt-right” concerning how best to convey its political message and attract recruits.²⁰⁰ It emerged in the wake of the deadly Unite the Right rally that took place in Charlottesville in August 2017, when White nationalist groups faced increased legal pressure and media scrutiny.²⁰¹ By dismissing the “optics debate”, Bowers rejected the idea of marketing White supremacy via public relations tactics to help turn it into a political force. Instead, he established violence as the sole way forward to save White people from an imagined annihilation.

The phrasing of Bowers’ last post swiftly appealed to many in extreme-right spheres online. Available archives from the image-board site 4chan show that “screw your optics” was already used regularly on the /pol/ board by the end of January 2019.²⁰² Additionally, in a message announcing his upcoming attack on the 15 March that same year, Tarrant shared an image on 8chan’s /pol/ board under the file name “Screw your optics.jpg”.²⁰³ Frequent uses of “screw your optics” on 4chan in the weeks following the attack, paired with Tarrant’s use of the phrase, show how quickly it turned into a rallying cry in extreme-right communities online.

“Screw your optics” appeared in various visuals commemorating Bowers’ attack and incited further violence. For instance, a user posted an image on 4chan showing the quote on the day after the Tree of Life attack.²⁰⁴ In the picture, Bowers is represented with laser eyes against a *sonnenrad* (or Black Sun) – a popular symbol among White supremacists – in the background.²⁰⁵ Laser-like eyes are a widespread trope in meme culture and extreme-right communities online, often used as an indication that the individual harboring them is transforming and growing more powerful.²⁰⁶

Countless similar images emerged in the following years. For example, about a year after the attack, a visual depicting Bowers with laser eyes in a hyper-stylised manner, holding an assault rifle and dressed in military equipment, circulated online.²⁰⁷ At the top of the image, “screw your optics” appears in capital letters. This imagery displayed elements of “tacticool” aesthetics, exalting fantasies of violence. It did so by depicting Bowers taking up arms and rebelling against both White supremacists’ “optics” and the law as an idealised archetype of masculinity.²⁰⁸

199 See Figure 13.

200 Amend, “Analyzing a Terrorist’s Social Media Manifesto.”

201 Amend, “Analyzing a Terrorist’s Social Media Manifesto.”

202 See Figure 14.

203 Rita Katz, *Saints and Soldiers: Inside Internet-Age Terrorism, From Syria to the Capitol Siege* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022).

204 See Figure 15.

205 “Sonnenrad,” *Anti-Defamation League*, accessed September 7, 2023, <https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/sonnenrad>.

206 “Glowing Eyes / Laser Eyes,” *Know Your Meme*, accessed September 7, 2023, <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/glowing-eyes-laser-eyes>.

207 See Figure 16.

208 Keshley Atherton, “A Closer Look at Our Dark Obsession With Guns Looking ‘Cool,’” *Vice*, March 22, 2018, accessed September 8, 2023, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/3kjqkw/a-closer-look-at-our-dark-obsession-with-guns-looking-cool>; Joshua Molloy, “Terrorwave: The Aesthetics of Violence and Terrorist Imagery in Militant Accelerationist Subcultures,” *Global Network on Extremism and Technology*, April 5, 2023, accessed September 8, 2023, <https://gnet-research.org/2023/04/05/terrorwave-the-aesthetics-of-violence-and-terrorist-imagery-in-militant-accelerationist-subcultures/>.



Figures 14 to 18 (clockwise from top)



Figure 19 (left) and Figure 20 (right)

Indeed, as Cynthia Miller-Idriss shows, iconographical tropes such as the “soldier”, which bolsters traits like courage and heroism, and the “rebel”, which valorises features like transgression and violence, help to convey far-right versions of masculinity through fashion.²⁰⁹ These visual features combined with racist discourses – in this case, the conspiratorial conviction that Jews are behind the imagined genocide of White people – embellish Bowers’ ideas and action and incite more violence.²¹⁰

At times, “Screw your optics” is dissociated from the figure of Bowers and used only as a call to embrace violent action. Recently, a “terrorwave”-inspired visual assigned Bowers’ quote to the Christchurch attack.²¹¹ The image shows a screenshot from Tarrant’s Christchurch attack footage, edited with a VHS-style effect and neon colours, an effect that, as Joshua Molloy suggests, is meant to give a sense of nostalgia.²¹² “Screw your optics” appears across the image that shows the moment Tarrant enters one of the mosques he attacked with a firearm in his hands.²¹³ There, the quote is paired with a screenshot glorifying the idea of taking action and edited to convey a positive perception of the past. This presents violence as the “correct” way to defend the “White race” and dismisses bloodless approaches to promoting White supremacy.

