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# Living Death: Imagined History and the Tarrant Manifesto

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## Abstract

This essay analyses the manifesto of terrorist Brenton Tarrant, the perpetrator of the 2019 Christchurch mosque shootings. Reading Tarrant's manifesto (*The Great Replacement*) as a cultural artefact of digital white nationalism, it is possible to identify a specific worldview and emotional subjectivity that is also shared with the actions and writing of Anders Breivik, the perpetrator of the 2011 Oslo and Utøya massacre. After examining both terrorists' manifestos, their biographical particulars and drawing from ethnographic research into the online communities that Tarrant frequented, a shared phenomenological framework emerges. This framework is presented as 'the imagined past and present' of the Replacement Theory terrorist. This essay will address these white nationalist *imaginings* via a cultural exegesis of Tarrant's and Breivik's manifestos, as well as an analysis of their comparable monastic aesthetic or 'living death' in the lead up to their attacks.

## Keywords

white nationalism – anthropology – digital radicalisation – phenomenology – Australia

## 1 Introduction

Anthropology is typically distinguished by its practical methodology: that is, the long-term qualitative study of individuals or cultural groups in real world 'field sites'. Historically known as ethnographic research in both the British and American school, the modern anthropological encounter between researcher and subject still retains much of its past fundamentals, despite radical

disciplinary changes in the late twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore curious that I have found myself conducting anthropological fieldwork entirely from a web browser, with informants I will never meet. Indeed, this digital ethnographic study was completed without conducting any formal interviews, in-person fieldwork, or experiencing that holy grail of anthropology: a sense of genuine cultural immersion amongst my informants – that will-o'-the-wisp experience where the researcher has trouble distinguishing where their subjectivity ends and that of 'the other' begins. As will soon be made clear, in the case of this particular study, any sense of cultural immersion with my informants would be practically impossible, as well as morally disconcerting.

This essay is a cultural and emotional exegesis of the manifesto associated with the 2019 Christchurch mosque shootings, contextualised with an ethnographically informed study of digital white nationalist culture in the biographical context of its Australian perpetrator, Brenton Tarrant. Inspired by Louis Snyder's theory of macro-nationalism<sup>2</sup> in the context of so-called 'stray dog'<sup>3</sup> white nationalist terrorism, this exegesis of Tarrant's writing is contrasted selectively with the writing, actions and life of the Norwegian white nationalist terrorist Anders Breivik.

For obvious reasons, traditional ethnographic research methods are lacking in this study, as I did not conduct in-person ethnographic research with either individual or the environments they inhabited. Instead, I have integrated long-term ethnographic observations of the distinct online spaces that Tarrant frequented with a close reading and cultural analysis of his and Breivik's manifestos.

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- 1 Ethnographic research is generally a long-term, in-person qualitative study of individuals or cultural groups, typically far removed from the subjectivity and 'cultural familiar' of the anthropologist. See Mike Morris, *Concise Dictionary of Social and Cultural Anthropology* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 54.
  - 2 Snyder's analysis emphasises the dynamic qualities of pan-nationalist movements, especially their ability to transcend the bounds of traditional nationalist ideology. Considering the myriad political identities Tarrant and Breivik espouse in their manifestos, I regard their synthesis of white supremacist ethno-nationalism, Christianity and Europeanism alongside their nativist Australian/Norwegian nationalism as an exemplary case study of macro-nationalist sentiment in the individual. For more, see Louis L. Snyder, *Macro-Nationalisms: A History of the Pan Movements* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1984).
  - 3 Brian Michael Jenkins, *Stray Dogs and Virtual Armies: Radicalization and Recruitment to Jihadist Terrorism in the United States since 9/11* (Pittsburgh, PA: RAND Corporation, 2011).

### 1.1 *On the Merits of Studying Hate*

In the spirit of a new kind of salvage anthropology,<sup>4</sup> I deem the Tarrant manifesto to be a viable cultural artefact of the unencounterable: that is, a distinctly ‘digital native’<sup>5</sup> white nationalist subculture. While I appreciate public commentary urging civil society to ignore the Tarrant manifesto outright,<sup>6</sup> a measured cultural analysis of *The Great Replacement* is warranted, especially when contextualised with long-term digital ‘fieldwork’ in key online spaces and social media platforms that Tarrant not only frequented,<sup>7</sup> but explicitly shared and proselytised the values of Replacement Theory and white nationalism within. Moreover, while the cultural biome of fringe sites like 4chan and its derivatives are often referenced in this essay, it is worth noting that such online spaces are often impervious to meaningful critical analysis.<sup>8</sup>

To compensate, this essay regards the written manifesto of Brenton Tarrant as an imperfect Rosetta Stone that partially decrypts the world of digital white nationalism, as well as offering a culturally relativist interpretation of his terrorist actions. I say imperfect, given *The Great Replacement’s* opacity, inaccuracies

4 Salvage anthropology is a subset of forensic cultural anthropology in which the anthropologist uses ethnographic research methods to survey the unencounterable (for example, deceased, historical) subject or cultural setting. See James Hester, ‘Pioneer Methods in Salvage Anthropology,’ *Anthropological Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (1968): 132–46, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3316788>.

