RACISM, RESISTANCE AND SOCIAL CHANGE

OFF WHITE

Central and Eastern Europe and the global history of race

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16

Through the Balkans to Christchurch: Southeast Europe and global white nationalist historical mythology

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In March 2019, a white Australian man who had settled in New Zealand plotted to commit mass shootings at three Christchurch mosques during Friday prayers, and killed fifty-one Muslim worshippers using legally purchased assault rifles before his arrest. Inspired by the 2011 Oslo/Utøya attacker, and other white nationalist lone-actor terrorists celebrated in the digital subcultures they all frequented, before setting out he had released an online manifesto steeped in the aesthetic culture of these online forums and contemporary global far-right conspiracy theories of 'white genocide', Muslim 'invasions', and a 'Great Replacement'. Aspiring to become a point of identification for other sympathisers by exploiting current digital technologies even further to try to become a point of identification for other sympathisers, he also livestreamed himself on Facebook driving to the first mosque and playing music his audience would have recognised as a well-known meme; the livestream continued as his attack began.[1] This massacre occurred half a world away from Europe, yet two details of his preparations indicated that Southeast Europe in particular played a constitutive part in his imagination of a global struggle between white Europeans and Islam: the names of warriors who fought Ottoman forces among the many slogans painted on his weapons, and the very song he livestreamed, a front-line folk-song about Radovan Karadžić created by Serb soldiers during the Yugoslav Wars.

For terrorism analysts, the Christchurch shooting marked a long-dreaded 'watershed' as the first livestreamed attack to be so widely shared and reuploaded in a crowdsourced attempt for it to enter mainstream public consciousness online.[2] The compassionate response by New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern drew widespread praise, and led to almost fifty governments and eight technology multinationals pledging to remove terrorist and violent extremist content online. Less well-known, except to specialists on political violence and Southeast Europe, is the troubling focus that the

shooting brought to how narratives of the region's history have been racialised in the global far-right imagination. These can be described as white nationalist narratives, since they assert the identity of a white people bound by ethnic ties and entitled to sovereignty and cultural superiority in territory they claim as their birthright. Both the Bosnian Genocide and the longer history of Christian–Ottoman warfare in the Balkans are reference points in contemporary Islamophobic far-right historical mythology.

This conjunction is not novel to the twenty-first century. As James Mark argues, certain early twentieth-century white supremacist authors like Lothrop Stoddard did include Slavs alongside other European peoples in the transnational 'citadel' of whiteness they imagined was under siege.[3] Whiteness, for Stoddard, represented a transnational ethnic and political identity-position in which injury to white interests anywhere harmed white interests everywhere – the same manoeuvre made when 'alt-right' communicators use (often exaggerated) examples of violence abroad to mobilise fear among sympathisers at home.[4] This active claim to a fixed, inherited white identity differs from critical race scholars' sense of 'whiteness' as the structural, intellectual, and affective sum of the legacies of European colonisation and the enslavement of Africans, yet such structures of whiteness foster the entitlements of global white nationalism. Its movements are grounded in particular nations, but exchange ideological, practical, and financial support. David Geary, Camilla Schofield, and Jennifer Sutton thus argue that, reacting to decolonisation and the transnationalised civil rights movement, white nationalism grew increasingly global after 1945.[5] Yet their 'global' concerns only the UK, the USA, Rhodesia, South Africa, and Australia, that is, the nations imagined as joined in visions of a white 'Anglosphere'.[6]

As Christchurch illustrated, white nationalism's networks, and especially its imagination, are more global. Transnational anglophone connections were, of course, pivotal to it: the Australian perpetrator, operating in New Zealand, alluded to UK and Canadian incidents on his weapons and US right-wingers in his manifesto. The very custom of releasing manifestos before mass far-right attacks indeed shows white nationalism's increasing transnationalisation:

> A manifesto issued by a Norwegian neo-Nazi inspired an Australian anti-immigrant fanatic, whose screed in turn inspired a Texan white supremacist [the August 2019 El Paso attacker] … [The perpetrator's] aforementioned weapon included names of far-right attackers from Canada, Sweden, Italy, and elsewhere.[7]