209 Cynthia Miller-Idriss, “Soldier, Sailor, Rebel, Rule-Breaker: Masculinity and the Body in the German Far Right,” *Gender and Education* 29, no. 2 (2017): 199.

210 Miller-Idriss, “Soldier, Sailor, Rebel, Rule-Breaker,” 212.

211 See Figure 17.

212 Molloy, “Terrorwave: The Aesthetics of Violence and Terrorist Imagery in Militant Accelerationist Subcultures.”

213 See Figure 17.

Bowers' quote also inspired other figures on the extreme right. For instance, Austrian neo-Nazi rapper Mr Bond, who was sentenced to ten years in prison for promoting neo-Nazism and inciting violence, produced an album rife with antisemitism entitled "Screw your optics, I'm going in" in 2019.²¹⁴ The album's cover shows Bowers represented, again, with laser eyes.²¹⁵ More recently, the American antisemitic network Goyim Defense League (GDL) paraphrased Bowers' quote to promote one of its shows on GoyimTV, the video platform it operates.²¹⁶ In a post shared on Telegram, GDL's leader Jon Mineado II is depicted in a Nazi uniform with a message announcing the upcoming show in these terms: "Fuck your optics [...] we are going in".²¹⁷

Representations of Bowers in Memes

Representations of Bowers are also disseminated in extreme-right communities online via memes. The term "meme" was coined in the 1970s by Richard Dawkins who defined it as a cultural body which spreads, mutates and reacts to external events in similar ways in which genes propagate in a gene pool.²¹⁸ In the context of internet culture, memes can be considered as conveyers of culture through which messages are produced in visuals, or through interactions between images and text.²¹⁹ They often use humour and irony as ways to communicate their message and are designed to spread easily online.²²⁰ Over time, memes became central to chan site culture and progressively penetrated extreme-right communities online. There, they help spread violent extremist discourses under the guise of seemingly innocuous jokes and have helped to influence several extreme-right terrorists.²²¹ For instance, as mentioned above, Tarrant attached a meme of which the filename was inspired by Bowers' infamous phrase. Earnest later referred to meme culture in his manifesto, calling followers to "meme Robert Bowers".²²² Finally, Gendron called supporters to "create memes, post memes, and spread memes" arguing that "memes have done more for the ethno-nationalist movement than any manifesto".²²³

Several memes using humour and irony to portray Bowers and his actions in a positive light appeared in the wake of the Pittsburgh synagogue attack. For instance, a meme that emerged on 4chan the next day ironically presented Bowers as the "/pol/ champion" winning a competition called "gas the k***" with a top score.²²⁴ About a year later, another meme appeared, showing the screenshot of an apparent news article entitled "Going to synagogue makes you happier, Pew study finds".²²⁵ Below the title is a picture of the interior of the great synagogue of Budapest, Hungary, with the portrait of Bowers appearing as a slightly

214 Mack Lamoureux, "'Neo-Nazi Weird Al' Gets 10 Years for Far-Right Parody Raps," *Vice*, April 7, 2022, accessed September 10, 2023, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/z3n78x/neo-nazi-rapper-mr-bond>.

215 See Figure 18.

216 "Goyim Defense League," *Anti-Defamation League*, August 2, 2021, accessed September 10, 2023, <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgroundunder/goyim-defense-league>.

217 See Figure 19.

218 Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 249.

219 Blyth Crawford, Florence Keen, and Guillermo Suarez de-Tanguil, "Memetic Irony and the Promotion of Violence within Chan Culture," *Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats* (December 2020), 10.