5 As referenced in the *Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch Masjidain* (hereafter NZRCI Report), vol. 2 (2020), 231, <http://www.christchurchattack.royalcommission.nz>. When describing Tarrant, the term ‘digital native’ denotes one who was born into and is encultured ‘natively’ (that is, raised in the context of) digital technology and the internet in particular. See Marc Prensky, ‘Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants Part 1,’ *On the Horizon* 9, no. 5 (October 2001), 1–6 <https://doi.org/10.1108/10748120110424816>.

6 James Alan Fox, ‘Media Amplifies New Zealand Shooting Suspect’s “Manifesto,” Giving Mass Killers a Platform,’ *USA Today*, 15 March 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2019/03/15/new-zealand-brenton-tarrant-dylann-roof-manifesto-column/3177853002/>.

7 ‘In 2017, [Tarrant] told his mother that he had started using the 4chan internet message board when he was 14 years old’ (NZRCI Report, 2:168). A digital native myself, I also first encountered 4chan in the pre-Reddit internet of the early 2000s and became fluent in its slang, toilet wall humour, and cultural rejection of outsiders. In the years following, I have frequently lurked on 4chan and its derivatives as a means of gauging extreme points of view, particularly in the wake of modern atrocities such as Utøya. Indeed, I first accessed Breivik’s manifesto on 4chan within hours of the terrorist attack.

8 Thomas Colley and Martin Moore, ‘The Challenges of Studying 4chan and the Alt-Right: “Come On In the Water’s Fine,”’ *New Media & Society* (September 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820948803>.

(deliberate or otherwise) and the author's preference for cryptolect.<sup>9</sup> However, if properly contextualised, *The Great Replacement* contains myriad layers of textual, cultural, emotional and political meaning that may be valuable to those seeking to understand what drives white nationalists to transcend inaction and commit acts of terrorism. At the very least, given future prevention is the perennial goal of Australian anti-terror policy,<sup>10</sup> the Tarrant manifesto also merits anthropological interpretation as a means of separating the manifesto's so-called 'shit posting'<sup>11</sup> from the fragments of genuine biographical, ideological and phenomenological confession.

*The Great Replacement* appears to address multiple audiences simultaneously, whether it be radicalising likeminded readers from 4chan, 8chan and Gab, or simply spiting his victims and revolting the general public. To understand how these varied audiences are constituted and addressed, this essay will outline the digital background of the Christchurch mosque shootings, its perpetrator and his ideological connection to Anders Breivik. Using an acquired cultural fluency of the online subcultures that Tarrant frequented, this is followed by a select cultural exegesis of the manifesto itself, which – alongside biographical examination of Tarrant and Breivik – suggests a dual phenomenological framework experienced by both individuals: the 'imagined past' and 'imagined present' of the Replacement Theory white nationalist terrorist.

This framework of historical 'imagining' suggests that despite them never meeting each other and the decade between their attacks, the lived experience and ideological worldview of both Tarrant and Breivik were remarkably similar, suggesting their inhabiting of a shared cultural world of digital white nationalism. This subculture is distinguished by two fundamental principles. First, from an early age, both Tarrant and Breivik harboured an intense, personal hatred for non-white society and culture present in their home nations (especially Islam). On its face, this pronounced racism may not be particularly uncommon in either Australia or Norway. However, both men's hatred eventually transcended abstraction, so that they began to dedicate their lives and resources to projects of mass murder. Second, for Tarrant and Breivik, the transformation of their abstract hatred to direct action was largely facilitated and politically legitimised with the ideology of Replacement Theory.

Along with these two essential elements, both men also experienced extreme isolation, a peculiarly masculine social alienation, and a slowly realised state

9 A secretive language form used by a subculture.

10 Tamara Tulich, 'Prevention and Pre-emption in Australia's Domestic Anti-terrorism Legislation,' *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 1, no. 1 (2012): 52–64, <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.viii.68>.

11 Or disingenuous/deceptive trolling.

of 'living death' in the lead up to their attacks. This shared state of 'living death' comprises a curious, escalating monastic aesthetic adopted by both Tarrant and Breivik in their final years, that seemed to encourage and rationalise their impending mass murder of civilians. It is distinguished by a rejection of hedonic sensualism, materialism as well as the trappings of a 'healthy' social life – a warrior monk ascetic in the twenty-first century. Most eerily, this state of 'living death' reflects the life in prison that both men planned for and now experience.<sup>12</sup> In short, despite the genuine political ideology present in both Tarrant and Breivik's writing, there is (at their biographical core) the hint of a mutually experienced loneliness, that seemed to push them both inexorably toward atrocity.

## 2 'Going Live': Digital Background on the Christchurch Mosque Shootings

In the minutes before the terrorist attack in Christchurch began, a new thread appeared on 8chan. 'Well lads, it's time to stop shit posting and time to make a real-life effort post', declared the anonymous user on 'Politically Incorrect', or '/pol/'; one of many imageboards hosted within the fringe site's servers. Alongside this declaration of intent, the user posted a handful of web links, most of them shortened and scrambled. At the very top of this list was a Facebook hyperlink that led users to the profile of 'brenton.tarrantg', where a live stream of the attack would shortly commence. Beneath the video stream were more weblinks, which led users to a seventy-four-page PDF manifesto dubbed *The Great Replacement*. On 8chan, the anonymous post continued, 'The Facebook link is below – by the time you read this, I should be going live', before signing off with an indirect reference to both *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) and Norse mythology, 'If I don't survive the attack, goodbye, god bless, and I will see you all in Valhalla!'<sup>13</sup> What the 8chan poster meant by 'going live' would quickly become apparent. In a horrific, live streamed head camera (or headcam) recording disseminated widely across mainstream social media platforms, fifty-one people would be shot to death in two Christchurch mosques by a twenty-eight-year-old Australian named Brenton Tarrant.