This analyst names two Western European countries and Canada, yet elides Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) into 'elsewhere'. Much other Western Christchurch coverage, too, swept over CEE's meanings to the perpetrator

and his sympathisers (despite frequent, mistaken Western tendencies to essentialise CEE as the 'most racist' part of Europe). Yet the far-right historical mythology of whiteness menaced by Muslim 'invasion' has systematically adopted historical narratives from this region, where since the mobilisation of mass national movements almost every nation has articulated a 'bulwark of Christianity' or 'antemurale Christianitatis' myth – that is, myths of the nation expressing military heroism and masculine virtue by defending Christianity against Islam.

Commenting on materials produced by the Christchurch perpetrator is ethically sensitive, especially given the consensus against circulating his content in New Zealand and Australia. Moreover, analysts including New Zealand's own investigative commission have often concluded his cultural and political references 'were just trolling exercises' within the online far-right culture of irony.[8] Nevertheless, as genocide scholar Dirk Moses contends, to explain how perpetrators' premises become thinkable, their genealogy must be traced.[9] As such, like recent scholars researching discourses on 'alt-right'-linked messageboards, the chapter reproduces no more information than necessary to explain the discursive practices it investigates.[10] These practices are the construction of a historical mythology of endless conflict between white Europeans and Islam, which does not just resemble but feeds directly on discursive strategies during the Yugoslav Wars which presented them as directly continuing past wars between national heroes and Ottoman foes.

Such interconnections break through the artificial separation between 'ethnic' and 'racial' that results from treating the Yugoslav Wars as simply an 'ethnic' reflection of patterns that manifest in the global North/West through 'race'. This chapter argues that both regions and patterns exist within one global history. Recent studies increasingly highlight the places of Hungary, Poland, Ukraine, and Russia in transnational white nationalist and far-right imaginaries, including Ivan Kalmar's diagnosis of Western illiberals' admiration for the 'Central and other East European claims to represent an unrepentant white superiority' expressed by figures such as Hungary's Viktor Orbán.[11] Journalists and extremism investigators have also begun documenting how Ukraine's numerically small and electorally unsuccessful far right has networked with European and US extreme right movements.[12] What has still however gone underappreciated outside the specialist literature on nationalism and genocide in Southeast Europe is the significance of another region, the Balkans, in white nationalist myth-making.

As Bosnian scholars such as Hariz Halilovich and Edin Hajdarpašić were able to immediately point out in providing the earliest insights into the Christchurch perpetrator's glorification of the Bosnian Genocide, the Balkans,

with their centuries-long Ottoman past, offer white nationalist movements another significant symbolic resource.[13] They are made into an example of Christian servitude under Islamic domination; a source of inspirational commanders and insurgents who resisted Ottoman rule; and 'proof' that violence in ethnically, religiously, and racially mixed populations is endemic. Within the Balkans, these discourses have themselves been themes of ethnonationalist nation-building projects and used to justify ethnic and religious persecution; since 1918 at least, Dušan Bjelić argues, these discourses of ethnicity have been wrapped around 'race'.[14] This itself may have helped such visions of ethnocentric sovereignty gain resonance on the transnational far right. Through transnational far-right digital spaces, ethnonationalist historical mythologies from Southeast Europe – up to and including Karadžić's 'legitimising' discourses for the Bosnian Genocide – fused with ultraconservative Islamophobic conspiracy theories to 'inspire' the Christchurch attack.

'Europe', whiteness, and far-right historical mythology

The overarching racialised narrative articulated by the Christchurch shooter, and adopted as a shared historical myth by global alt-right, identitarian, and white nationalist sympathisers, is the 'Great Replacement' conspiracy theory.[15] Originating in France's post-1968 'Nouvelle Droite', it takes its current name from a 2011 Renaud Camus book. In its illusory near future, Muslims will replace, outbreed, and eventually subjugate Christians and secular Europeans unless Muslim immigration stops immediately.[16] Simultaneously, the theory imagines so-called 'cultural Marxists' – especially educators – as traitors who undermine traditional values (including the traditional gender order), brainwash Westerners into accepting multiculturalism, and, in violent extremist narratives, deserve brutal reprisals.[17] Its historical myth thus contains a threatening future, a compromised present, and a 'glorious past' that must be restored, 'dominated by white, European men'.[18] Indeed, it foresees demographic catastrophe unless traditional patriarchal masculinity is defended to prevent the white Western family unit crumbling into gender nonconformity while Muslim birth rates grow.[19]

