

Name: Alert ID: TMML2024037980263 Conspiracy Theories of the 'White Genocide' While much remains to be learned about the terrorist attack targeting worshipers at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, the 17,000-word manifesto posted online by the gunman makes it clear that far-right internet culture and white supremacist propaganda played an integral role in radicalising the 28 year-old attacker. In his manifesto, the terrorist made frequent reference to the white genocide conspiracy theory, which claims – falsely – that white people are being replaced by non-whites through changes in birth rates, mass immigration and “forced assimilation”. According to the Anti-Defamation League, the belief system surrounding so-called ‘white genocide’ represents “one of the most deeply held white supremacist convictions”. More than \$200 million was pumped into the anti-Muslim propaganda industry between 2008 and 2013. The manifesto is riddled with anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric. Throughout the document, the terrorist repeatedly referred to Muslims as “invaders” who are trying to take over “the West” and lamented the “high fertility” rates among Muslim populations. The gunman frequently returned to the conspiratorial idea that whites are facing an existential threat due to increasing numbers of Muslims and other immigrants coming to predominantly white countries and “destroying” the culture. The word “destroy” appears 25 times in the document, while references to “birth rate” and “fertility” appear 43 times, alongside 47 references to Western or European “culture”. Such extremist views are common in the modern white supremacist movement. The terrorist’s manifesto mirrors the rhetoric found on forums and message boards such as 4chan and Stormfront, as well as websites like the Daily Stormer, VDARE, and Vanguard News Network. Electing Trump was about White Supremacy Not ‘Making America Great Again’ CJ Werleman But, the gunman’s Islamophobic rhetoric isn’t confined to the dark corners of the web. Far from it, actually. Inciting hatred towards Muslims is part of a multi-million dollar propaganda business funded by some of the most prominent right-wing donors and organisations in the United States – including many that have direct ties to the Trump administration. According to a June 2016 report released by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and University of California Berkeley’s Centre on Race and Gender, more than \$200 million was pumped into the anti-Muslim propaganda industry between 2008 and 2013. That money funded the activities of several dozen groups whose primary purpose is to “promote prejudice against, or hatred of, Islams and Muslims” and to push their Islamophobic rhetoric from the fringes into the mainstream. They achieve that goal, in part, by working hand-in-hand with media and tech companies to disseminate their propaganda via right-wing “scholars”, media personalities, grassroots organisations and other associated entities. “This enables them to mutually reference each other’s highly inaccurate or purposefully deceptive material as facts and then subsequently disseminate it to other grassroots groups and politicians through right-wing media outlets,” the Centre for American Progress (CAP) explained in a 2011 report. Among the most prominent donors backing America’s anti-Muslim propaganda industry is Robert Mercer, whom the Washington Post named as one of the “top 10 most influential billionaires in politics”. Mercer – the top contributor to Donald Trump’s presidential campaign – is affiliated with a slew of right-wing organisations, but he is perhaps most notorious for launching the now-defunct, scandal-plagued data analytics firm Cambridge Analytica and funding the far-right Breitbart News network, run by Steve Bannon. Mercer, his daughter Rebekah, and the vehicles they use to influence policy and society, are a case study in for-profit hate, showcasing the inner workings of an anti-Muslim propaganda industry, the tentacles of which stretch from the fringes of the internet to establishment think tanks – and all the way into the White House. The Mercer-Funded Anti-Muslim Propaganda Business Between 2014 and 2016, the Mercer Family Foundation donated \$250,000 to the New York-based Gatestone Institute, an anti-Muslim think tank that warns of a looming Muslim takeover of Europe leading to a “Great White Death”. The organisation is also notable for its close ties to the Trump administration. Rebekah Mercer sits on its board of governors, former Trump campaign chairman Steve Bannon has been a speaker at Gatestone events, and Trump’s national security adviser John Bolton became the group’s chairman in 2013. In 2016, the Gatestone Institute partnered with far-right Canadian website Rebel Media to produce a dozen “cross-branded videos” warning about the supposed dangers of Islam and refugees from Muslim-majority countries. The clips were posted on the Gatestone Institute’s YouTube page and cross-posted on Rebel Media’s website between May and October 2016. Rebel Media has produced a number of prominent anti-Muslim and anti-immigration activists, including Lauren Southern, Laura