12 Both Tarrant and Breivik planned to survive their respective terrorist attacks and, in Breivik's case, also pursue a lengthy legal battle.

13 The war cry of the film's antagonist Immortan Joe and his army: *Mad Max: Fury Road*, directed by George Miller (Burbank, CA: Warner Bros, 2015).



FIGURE 1 The 'Australian Shitposter' avatar used by Tarrant  
SOURCE: 8CHAN

While the 8chan post on 15 March contained a unique identification number and a timestamp, its only other distinguishing feature was an accompanying image. 8chan is an imageboard: a primitive, text-based web forum, in which users share an image and discuss it within an individual thread – a crude user-interface ubiquitous across the unaffiliated chan network.<sup>14</sup> To the uninitiated, it looks both archaic and distinctly 'old internet'. The image accompanying the post announcing the Christchurch attack was a meme of the so-called 'Australian Shitposter',<sup>15</sup> which depicts a grinning, bronzed, older man with the likeness of Australian politician Bob Katter (Figure 1).<sup>16</sup>

Wielding a bottle of Victoria Bitter in one hand and wearing an iconic Akubra hat, this character has pervaded 4chan and its derivative imageboards

14 Since the 4chan imageboard debuted in October 2003, its open-source user-interface has remained consistent, with only minor aesthetic variations to its innumerable clones like 8chan, 7chan, 8kun and Endchan.

15 Also known colloquially as the 'Aussie Face' meme.

16 My estimation.

for years. According to Know Your Meme, the iconic Antipodean was conjured up in March 2013 to represent the inordinate number of Australian trolls who would appear on 4chan while its North American users slept in their respective time zones.<sup>17</sup> Along with the terrorist's name, this avatar would be the only consistent feature of the social media accounts purporting to be operated by Tarrant. In the cultural biome of 4chan and its derivatives, the Christchurch attack post was nothing special. I have been lurking<sup>18</sup> on imageboards and other less accessible corners of the internet since the mid-2000s, often seeing posts declaring an imminent act of extreme violence, either to be committed by the anonymous poster themselves, or by somebody they know. These hoaxes typically imply an impending school shooting in the United States, with the user cryptically warning in their post that readers should avoid a particular high school or college campus over the next twenty-four hours. In my personal experience as a lurker, none of these posts ever preceded real world massacres. Invariably, it was just mass shooter 'cosplay' (or 'larping'),<sup>19</sup> a prank facilitated by 4chan's inherent anonymity.

In the wake of the attack, Tarrant deliberately left the world with two cultural artefacts. There was the point-of-view (POV) live stream of the attack itself – which included a lengthy monologue to camera by Tarrant. Filmed with the same headcam that he would don minutes later before walking into the first of two Christchurch mosques, Tarrant began the livestream in his car, amiably addressing viewers with dry humour and 4chan inside jokes. Delivered with a nonchalance that belies the extreme violence to follow, Tarrant's manner of speaking in the vlog was also a crucial link between himself and the published manifesto. Shared cadence, choice of words, use of choice slang and a deadpan humour are all present in Tarrant's headcam address, and these qualities are also reflected in his writing.

The second artefact was the manifesto itself. *The Great Replacement* is a seventy-four-page digital document that ranges from a crude political treatise to a semi-reliable biographical confession – everything that Tarrant assumed the public would want to know about him, his motivations for conducting the attack and the worldview that enabled it. While the POV live stream of the Christchurch massacre itself was novel in the context of white nationalist propaganda, it was the substance, presentation and tone of Tarrant's manifesto that especially echoed the ideology, writing and biography of terrorist Anders

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17 'Australian Shitposters,' Know Your Meme, accessed 15 November 2020, <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/australian-shitposters>.

18 Chan slang for users who view, but do not actively post content.

19 Costume Play (CP) or Live Action Role Play (LARP).

Breivik, the white nationalist assailant of the 2011 Oslo bombing and Utøya Island massacre.

### 3 Connecting Utøya with Christchurch: Replacement Theory and Phenomenology

The best option would [be] to upload the digital movie via high-speed internet (your iPhone) to a distribution site at the end of your mission. Unfortunately uploading [would take] hours ... This will of course change at some point in the future.