This conspiracy theory energised 'counter-jihad' bloggers after 9/11, who (pre-Camus) usually called it the 'Eurabia' myth, implying Muslims and Western traitors were conspiring to extend 'Arabia', the Muslim heartland, into Europe. Large sections of influential 'counter-jihad' blog posts and columns appeared in the Oslo/Utøya perpetrator's manifesto.[20] Sympathetic internet users subsequently blended the 'Eurabia'/'Great Replacement' ideas with (previously somewhat distinct) US white supremacist fantasies of 'white

genocide' into one single conspiracy theory.[21] 'Great Replacement' ideology meanwhile entered Global North political and intellectual life further, through polemical books like Camus' and through the networking of Donald Trump's ex-strategist Steve Bannon, who in gathering an international reactionary coalition was known to mention the 1683 Siege of Vienna alongside the 832 Battle of Tours and other Christian–Muslim clashes and ask his audience their role in the battle to come.[22] This pulled the seventeenth-century Habsburg/Ottoman frontier into one transhistorical framework with early medieval France and contemporary Islamism, anchoring the Balkans within this vision of Christian reconquest.

These conspiracy theories should be seen as not just motivated by religious/cultural antagonism, but as inherently racialised.[23] During the Global War on Terror, mainstream political debates racialised Muslims into a culture supposedly embodying an existential threat to Western values, giving credibility to far-right conspiracies about one unified Muslim enemy confronting a West defined by Christian and European descent.[24] These accelerated after the 2015 refugee crisis. With that West racialised as white, far-right sympathisers could equate defending against the 'replacement' of European culture with defending against 'white genocide' itself.[25] Both the Christchurch and Oslo/Utøya perpetrators tried to digitally and materially memorialise themselves as heroes in this myth.

Both attackers' manifestos and material preparations thus fantasised their authors as knights or crusaders, more specifically Templars, waging modern war against an ancient enemy. This served as individual psychological preparation to commit mass killing, but also, we can suggest, a conscious effort to become identification points for future perpetrators. The Christchurch shooter, indeed, harnessed contemporary online microcelebrity practices in livestreaming his attack with direct commentary, even shouting out to a star YouTube gaming streamer who shared the online right's 'ironic sensibility'.[26] These, and the aesthetics of first-person shooter games recreated by GoPro cameras, were his visual grammar.[27] Driving to the first mosque with a song honouring Karadžić tied a warped history of the Bosnian Genocide into the attack.

Amid the attack's multiplatform 'liveness', created as journalists and internet users strove to comprehend its facts and motives, was thus a rush to discover and explain the song.[28] Images are already argued to be 'powerful visual nodes' on social media 'that frame emotive public engagement with violent events'.[29] As video, they are also powerful *audio*visual nodes. As uncomfortable as it is to interrogate a song used in such violence, it is also important to question its possible meanings for a white Australian man committing a racist and Islamophobic attack, its origins, and how he might have encountered it – since the answers reveal networks connecting ideas

of nationhood, masculinity, Europeanness, and whiteness that have shaped the contemporary far right.