Loomer, Faith Goldy, Gavin McInnes, and ‘Tommy Robinson’. These activists, along with ideologically aligned figures like Stefan Molyneux and Milo Yiannopoulos – whose activism on behalf of neo-Nazis and white nationalists was funded by Mercer dollars – form a global network of Islamophobia spanning the UK, US, Canada, Australia and South Africa, among others. The video series produced by Rebel Media and Gatestone covered topics including Sweden’s migrant rape epidemic, the dangers of the Islamization of the West and the growing influence of Sharia law and the Islamization of Europe, which the video claimed was a threat to “Western values”. Other videos asked if Europe is “doomed by migrants” and whether “Europeans [...] will rise to fight radical Islam and hold onto Western values”. Some pushed fear-mongering disinformation about so-called “no go zones” and propaganda claiming that Islam is inherently linked to terrorism. The New Zealand gunman referenced many of these topics in his manifesto and the underlying theme of Muslims as a threat to “Western culture” – whiteness – featured prominently in both the videos and the manifesto. Notably, the list of speakers featured in the video series includes Dutch far-right leader Geert Wilders and Daniel Pipes, president of the Middle East Forum (MEF), which has been identified as one of five key think tanks fuelling the anti-Muslim propaganda industry. Not coincidentally, many of the videos also feature clips of news articles from Breitbart, the far-right platform financed by Robert Mercer – just one of many examples of how this network of Mercer-affiliated, anti-Muslim organisations and individuals uses its own propaganda across platforms to make it appear more credible and to expand its reach.

**Weaponised Islamophobia**

The partnership between Rebel Media and the Mercer-backed Gatestone Institute demonstrates how the anti-Muslim propaganda industry pushes its Islamophobic messaging from seemingly “serious” think tanks and other conservative organisations to far-right websites and activists, who then recycle the talking points and disseminate them to new audiences. Prominent tech companies such as YouTube, Google and Facebook play a major role in this cycle by disseminating extremist content to specific audiences through features like micro-targeting and algorithmically-produced recommendations and suggestions. “We exploited Facebook to harvest millions of people’s profiles. And built models to exploit what we knew about them and target their inner demons” Chris Wylie This was the case with Secure America Now, a secretive right-wing organisation bankrolled by Robert Mercer. In 2016, the dark money group produced a series of Islamophobic propaganda videos and aired them during the final weeks of the US presidential election. However, most Americans never saw the fear-mongering videos – and that’s no accident. Secure America Now worked closely with Facebook and Google to target the anti-Muslim ads only at voters in swing states who were deemed most likely to be receptive to the messaging, which was “meant to stoke viewers’ fears of imminent Muslim conquest”. This type of targeting falls squarely within the purview of Cambridge Analytica, the data firm funded by Robert Mercer. Former Cambridge Analytica employee-turned-whistleblower Chris Wylie has described how the company, which shut down last year, used Facebook data to build a system that could profile individual voters to target them with political ads. “We exploited Facebook to harvest millions of people’s profiles,” he said. “And built models to exploit what we knew about them and target their inner demons. That was the basis the entire company was built on.” As journalist Carole Cadwalladr has explained in the Guardian, adware and tracking cookies from websites such as Breitbart can also be used by companies like Cambridge Analytica to track and monitor people’s online activity. This data can be mined to profile people based on their internet browsing history and, then, with Facebook’s help, target them with ads. “It’s how you brainwash someone. It’s incredibly dangerous” Professor Jonathan Rust “With this, a computer can... predict and potentially control human behaviour,” Professor Jonathan Rust, Director of the Psychometrics Centre at the University of Cambridge told the Guardian. “It’s how you brainwash someone. It’s incredibly dangerous.” “It’s no exaggeration to say that minds can be changed. Behaviour can be predicted and controlled. I find it incredibly scary. I really do. Because nobody has really followed through on the possible consequences of all this.” Those consequences are coming to light in real time and, all too often, they come in the form of hate crimes and violence. While there is more to be learned about the motives of the gunman in New Zealand, it would be foolish to overlook the influence of a multi-million dollar propaganda industry that creates the very same anti-Muslim rhetoric found in his manifesto.