Excerpt from 2083, the 2011 manifesto of ANDERS BREIVIK, 893

Despite their attacks occurring nearly a decade apart and in different social environments, Breivik's and Tarrant's ideological catalyst for mass murder was identical: Replacement Theory is at the centre of both individual's writing. For Breivik, it is the thesis that runs through all 1,515 pages of his manifesto, 2083: *A European Declaration of Independence* (hereafter known as 2083).<sup>20</sup> For Tarrant, Replacement Theory is in the title of his manifesto and is a constant refrain throughout its comparably meagre seventy-four pages. For both terrorists, Replacement Theory ideologically legitimises their acts of mass murder, by fusing their personal alienation and hatred of Islam into an objective political project of historical significance. Depending on the grievances of those who embrace it, Replacement Theory is culturally adaptable and environmentally subjective in guiding white nationalist terrorist target selection. In the case of Breivik, the malleability of Replacement Theory rationalised his targeting of the predominantly white youth division of the Norwegian Labour Party (AP) on Utøya Island. While this may seem incongruent with Tarrant's exclusive targeting of observant Muslims in Christchurch, the ideological rationale of Replacement Theory supported both attacks, encouraging a universal dehumanisation of its targets irrespective of ethnicity, religion or nationality.<sup>21</sup>

In 2083, Breivik writes that the 'Islamisation of Europe' is deliberately facilitated by domestic 'cultural Marxist/multiculturalist traitors', and therefore categorises European 'targets' into a priority hierarchy of 'A/B/C'. In this hierarchy,

20 While less explicit than Tarrant in his invocation of Replacement Theory, the email subject heading that Breivik sent out to the public with his manifesto attached was: 'The Islamisation of Western Europe and the Status of the European Resistance Movements.' See Asne Seierstad, *One of Us* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), 179.

21 The rationale for Breivik's non-Muslim target selection is a continued subject of analysis by researchers. For clarity, this article is limited to Breivik's own writing in 2083 and select authoritative sources on his motives (in particular Seierstad, *One of Us*).



category 'A' traitors are heads of state, whereas category 'C' traitors are 'low-level' civilian enablers of multiculturalism (such as the teenage attendees of the Utøya Island AP summer camp).<sup>22</sup> In *The Great Replacement*, Tarrant offers a more rudimentary criterion for his target selection of worshippers in two Christchurch mosques. 'They were [a] large group of invaders, from a culture with higher fertility rates ... that seek to occupy my peoples [sic] lands and ethnically replace my own people' he writes on page 10, demonstrating the adaptive nature of Replacement Theory as an ideological enabler of his personal hatred of Muslims. Consequently, Replacement Theory deems both social groups viable targets in the direct action of white nationalist terrorism,<sup>23</sup> whether they be worshippers from migrant backgrounds in a Christchurch mosque, or a cohort of politically active white Norwegian teenagers at a summer camp.<sup>24</sup>

As to its history, Replacement Theory existed in white nationalist discourse throughout the twentieth century, with its basic premise of threatened racial hygiene in Western Europe a common tenet of neo-Nazi political racism.<sup>25</sup> However, in 2011, it underwent somewhat of a revival, with far-right novelist Renaud Camus publishing two works on the conspiracy theory, which were subsequently translated and disseminated widely online.<sup>26</sup> Although the minutiae of the conspiracy vary, Replacement Theory ostensibly posits that the white race is being deliberately eradicated by non-white/non-European peoples, particularly Muslims, in the context of post-colonialism. This 'replacement' is facilitated by mass migration, and purposeful rapid births within recently arrived migrant families, which is in turn enabled deliberately by technocrat European elites. Finally, a manufactured culture war is waged by these elites, in which imported non-Western practices and norms systematically 'replace' Western traditions and liberal values in 'white' civil society.<sup>27</sup>

22 Anders Breivik, 2083: *A European Declaration of Independence* (2011), 938–39.

23 The dehumanisation of their widely different targets is reflected in both terrorists' interchangeable use of the words 'traitors' and 'invaders' for their victims irrespective of ethnicity, age, gender, political affiliation or other characteristics. See Breivik, 2083, 813, 938–41; and Brenton Tarrant, *The Great Replacement* (2019), 4–13.

24 Karolina Wojtasik, 'Utøya – Christchurch – Halle. Right-wing Extremists' Terrorism,' *Security Dimensions International and National Studies* 33 (2020): 84–97, <https://10.5604/01.3001.0014.2670>.

25 For a concise history of race hygiene theory in Western Europe, see Sheila Faith Weiss, 'The Race Hygiene Movement in Germany,' *Osiris* 3, no. 1 (1987): 193–236, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/301759>.

26 Jacob Davey and Julia Ebner, *The 'Great Replacement': The Violent Consequences of Mainstreamed Extremism* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2019), 7–10.

27 Gabriele Cosentino, *Social Media and the Post-Truth World Order* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 73–77.

Camus, like other European racists of his generation, was himself influenced by a litany of mid- to late-twentieth-century fiction and non-fiction depicting an imminent overrunning of Western Europe by non-whites, and the rapid eradication of so called 'white' and Western civilisation. Jean Raspail's *Le Camp des saints* is a typical example of *The Great Replacement* speculative fiction that influenced Camus.<sup>28</sup> Conceived in the tumultuous decade following France's colonial withdrawal from Algeria, *Le Camp des saints* depicts a naïve European continent that opens up its borders to post-colonial migrants. This quickly results in a dystopia and the eclipse of Western civilisation, as Europe is literally overrun and 'replaced' by the previously colonised indigenous populations of India, the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>29</sup>