Christchurch and the glorification of the Bosnian Genocide

The song livestreamed before the attack is one of hundreds of newly composed folk songs produced on/near the frontline during the Yugoslav Wars. Soldiers throughout these wars engaged in semi-professional patriotic music production, with music, language, and themes typically emphasising the ethnicised symbolic boundary between singers' nations and their professed enemies.[30] First known as 'Karadžiću, vodi Srbe svoje' ('Karadžić, lead your Serbs') or by its first line of 'Od Bihaća do Petrovca sela' ('From Bihać to Petrovac village'), it praised Karadžić as a battlefield leader, and clearly supported his genocidal project of carving a separatist 'Republika Srpska' (RS) out of Bosnian territory.[31] Originally recorded on VHS, probably by a local video production house, it was likely uploaded to YouTube in the mid/late 2000s by a user sharing it with their ethnonational diaspora. Unlike many other such songs, it entered transnational digital culture when adopted as a meme by anglophone imageboards and gaming forums which called it 'Serbia Strong', or, Islamophobically and genocidally, 'Remove Kebab'.[32] These memes invited users to bond subculturally around transgressive laughter at upsetting topics, but also fulfilled a strategy of disseminating and normalising far-right talking-points in users' everyday lives.[33]

This now-digital artefact of the Yugoslav Wars thus stems from the same violent ethno-political project praised by the Oslo/Utøya manifesto. This not only copiously reposted 'Eurabia' blogs but also sympathised with Serb nationalists' Islamophobic discourses levelled against Kosovar Albanians and Bosniaks before and during the wars: it admired Karadžić, claimed Bosnia was historically Serbian land, described Kosovo's independence as another step in Europe's Islamisation, and represented the Ottoman Empire as an Islamic regime dedicated to enslaving European Christians. The Christchurch manifesto differed on certain other positions (such as sympathy for the US, and interest in ecofascism), but on Southeast Europe both manifestos stood in continuity, and the Christchurch attacker's desire to be recognised as identifying with the Oslo/Utøya perpetrator was clear.

The Christchurch shooter's livestream thus began with a song praising the RS's genocidal project against Bosniak presence in territory it viewed as 'Serb', in the RS's ideological terms. Its composer Zeljko Grmuša, who now lives in Plavno near Knin in Croatia, told a Serbian tabloid after Christchurch that he had written it in 1993 'to offer moral support to our army'.[34] Its video, where four uniformed men including Grmuša sing in a

field, has become a meme on ultra-libertarian imageboards. Especially famed is its stony-faced accordionist, often named as Novislav Đajić – a man convicted by a German court in 1997 for involvement in the April 1992 massacre of fourteen Bosniaks in Foča, who appears in a controversial 1999 Peter Handke play that attempted to exonerate Serb responsibility for the Bosnian Genocide. Handke was reportedly even a groomsman at Đajić's wedding.[35] Most users sharing the meme might not have recognised Đajić before Christchurch; his presence still connects it to transnational genocide denial, where the false narrative of Serbs defending themselves from Muslim aggression is essential to cast Serbs as wronged. Its adoption by the digital far right further embeds this discourse within global 'white genocide' myths. Many anglophone commentators on the Christchurch attack primarily interpreted it through links to far-right meme culture.[36] Yet it supported his ideology more deeply, with a call to action describing all Serb land as under attack ('srpska zemlja napadnuta cela') and hailing Karadžić as a saviour-leader who would repel the 'Croatian Ustaše' (the militia of the fascist Independent State of Croatia in 1941–45) and the 'Turks' (Ottomans) – incorporating Serb nationalist historical myths about the Bosnian Genocide into what the Christchurch shooter presented as his war.

Bosnians, once Karadžić's targets, quickly noted these resonances. The Bosnia-Herzegovina ambassador to Australia/New Zealand immediately conveyed alarm at this ideology's spread:

> What especially worries us from Bosnia is that the killer was a white male and born in Australia and that during the live recording which was posted on social media … he listened to Chetnik songs … which mention Radovan Karadžić … and it mentions that Ustashas and Turks need to be killed.[37]

The Bosnian, Australia-based anthropologist Hariz Halilovich acknowledged the song's new life as 'a popular anti-Muslim anthem among white supremacists' and others 'linked through social media', even suggesting the livestream resembled the notorious 'Scorpions' execution video recorded by Serb paramilitaries at Srebrenica in July 1995. Viewing the Yugoslav Wars and contemporary white nationalist terrorism together, Halilovich argued that Karadžić and the Christchurch shooter had both attacked societies expressing multicultural conviviality, a target for the transnational far right and for perpetrators of ethno-political violence during the Yugoslav Wars.[38] Edin Hajdarpašić thus observes a 'fusion of Serbian and white nationalist tropes' in far-right celebrations of Karadžić.[39] This very move characterised the politics of history during the Yugoslav Wars, which amalgamated recent and distant historical references into one grand narrative of each nation's recurring, existential conflict against historic enemies.[40] Most famously, perhaps, Ratko Mladić proclaimed Serb vengeance on the 'Turks' when he