220 Crawford, Keen, and Suarez de-Tanguil, "Memetic Irony and the Promotion of Violence within Chan Culture," 10.

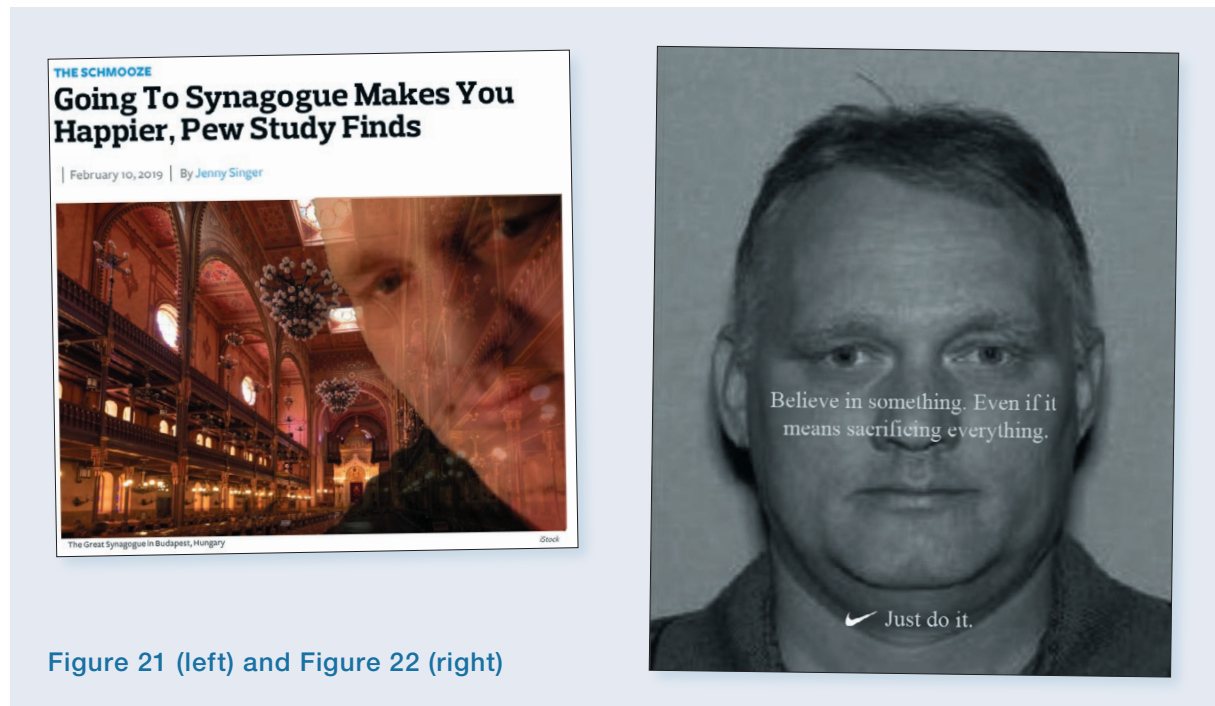
221 Crawford, Keen, and Suarez de-Tanguil, "Memetic Irony and the Promotion of Violence within Chan Culture," 5–6.

222 Earnest's manifesto, 5.

223 Gendron's manifesto, 169.

224 See Figure 20.

225 See Figure 21.



transparent shadow superimposed on it. There, irony is used to incite violent actions against Jews by associating the figure of Bowers with positive feelings. Another meme ironically repackaged a Nike advert starring former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick with representations of Bowers.²²⁶ In 2019, Nike released an ad campaign featuring a slogan that referred to Kaepernick's 2016 kneeling protest and his subsequent exclusion from the league. The campaign included a black and white portrait of the former NFL player with the phrase "Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything" across it. Nike's iconic slogan "Just do it" appears below.²²⁷ Shortly afterwards, a meme emerged on 4chan in which the quarterback's picture is replaced by a portrait of Bowers, turning Nike's reference to Kaepernick's protest for racial justice into a call for racial violence.²²⁸ Bowers' figure is therefore associated with slogans praising the force of convictions, self-sacrifice and self-realisation through action. The relationship between the picture and the text hence enhances commitment to violence against the imagined enemies of the "White race". As such, it helps set out the values, standards and behaviours that are expected from a supporter of the cause.

²²⁶ See Figure 22.