*Le Camp des saints* influenced Camus, who just six months before Breivik's attack on Utøya published *Le Grand Remplacement* ('*The Great Replacement*'). This updated account of the conspiracy theory incorporated contemporary post-9/11 Islamophobia into its thesis, effectively launching Replacement Theory's globalised journey, appealing to a new generation of digital-native hardened racists. Alongside Replacement Theory, Tarrant's fascination with Breivik and Utøya is reflected predominantly in his written manifesto. Indeed, the definitive New Zealand Royal Commission Inquiry report on the Christchurch terrorist attack (hereafter referred to as NZRCI) dedicates a section of Volume 2 to Tarrant's connection to Breivik, concluding that Tarrant 'was significantly influenced by the Oslo terrorist'<sup>30</sup> in ideology and practice. Despite this, the NZRCI report also stresses that Tarrant acted alone,<sup>31</sup> and his stated connection to Breivik (namely a 'blessing' given to him by an imprisoned Breivik through unnamed white nationalist interlocutors dubbed 'The Reborn Knights Templar') was a mere red herring. In other words, it was an elaborate false trail of evidence apparently laid by Tarrant in his manifesto to falsely imply that the Christchurch attack was part of an international white nationalist uprising.<sup>32</sup> Likewise Breivik, too, acted technically 'alone', and fabricated the existence of a UK-based terror cell after his arrest.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, Breivik's and Tarrant's ideological core suggests both political lineage and intimate cultural connection.

28 G. E. Jarvis, 'Raspail, Racism, and Migration: Implications for Radicalization in a Polarizing World,' *Transcultural Psychiatry* (July 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1363461520930921>.

29 Jean Raspail, *Le Camp des saints* (Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont, 1973).

30 NZRCI Report, 2:197–98.

31 Financially, logistically and operationally (NZRCI Report, 2:233).

32 NZRCI Report, 2:232–33.

33 Seierstad, *One of Us*, 282.

### 3.1 *Applying Phenomenology to Tarrant and Breivik*

Phenomenological frameworks of individual perception are beneficial in anthropology, as they seek to understand the subjective experience and everyday reality of ourselves and others. As Ram and Houston note, ‘phenomenology is an investigation of how humans perceive, experience, and comprehend the sociable, materially assembled world that they inherit at infancy and in which they dwell’.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, in the context of anthropological investigation, phenomenology seeks to understand individual perception of the everyday world as a means of ethnographically documenting the lived experience of the research subject. While advocates of phenomenology’s use in anthropology are quick to recognise ‘the limits to a knowing consciousness’,<sup>35</sup> there is value in regarding ethnographic informants’ subjectivity as the ‘constitutive “horizon” of experience’.<sup>36</sup> For some anthropologists, the studying of this ‘horizon’ can ‘give renewed significance to the pervasive presence of emotions in social life ... in social theory and ethnography’.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, separating the emotional and ideological core of *The Great Replacement* is the first step in studying Tarrant’s ‘horizons’ in the lead up to his attack. Reading his manifesto, it is clear that while Replacement Theory served as the ideological basis for the Christchurch attack, it was Tarrant’s intense affective hatred for the Muslim ‘other’ that also pushed him to commit mass murder.<sup>38</sup> The roots of this emotional core are uncertain, but the NZRCI report notes that according to Tarrant’s childhood friends and former high school teachers, he espoused shocking racism from an early age. Further, while an unremarkable and indifferent student, Tarrant expressed an impassioned interest in European military history.<sup>39</sup>

Sara Ahmed has written extensively on how hate ‘works on and through [the] bodies’ of subjects as part of the ‘ordinary production’ of everyday life. She regards the emotion as an often latent psychological projection – that is, the self ‘projects all that is undesirable onto another, while concealing any traces of that projection, so that the other comes to appear as a being with a life of its own.’<sup>40</sup> In the context of white nationalist terrorism, Ahmed emphasises hate’s

34 Kalpana Ram and Chris Houston, ‘Introduction: Phenomenology’s Methodological Invitation,’ in *Phenomenology in Anthropology: A Sense of Perspective*, ed. Kalpana Ram and Chris Houston (Indiana University Press, 2015), 1–26.

35 Ram and Houston, ‘Introduction,’ 11.

36 Ram and Houston, ‘Introduction,’ 11.

37 Ram and Houston, ‘Introduction,’ 13.

38 Tarrant, *The Great Replacement*, 5, 7, 13.

39 NZRCI Report, 2:168.

40 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 49.

boundary-marking between 'selves' and 'others' – when the self is perceived as invaded, or threatened by an 'other', hatred for the 'other' intensifies.<sup>41</sup> But as Ahmed also notes, 'not all subjects hate in the same way',<sup>42</sup> and this is where a speculative phenomenological framing of Tarrant and Breivik is useful.

In the case of Utøya and Christchurch, it would appear that irrespective of social and cultural context, when those who harbour emotional hatred for the Muslim 'other' are also seduced by the political legitimisation of Replacement Theory, a toxic alchemy of emotion and ideology can result in distinctly similar terrorist attacks across the globe. Indeed, despite their different cultural contexts and seemingly incongruent target selection, Tarrant and Breivik both cited Replacement Theory in order to evolve their emotional hatred of 'invaders' and domestic enablers of multiculturalism into politically significant, heroic acts in the social spaces they inhabited. This is combined with both individuals regarding themselves as grandiose figures in an epic *imagined* history, a signified past culturally particular to white nationalist terrorists who embrace Replacement Theory.