entered Srebrenica in July 1995 on the eve of its genocidal sack, equating the town's Bosniaks with oppressive Muslim rulers whom Serbs in past centuries had fought against. Today's global white nationalism delineates a transnational rather than national in-group of white European heritage, in Europe and territories Europeans colonised, and makes the Balkans part of its 'Europe' on those terms, even as critics from the region resist that fantasy.

Southeast European history as symbolic resource

Besides associating himself with Serb nationalist and alt-right glorifications of Karadžić's RS, the Christchurch shooter also incorporated himself and Karadžić into a larger historical mythology. Such syncretism had also characterised the Oslo/Utøya terrorist's self-mythologisation, centred on the Crusades and Christian cooperation against Ottoman forces at Vienna in 1683: by the siege's quatercentenary, he fantasised, Muslims would first have overrun Europe, then been defeated by resistance fighters like himself.[41] Crafting a self-appointed identity as a neo-Templar 'justiciar knight', he wore confected uniforms and fictitious medals in photographs for his manifesto. On the surface, this suggested acute attention to 'the visuality of his perverse narrative', sustained after his arrest when refusing to pose for police photographers, yet when analysed more closely only demonstrates the banality and incoherence of his ideas.[42]

The Christchurch shooter employed similar, though less elaborate, self-fashioning by painting his weapons and gear with dozens of names, toponyms, and dates, plus a handful of neo-fascist symbols like the 'black sun'. Among them were at least eighteen references to medieval history and the Crusades, arguably an urgent sign that anti-racist medievalists must counter white supremacists' simplifications and appropriations of the past.[43] The decorations' 'visual litany' of continuous struggle, moreover, attempted to seamlessly connect this past with two other contexts: battles against Muslim armies in the Balkans and Caucasus, and contemporary Islamophobic far-right violence.[44] These combined into a mythological continuum of supposedly existential battle against white Europeans' subjugation by Islam.[45]

This continuum's Southeast European, anti-Ottoman historical references went well beyond the obvious, such as 'Vienna 1683' or the 1389 Battle of Kosovo. Represented also were the nineteenth-century Montenegrin general Marko Miljanov Popović; the seventeenth-century Serb hajduk Bajo Pivljanin; Novak Vujošević, who killed twenty-eight Turkish soldiers at Fundina under Miljanov Popović; the Albanian ruler Skanderbeg; the fifteenth-century Hungarian commander János Hunyadi; Bulgarian battles including Bulair

(1913) and Shipka Pass (1877–78); the Greek independence fighter Nikitaras 'Turkofagos'; Șerban Cantacuzino, Ernst Rüdiger von Starhemberg and Feliks Kazimierz Potocki, all present at Vienna in 1683; Venice's siege-captain at Famagusta in 1570–71; Venice's commander at Lepanto in 1571; plus Russian and British admirals at the 1827 Battle of Navarino, fought off the Peloponnese.[46] All these were swept into one epic struggle against Ottoman domination over Christians, as were two Georgians, King David IV (victor against Seljuk forces at Didgori in 1121) and David Soslan (Queen Tamar's consort, who defeated Ildegizid and Seljuqid forces in 1195 and 1202).[47]

Equal in this syncretic history were contemporary far-right terrorists and talking-points. They included the 2017 Quebec City mosque shooter; the far-right Ukrainian postgraduate who in 2013 killed an 83-year-old Muslim man in Birmingham; the shooter of six African migrants in Macerata in 2018; Ebba Akerlund, a girl killed in the 2017 Islamist truck attack in Stockholm; and the Global Compact for Migration. A reference to '14 words' tied the symbolic complex explicitly to US white-genocide mythologies (the '14 words' abbreviate a quotation from the US white supremacist David Lane), while one dedication 'For Rotherham' alluded to a Yorkshire sexual-exploitation case that UK far-right figures frequently mentioned to online followers at home and abroad.[48] These references had already converged in the 'collective imaginary' of the perpetrator's and his audience's digital lifeworld.[49] His decorated weapons similarly attempted to assemble dates and figures into what Halilovich called 'a shared ideology of hatred, conflating mythological, historical and contemporary ideas and characters'.[50] Such a rhetorical strategy had equally characterised dominant public discourse immediately before and during the Yugoslav Wars.[51]