²²⁷ "Nike's 'Dream Crazy' Advert Starring Colin Kaepernick Wins Emmy," *The Guardian*, September 16, 2019, accessed September 12, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2019/sep/16/nikes-dream-crazy-advert-starring-colin-kaepernick-wins-emmy>.

²²⁸ See Figure 22.

Robert Bowers' Place in Neofascist Militant Accelerationist's "Saints" Culture

On the day after the Tree of Life attack, a post on 4chan anointed Bowers as a "Saint". The post included a visual of the Pittsburgh shooter depicted as a Christian Saint together with three other extreme-right terrorists from the previous 30 years: Timothy McVeigh, Anders Breivik and Dylan Roof.²²⁹ By December 2020, another visual portraying Bowers as a Saint was circulating online. The picture was based on Nicolas Tournier's painting "Saint Paul", which originally depicted the holy man holding a scroll.²³⁰ It was edited to represent Bowers in place of Saint Paul with a *sonnenrad* as a halo above his head. In the scroll, "screw your optics" appeared in gothic letters.²³¹

Emerging from NMA circles online, this list of so-called "Saints" expanded as other individuals linked to the extreme right perpetrated attacks. It grew into a culture that spread online, notably through the Terrorgram community, a loose network of NMA Telegram channels.²³² As Jonathan Lewis et al. suggest, the deification of past attackers – regardless of whether they survived their attacks – aims to incite violent action by glorifying them as martyrs.²³³ Originally used in the Bible and the New Testament to describe a person who was killed because and/or in defence of his/her faith, the term "martyr" has appeared in the propaganda of various violent extremist movements and groups throughout history. There, its meaning was adapted to valorise one's sacrifice for their respective causes.²³⁴ In the context of NMA, martyrdom is conveyed both visually, via the creation of Christian iconographies in the image of the perpetrators, and textually, via the use of a religious terminology related to sainthood.

In 2021, NMA's "Saints" culture became increasingly structured, as Telegram channels dedicated to the promotion of extreme-right terrorists as holy figures emerged.²³⁵ These channels display homogeneous visual identities, making tribute posts to so-called "Saints" easily recognisable. To celebrate past attackers, propagandists produced monthly calendars marking various milestones such as the dates of attacks and perpetrators' birthdays, arrests, or death dates.²³⁶ Additionally, they created "Saints Cards", fact sheets that display details of the perpetrators and their attacks, including summaries of attacks, attackers' methods, death tolls and pictures. They also included a "further readings" section to encourage followers to learn more about the individuals they present as martyrs.²³⁷ As these channels emerged, Bowers' name was added to the "Saints" calendar and a "Saint Card", which included most known details of the Tree of Life shooting appeared online.²³⁸ The figure of the Pittsburgh attacker as a "Saint" is also frequently promoted in the Terrorgram community, notably via publications affiliated with the network. Among them, *Militant Accelerationism*,

229 See Figures 23 and 24.

230 "Saint Paul," Musée des Augustins, accessed September 15, 2023, <https://www.augustins.org/fr/notice/91-1-1-saint-paul-fc4f532d-84ba-4ce9-adbf-6aaf5dfbad22>.

231 See Figure 25.

232 Lewis, Molloy, and Macklin, "The Lineage of Violence: Saints Culture and Militant Accelerationist Terrorism," *Global Network on Extremism and Technology*, April 27, 2023, accessed September 15, 2023, <https://gnet-research.org/2023/04/27/the-lineage-of-violence-saints-culture-and-militant-accelerationist-terrorism/>.