The basis for understanding this perception of reality (or, *imagined* history) begins with Tarrant's and Breivik's 'imagined' past. This is an abstract realm of ethno-nationalist memory, analogous to the nationalist mythologies that Benedict Anderson regarded as critical to maintaining one's unity with the *felt* national whole – that subjective 'sense' of belonging to a nation as a citizen.<sup>43</sup> What follows is an examination of Tarrant's and Breivik's shared imagined past and present explored through a limited cultural and emotional exegesis of *The Great Replacement*, as informed by my ethnographic understanding of digital white nationalist subculture. Throughout this analysis, aspects of Tarrant's verifiable biography will be contrasted selectively with the life and writing of Breivik, suggesting a shared phenomenological 'horizon' in both white nationalist terrorists.

#### 4 The Imagined Past

Benedict Anderson's most renowned contribution to the study of nations was the notion that as abstract social constructions, they must be 'imagined' by the community to exist. As Anderson explains, the nation is imagined 'because

41 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 51, 56.

42 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 56.

43 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on The Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 3rd edn (London: Verso, 2006), 1–7.

the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each, lives the image of their communion'.<sup>44</sup> In their writing, both Tarrant and Breivik describe active participation in an elaborate imagined macro-national community, specifically one built on an ethno-nationalist imagined past, which justifies their terrorist actions in the present. Although a self-described lifelong racist and politically active ethno-nationalist since his late teens,<sup>45</sup> Tarrant describes the impetus for the Christchurch mosque shooting in an anecdote from his European travels in the mid-2010s. Early on in *The Great Replacement*, Tarrant describes being emotionally overwhelmed at the sight of an unnamed world war cemetery in rural France. 'Simple, white, wooden crosses stretching from the fields beside the roadway, seemingly without end, into the horizon',<sup>46</sup> he writes, while also regarding the European war deaths of the twentieth century as vain in the wake of twenty-first-century immigration.

Given the NZRCI report's assessment that Tarrant is often an unreliable narrator in *The Great Replacement*,<sup>47</sup> it is impossible to evaluate whether or not Tarrant resolved to 'do something'<sup>48</sup> as a result of this particular encounter. Nevertheless, Tarrant's choice to include this vivid description of the cemetery and its profound psychological effect on him again suggests a link between an intense, emotional hatred with the ideological premise of Replacement Theory and its historical framing of white decline in post-war Europe. Placed deliberately in the opening pages of his manifesto, this anecdotal fusion of hate and ideology establishes Tarrant's particular ethno-nationalist imagining early in his manifesto, positioning himself as indebted to white European ancestors and a historical past that he feels is being erased in the present.

#### 4.1 *On Hate and White Imagination*

Tarrant's visceral hatred for the 'invader' runs through *The Great Replacement*, but his emotional distress, most often expressed as revulsion, is most pronounced in the first section of the manifesto.<sup>49</sup> In a modification of Anderson's theory of the imagined community and nationalism, Ahmed frames the nation as a collective 'body' made up of ideology and core emotions, again offering a valuable reading on the relationship between hate and the imagined past of white supremacists like Tarrant and Breivik. In the context of white nationalist

44 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

45 Tarrant, *The Great Replacement*, 18–22.

46 Tarrant, *The Great Replacement*, 7.

47 NZRCI Report, 2:232.

48 Tarrant, *The Great Replacement*, 8.

49 Tarrant, *The Great Replacement*, 1–22.

ideology, Ahmed asks us to ponder ‘the role of hate in shaping bodies and worlds through the way hate generates its object as a defence against injury’.<sup>50</sup>

Both Tarrant and Breivik fixate on Muslim ‘invaders’ who have come to ‘inhabit’ their nation as political interlopers, a trend they attribute loosely to leftist advocates of cultural Marxism and multiculturalism in their native countries. For Ahmed, fear of the nation being ‘invaded’ is paramount to white nationalist hatred for the ‘other’. Ahmed writes that, for the white nationalist, when their nation is ‘invaded, it becomes a gendered and feminized body’, a ‘soft nation’ that is ‘too emotional, too easily moved by the demands of others’. ‘Such attributes are of course gendered: the soft national body is a feminized body, which is “penetrated” or invaded by others.’<sup>51</sup> *The Great Replacement* repeatedly laments a comparable weakening of the imagined white macro-nation, with Tarrant frequently lamenting the ‘softening’ of successive generations in post-war Europe and elsewhere. Throughout the manifesto, Tarrant frequently derides ‘(baby) boomers’ as ‘weak’ and ‘incapable of creating real change and with no actual viable plan to save their nation’.<sup>52</sup> ‘Strong men do not get ethnically replaced, strong men do not allow their culture to degrade’, he writes on page 30.<sup>53</sup>

Abby Ferber regards white supremacy as a gendered phenomenon, specifically a cultural and political movement that is ‘overwhelmingly [of] and for white men’.<sup>54</sup> Ferber specifically contrasts ‘mythopoetic’ masculinity (that is, non-violent revisionist men’s movements of the late twentieth century) and the hypermasculinity of white nationalism,<sup>55</sup> observing how ‘reactive’ masculinity is often at the core of both non-racist ‘masculinity in crisis’ movements and white supremacist discourse.<sup>56</sup> This ‘reactive’ masculinity can take many forms: from the formation of pacifistic ‘mythopoetic’ men’s groups that encourage ‘traditionalist’ and ‘deep’ masculine pursuits, to the violent political activism of white supremacy. Nevertheless, at the heart of both movements is ‘[an] appeal to similar constituencies of white males who feel vulnerable, victimised, and uncertain about the meaning of masculinity in contemporary society’.<sup>57</sup>

50 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 1–4.