New Zealand investigators found the perpetrator had started planning to decorate his weapons by 30 January 2019, though his initial plans did not include Southeast European references.[52] Where he learned them is not immediately traceable. In 2014–17 – when Islamist terrorism peaked in European cities – he did use his father's inheritance for extensive travel, including a month in the post-Yugoslav region in December 2016–January 2017; he contacted his future rifle club from Croatia, and booked his tickets to New Zealand the next month. Yet investigators found no evidence he met far-right extremists in post-Yugoslav countries, Russia, or anywhere else. Rather, he entered far-right spaces online, through the forums, boards, and YouTube channels he accessed as he travelled, where he demonstrably read much about migration, far-right ideology, 'and historical struggles between Christianity and Islam'.[53]

The 'affective networking of paranoia' fostered through such digital spaces has arguably radicalised numerous internet users, mostly white men, to act on a 'militarized sense of masculine duty' and commit lone-actor attacks.[54]

It may have been amplified for this perpetrator through being physically transient in 2014–17 while real Islamist terror attacks were happening. His immersion in imageboard culture is particularly significant as an example of contemporary white nationalism mythologising Southeast Europe. One study of Serbian participation on the imageboard most closely associated with the far right in 2014–18 concludes its Serbian users promoted 'inherited … patterns of extreme nationalism' by relating a glorious Serbian history of 'militant opposition to Muslims', introducing figures like Mladić and Đajić into the board's 'collective mythology', and making 'alliances with extremist discourse in other countries' by merging Serb nationalist discourses with broader extremist narratives.[55] These discourses appeared 'predominant' among users posting from Serbia.[56]

If global white nationalist and populist politicians have formed an approving image of Central and Eastern Europe patriarchal ethnonationalism, these networks match it at the grassroots.[57] Through transnational digital exchanges, international users learned far-right narratives of Southeast European nations' pasts, while Southeast European users gained validation as a vanguard of white European resistance to Islam. Christchurch fuelled validation further: one NGO researching online extremism in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2020 found Bosnian users now predominantly searched for the 'Christchurch' song under its English titles, and that searches peaked during a period coinciding with commemorations of major massacres committed by the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) in 1992–95.[58] The song's endorsement by the Christchurch perpetrator, circulating through international far-right digital networks, appeared to give it extra value within the discursive spaces of genocide 'triumphalism' where it began.[59]

From analogy to connection: white nationalist networks and Southeast Europe

Informed but not wholly led by Southeast European internet users, digital spaces where identitarian and white nationalist sympathisers congregate have adopted recent and earlier histories of war in Southeast Europe as exemplars of how to defend European civilisation against Islam. The Ottomans' conscription of Christian boys, a Serb nationalist grievance since the nineteenth century, has even been repurposed to argue that (since Europeans were also enslaved, by Muslims) the transatlantic slave trade was nothing uniquely heinous.[60] The online platforms where these historical narratives circulate as calls to action have created a 'digital feedback loop' where 'white male violence is uploaded, distributed, consumed and remixed by others'.[61] So are ideas about Southeast Europe as a place where white

European civilisation has persistently been under attack, as part of a trans-historical invasion that sympathisers believe has now reached the West.