233 Lewis, Molloy, and Macklin, "The Lineage of Violence: Saints Culture and Militant Accelerationist Terrorism."

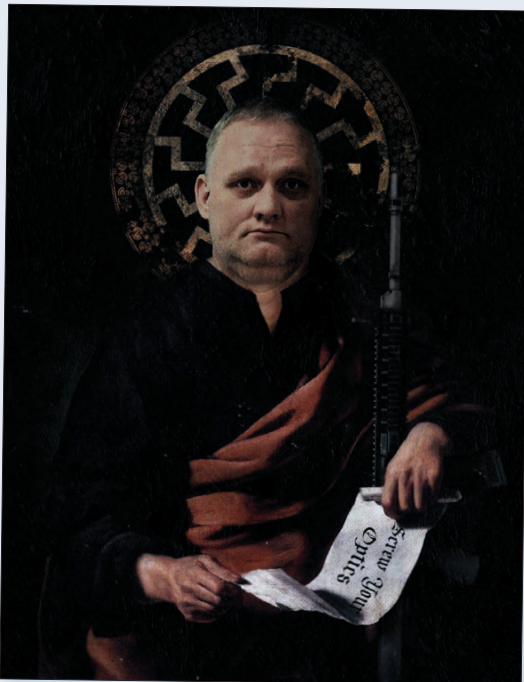
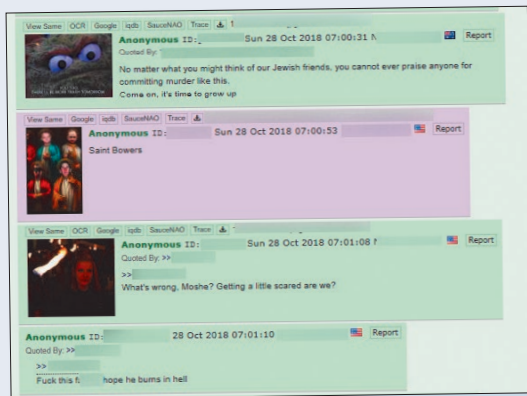
234 Ari Ben Am and Gabriel Weinmann, "Fabricated Martyrs: The Warrior-Saint Icons of Far-Right Terrorism," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 14, no. 5 (October 2020): 130.

235 Lewis, Molloy, and Macklin, "The Lineage of Violence: Saints Culture and Militant Accelerationist Terrorism."

236 Lewis, Molloy, and Macklin, "The Lineage of Violence: Saints Culture and Militant Accelerationist Terrorism."

237 Lewis, Molloy, and Macklin, "The Lineage of Violence: Saints Culture and Militant Accelerationist Terrorism."

238 See Figures 26, 27, and 28.



Figures 23 to 25 (clockwise from top)

a document promoting NMA tactics, referenced Bowers in the list of so-called “Saints” to celebrate.²³⁹ A similar publication entitled *Do It For The ‘Gram* called followers to “commemorate Robert Bowers Day” by remembering that “the Tree of Life synagogue was a justified military target”.²⁴⁰ It explained that the synagogue was a place in which “Jews of all branches conspired to deprive [White] people of [their] birthright”.²⁴¹

Bowers is celebrated within NMA’s online spaces as part of a broader “Saints” culture, which regulates the commemoration of past attackers affiliated with White supremacist ideologies. This culture does not only glorify these so-called “Saints”, it also assigns to each of them exclusive moments of remembrance throughout the year, pacing the life of followers in similar ways that religious rituals do. This process

239 *Militant Accelerationism: A Collective Handbook* (Terrorgram publication), accessed via READ database.

240 *Do It For The ‘Gram: The Collected Writings of Terrorgram* (Terrorgram publication), accessed via READ database.

241 *Do It For The ‘Gram*.



Figures 26 & 27 (left) and Figure 28 (right)

of ritualisation provides symbolically important dates to followers, which can strengthen the movement's collective identity and reinforce shared beliefs by providing righteous examples to follow.²⁴² References to Bowers' martyrdom tend to emerge periodically within these online communities, particularly around 27 October – the anniversary of his horrific attack – every year.

242 Lewis, Molloy, and Macklin. "The Lineage of Violence: Saints Culture and Militant Accelerationist Terrorism."

6 Conclusion

This report has examined the ideological underpinnings of Robert Bowers' attack and its impact on the extreme right five years after he opened fire and killed worshippers at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh. It has offered an in-depth insight into the history of demographic conspiracy theories in the far right in the West. It has traced these conspiratorial narratives of racial and cultural annihilation back to the 19th and early 20th centuries, when French discourses of "replacement" resonated with fears of miscegenation in the United States. These discourses shaped alternately the figures of Jews, Muslims, immigrants and progressive forces as racialised threats. Over the years, they interlaced and merged to produce labelled demographic conspiracy theories from the mid-1980s. These various accounts revolved around the alleged ongoing eradication of White people and/or Western cultures due to demographic threats produced by plots instigated by diverse sets of actors.