51 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 2.

52 Tarrant, *The Great Replacement*, 16, 20, 63.

53 Tarrant, *The Great Replacement*, 30.

54 Abby Ferber, ‘Racial Warriors and Weekend Warriors: The Construction of Masculinity in Mythopoetic and White Supremacist Discourse,’ *Men and Masculinities* 3, no. 1 (July 2000): 30–56 (36), <https://doi.org/10.1177/02F1097184X0003001002>.

55 Ferber, ‘Racial Warriors,’ 30–31.

56 Ferber, ‘Racial Warriors,’ 30, 35.

57 Ferber, ‘Racial Warriors,’ 36–37.

Despite their ideological differences, Ferber describes how for both movements their masculinity is constructed via complex imagined histories – specifically mythologies of ‘essentialism’.<sup>58</sup> These range from alpha male dominance theory, to claims of masculine architecture and maintenance of ‘Western’ civilisation, to the belief that a twentieth-century collapse of traditional patriarchy is the root cause of white male decline in the Anglosphere.<sup>59</sup> *The Great Replacement* echoes these sentiments, especially the ‘reactive’ white supremacist anxiety that links declining patriarchy with ethnic replacement. For Tarrant, the twentieth century saw the white nationalist imagined past shift from an era to be proud of, to one in precipitous decline – with the only corrective being an act of political mass murder conducted in the present.

In linking Ferber’s and Ahmed’s analyses, the emotional subjectivity of the male white supremacist suggests a curious nexus of phenomenology, emotional politics and essentialist masculinity in the context of Replacement Theory and its various ‘imaginings’. First, Ferber describes the gendered ‘promise’ of white nationalism to its male adherents – an ideological guarantee that a hegemonic ‘white’ masculinity will be restored both subjectively and communally in exchange for participation and direct action.<sup>60</sup> This assurance addresses the emotional needs of men who regard white masculinity to be in crisis, especially those ‘vulnerable, victimised and uncertain about the meaning of masculinity in contemporary society’.<sup>61</sup> This builds on Ahmed’s psychoanalytic projection of the white nation as feminised, as well as her contention that hate offers an emotional bridge from the individual to the political collective (for example, Replacement Theory white nationalism). By regarding Replacement Theory terrorism as a masculine defence of the feminised (that is, weak) white nation, a stark example of ‘what emotions do’ in the ‘cultural politics’ of hate movements emerges.<sup>62</sup>

Specifically, Ahmed theorises that the shared experience of a ‘felt’ subjective emotion is essential to the political ‘organisation of hate’ – that is, exogenous political hate movements like Replacement Theory are often buoyed by a communal emotional angst that is ‘felt’ by its subjects. Ahmed describes how ‘hate is an intense emotion; it involves a feeling of “againstness” that is always, in the phenomenological sense, intentional’.<sup>63</sup> As Replacement Theory subsists on an acute feeling of hateful ‘againstness’ in its boundary marking and fundamentalist racial politics, when paired with Ferber’s gendered ‘promises’

58 Ferber, ‘Racial Warriors,’ 37–40.

59 Ferber, ‘Racial Warriors.’

60 Ferber, ‘Racial Warriors,’ 38.

61 Ferber, ‘Racial Warriors,’ 37.

62 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 4–5.

63 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 49.

of white supremacy to 'restore' white masculinity, a shared emotional and gendered 'horizon' in the phenomenology of Breivik and Tarrant appears.

While the personal journey of both terrorists' radicalisation differed, it is nevertheless evident in both manifestos that a mutual hatred of Islam preceded and drew both men to the digital political collective of Replacement Theory white supremacy.<sup>64</sup> It was within the collective of Replacement Theory ideology that both men's subjective emotional hatred became tethered to a communal (in this case, digital) 'organisation of hate' that resulted in direct action terrorism. Crucially, the communal hatred that is 'felt' within Replacement Theory politics is often supported by complex white nationalist 'imaginings' of the past and present. These 'imaginings' litter both Breivik's and Tarrant's manifestos, rendering both texts as eerily similar phenomenological accounts of how a subjective emotional hatred is recontextualised into a globalised white supremacist political ideology, which can result in terrorist radicalisation. However, perhaps the most persuasive comparison to Ferber's and Ahmed's analyses is that in both 2083 and *The Great Replacement*, Breivik and Tarrant present as paradigmatic white nationalist masculine saviours, defending a 'weak' (or feminised) white nation from 'invaders' under the banner of Replacement Theory,<sup>65</sup> which is morally supported and ethically justified by an elaborate imagined past.