White nationalist interpretations of the 'Balkans', moreover, also point to a longing to violently separate multicultural societies (especially the US) into separate ethno-states – including the long-fantasised whites-only 'Cascadia' in the Pacific Northwest.[62] 'Balkanisation', a usually pejorative concept, is in this ideology paradoxically welcome, as the imagined cause of 'ethnopluralism' where every ethno-racial group would inhabit its own homeland.[63] Professed indifference for where those of non-European heritage would live disguises identitarian visions of mass forced displacement and overtly extremist fantasies of outright eliminationist violence.[64] Such ideas, and the deniability strategies supporting them, come very close to the RS strategic programme, which aimed to permanently separate peoples by removing non-Serbs throughout the territory Karadžić had designated as a strategically viable Serb homeland.[65] RS propaganda, meanwhile, exploited the wartime Bosnian president's youthful interests in political Islam to spread fear that his government would enforce Islamist rule.[66]

Within contemporary white nationalism's reference points in charting existential war against Islam, the RS in particular appears to have joined Rhodesia and apartheid South Africa within the 'transcolonial racist imaginary' highlighted when the perpetrator of the 2015 Charleston attack venerated both the latter countries.[67] Boosted by the Oslo/Utøya manifesto, Jasmin Mujanović argues, the Bosnian Genocide 'has become [a] major ideological pillar among, and model for, new-age far-right extremists'.[68] Contemporary white nationalism takes up its perpetrators' historical mythology and combines it with panic about 'white genocide' into one myth of white victimhood at the hands of Islam. Yet this is not just a case of mapping Eastern European 'ethnicity' on to Western 'race', since the RS project already deployed a racialised understanding of Serbs' separation from Muslims – especially through its vice-president Biljana Plavšić, an ex-biologist who considered Bosniaks a 'genetically deformed' subgroup of South Slavs who were degenerating by the generation since conversion to Islam.[69]

Christchurch has raised Islamophobic Serb nationalism's profile in digital far-right spaces just as Oslo/Utøya introduced many more sympathisers to the fantasy of a revived Knights Templar.[70] Since 2019, users expressing the incel movement's misogynistic and racist visual rhetoric have celebrated the perpetrator through memes positively comparing him to other shooters, with a clear message that mass attacks protecting white European cultures 'are the pathway to becoming a man'; one meme even mentions his playing 'Serbian' songs among his virtues.[71] Southeast Europe might here represent an authentically masculine Europe ready to defend Western civilisation when the supposedly feminised, gender nonconforming West cannot.

This extremist subjectivity thus links masculinity, violence, and whiteness foundationally together. If contemporary far-right aesthetics appeal to marginalised men who identify with whiteness by fusing desire for male comradeship with anger at mainstream society and turning these emotions into readiness for violence towards Others, this nexus was also at work here.[72] The Christchurch shooter's manifesto, for instance, wrote that 'the men of Europe' would be 'men in name only' until Hagia Sophia had no more minarets, suggesting that cleansing Islam from Constantinople was a masculine duty.[73] Such grievances were widespread before and during the Yugoslav wars, sparked by mid-1980s nationalistic Serbian media stoking fear that Albanians were orchestrating physical and sexual violence against Serb men to force them out of Kosovo.[74]

Racialised Islamophobia has also fostered material connections between groups. In 2011, 'Knights Templar International' (KTI) was simply a fictive organisation in the Oslo/Utøya manifesto; in 2015, an organisation named KTI appeared online selling membership regalia and producing content. This KTI has fund-raised for Bulgarian 'migrant-hunting' vigilantes and unnamed Serb groups in Kosovo, where it said it had sent bullet-proof vests and communications equipment to resist 'Islamist oppression'.[75] Its British founder was based in Budapest until Hungarian authorities denied him entry in May 2017, and has recorded videos on the Bulgarian border with the anti-migrant militia BNO Shipka, whose own name references Shipka Pass.[76] Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) journalists in 2018 reported KTI was promoting the 'Great Replacement' online to microtargeted audiences via a video hub in Serbia, and a student from the small Serbian chapter of the identitarian movement Generation Identity told the BBC they had received social media training from KTI's founder.[77] A lengthy essay on 'ethos' on KTI's website contained four paragraphs praising Prince Lazar's actions before the Battle of Kosovo as a 'perfect example of sacrifice', crediting the Serbian far-right Red zmaja ('Order of the Dragon') for the text.[78] Until at least mid-2018, KTI's site was publishing videos about Christian–Muslim battles which would have been obscure to most Western audiences, including one on Shipka Pass.[79] However, much KTI material on mainstream platforms has become unavailable since the post-Christchurch reaction against far-right content online.