This report then has highlighted the role demographic conspiracy theories played in Bowers' interpretations and representations of social realities, and his subsequent influence on other attacks. Bowers' posts on the social media platform Gab illustrated the fluid nature of these narratives and their ability to merge fully or partly to produce personalised accounts linked by the fear of genocide plots against White people. In Bowers' case, the centrality of the Jewish plot, a core feature of Lane's "White Genocide", is paired with the demonisation of immigrants and refugees, a typical aspect of Camus' "Great Replacement" theory. This shaped the image of Jews as enablers of an alleged "invasion" of migrants endangering the future of White people, an idea which recalls Honsik's "Kalergi Plan". In the context of White supremacist attacks, Bowers' influence is linked to broader conspiracy beliefs that view the alleged struggle for the survival of the "White race" against concerted annihilation attempts as central. Earnest, Gendron and Krajčák, who all cited Bowers as a role model, displayed various demographic conspiracy beliefs. While their target choices differed, however, they praised one another as committed "ethno-soldiers" sacrificing themselves for the cause of preserving the "White race".

Despite his relatively modest popularity, Bowers is also regularly commemorated and glorified within extreme-right communities online. "Screw your optics, I'm going in", his last words on Gab, turned into a popular slogan used as a catchphrase to incite violence. Representing the moment Bowers rejected non-violent ways to promote White supremacism, its use extended beyond the figure of the Tree of Life shooter. It was adopted in visuals calling for attacks and inspired extreme-right activists who used it to promote their own activities. Bowers was also introduced into NMA's pantheon of "Saints" and regularly promoted as a holy figure within militant accelerationist circles. The celebration of "Saints", via key dates such as the anniversary of attacks or perpetrators' birthdays, increased visibility and ensured moments of remembrance for Bowers and his attack in NMA communities online.

The findings of this study have implications for researchers and practitioners focusing on understanding the role of conspiracy theories in extreme-right movements and groups. Beyond offering a historical perspective on the emergence of demographic conspiracy theories, this report highlights their ability to shape shared social realities and sustain White supremacist narratives. It also underscores ways in which extreme-right communities online institutionalised the commemoration of past attackers to increase in-group cohesion and incite further violence. More research is needed to further dissect the various natures of demographic conspiracy theories in order to improve their conceptual clarity. Additional work is also necessary to reach a better understanding of their social role in a variety of extreme-right-related contexts.

On 2 August 2023, Robert Bowers was sentenced to death by a federal jury in Pittsburgh.²⁴³ Hardy Lloyd, a longtime White supremacist from West Virginia, was arrested a week later for attempts to intimidate jurors and witnesses involved in the trial.²⁴⁴ On the messaging app Telegram, he praised Bowers as a role model and called for more violence against Jews, symbolising the influence the Tree of Life shooter still has today.²⁴⁵ Indeed, five years after his horrific act, Bowers continues to be celebrated in extreme-right communities online. His attack has helped to inspire like-minded attackers, linked to Bowers by the shared conspiratorial belief to be standing for the defence of the “White race” against eradication plots. As White supremacist demographic conspiracy theories keep spreading online, imagined threats may help to produce real violence again in the future. These findings will hopefully provide a useful contribution and encourage further research into these trends.

243 Sabrina Souza, Nicki Brown, and Eric Levenson, “Pittsburgh Synagogue Shooter Sentenced to Death for Killing 11 Worshipers in 2018,” *CNN*, August 2, 2023, accessed September 20, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/08/02/us/pittsburgh-synagogue-shooting-trial-sentencing-deliberations/index.html>.

244 “West Virginia Man Admits to Obstructing Tree of Life Trial,” *US Department of Justice – Office of Public Affairs*, September 19, 2023, accessed September 21, 2023, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/west-virginia-man-admits-obstructing-tree-life-trial>.

245 Centre on Extremism, “White Supremacist Hardy Lloyd Arrested for Threatening Tree of Life Jurors,” *Anti-Defamation League*, August 10, 2023, accessed September 21, 2023, <https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/white-supremacist-hardy-lloyd-arrested-threatening-tree-life-jurors>.



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