KTI's documentable connections with Southeast Europe nevertheless show how anglophone movements have absorbed regional history into their own historical mythology of transhistorical European struggle against Muslim invaders, and suggests increasing networking between this mythology's sympathisers in Southeast Europe and the Global North/West.[80] The Serbian Generation Identity leader who told BBC journalists '[w]e are against … mass immigration, illegal immigration … basically, we do not want to be

replaced, to be bred out of existence in our own homelands' was synthesising Serbian nationalist discourses of demographic panic dating back to the mid-1980s with US 'white genocide' rhetoric and anti-immigration panics throughout the West.[81] The spectre of Muslims taking over Kosovo, fomented by Serbian tabloids and the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1985–86, now inspires far-right French intellectuals' warnings about French cities.[82] The Christchurch shooter's manifesto, meanwhile, was translated into Croatian, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, and several Western European languages; its Bulgarian translator (a user of one image-board where the shooter posted his manifesto) explained he wanted non-anglophone readers to also access its ideological messages and be inspired to commit attacks.[83]

The digitally facilitated absorption of Southeast European 'antemurale' myths into white nationalist historical mythologies creates new space for supporters of anti-Muslim nationalist programmes to imagine membership of a global struggle, standing incontrovertibly and indispensably with(in) white Europe. The hypermasculinity of propagandistic representations of Serb soldiers within this space, meanwhile, aligns with a gendered geopolitics that imagines the Balkans (like Hungary, Poland, and Russia) as a space of white masculine heroism, defending Western civilisation when a feminised, gender nonconforming West cannot. This mythology persists even as Southeast European migrants in the West can be targeted for far-right violence, showing asymmetry in the power to ascribe and confirm whiteness.[84]

Putin's Russia, Ukraine's far right, and the anti-gender, anti-globalist politics of today's Hungarian and Polish governments are not, therefore, white nationalists' only CEE reference-points.[85] So are the Balkans, and in particularly mythologised ways. The perpetrators of the 2010s' two largest far-right terror attacks, in Oslo/Utøya and Christchurch, both propagated historico-mythic narratives incorporating Kosovo and the Bosnian Genocide, and the Christchurch shooter added numerous other Balkan episodes that had entered far-right digital culture. White nationalist fantasies of stoking US racial war model themselves on the Balkans – or rather their imagined picture of a Balkan civilisational shatter-zone.[86] This shatter-zone image is common to much other Western geopolitical thought, hinting at how interpretations of 'Balkan' conflict have fuelled racialised 'clash of civilisations' thinking since the 1990s; indeed, Karadžić and Slobodan Milošević exploited that very trope when addressing Western interlocutors during the wars. Certain late 2010s Serbian activists courted Western identitarian allies similarly.[87]

Nevertheless, most scholars treat the Yugoslav Wars and their historical mythologies separately from the global history of 'race'. Even as eminent a scholar as Stuart Hall could call the conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo the

product of 'ethnicity rather than "race"'[88] – though prevailing explanations in 1990s UK media might have contributed to that. Yet ethnicised symbolic boundaries were hardest and dehumanisation processes were most bitter during these wars when leaders were using racialised dynamics to separate collective national selves from their supposed historic enemies. For this to be possible in the 1990s, majoritarian nation-building projects in the region had first had to undergo what Dušan Bjelić has termed the '[p]olitical conversion of ethnicity into race' – that is, the nationalistic adoption of race science to frame ethno-nations as more primordially favoured than their rivals and better suited to rule.[89] The projects to create an ethnically homogenous RS in Bosnia and regain Serb dominance in Kosovo, including the harnessing of historical mythologies to start legitimising them before the wars, are not just analogous enough to 'white genocide' and 'Great Replacement' myths that white nationalist sympathisers can identify with them. Those genocidal projects and white nationalism are already connected, since by the time both were formed, the reservoir of ideas about race, violence, and culture beneath them had already suffused the globe.

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