#### 4.2 *On Ancient Symbols and Modern Memes*

In constructing this imagined past that justifies atrocities committed in the present, both Tarrant and Breivik reached into often obscure white nationalist mythology and ancient history for cultural inspiration and emotional resolve. While Replacement Theory was the political impetus for justifying the Utøya and Christchurch attacks, both Tarrant and Breivik frame themselves as descendants from an ancient lineage of ethno-nationalist soldiers. This histrionic, albeit genuine, belief accounts for *The Great Replacement* and 2083 being peppered with arcane symbolism, racially charged accounts of European Christian history and esoteric race myths. As if to broadcast this at the first opportunity, *The Great Replacement's* title page features a large graphic of a Sonnenrad, or sun wheel (Figure 2). Tarrant also wore a prominent Sonnenrad on his tactical vest during his attack. This black segmented circle is a speciously ancient European or Nordic symbol, popularised in white nationalist discourse beginning in the early twentieth century. Like the adoption of the

64 Breivik, 2083, 1377–80, Tarrant, *The Great Replacement*, 5, 7, 13.

65 While references to gendered weakness are replete in both manifestos, most notable examples include Breivik, 2083, 742–43, 1210; and Tarrant, *The Great Replacement*, 3, 30, 58.



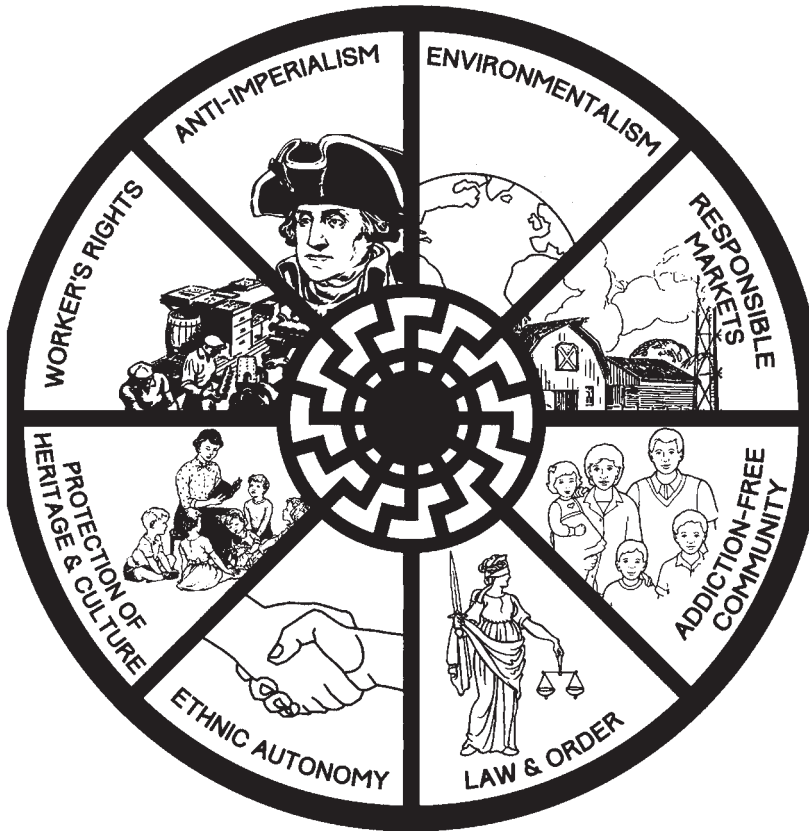


FIGURE 2 Sonnenrad adorning *The Great Replacement*  
SOURCE: AUTHOR SCREENSHOT

Eurasian swastika by the Nazi party in 1920,<sup>66</sup> the ancient Sonnenrad was also plucked from esoteric obscurity by the Nazis for the purposes of white nationalist propaganda. In 1933, Heinrich Himmler was overseeing the renovation of Wewelsburg castle for the SS and integrated a large black Sonnenrad into a refurbished hall floor for ceremonial purposes (Figure 3).<sup>67</sup>

Despite the destruction of Nazi Germany, both the swastika and Sonnenrad have persisted as prominent white nationalist symbols, albeit the latter being lesser known. Nevertheless, the Anti-Defamation League classifies the Sonnenrad as a general hate symbol that has persisted in neo-Nazi iconography

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

67 Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*.



FIGURE 3 Sonnenrad in Wewelsburg castle  
SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

as well as other white nationalist groups following World War II.<sup>68</sup> Looking at photographs of Himmler's Wewelsburg Sonnenrad today, it is striking how almost identical it is to the sun wheel adorning the title page of *The Great*

68 'Sonnenrad,' ADL, accessed 8 December 2020, <https://www.adl.org/education/references/hate-symbols/sonnenrad>.

*Replacement* a near century later. Tarrant's imagined past is somewhat encapsulated with his use of the Sonnenrad – it is a vague symbol of an unclear mythological heritage that is poorly articulated by its bearer. Indeed, Tarrant's cursory understanding of history is reflected throughout *The Great Replacement*, with a particular fixation on piecemeal elements of the Christian crusades, and a selective interpretation of white European relations with the generalised Muslim 'other', epitomised by the Ottoman Empire. On page 28, in a section addressed explicitly 'To Turks', Tarrant channels his personal hatred of Muslim migration to the wider white nation by fixating on the Hagia Sophia museum in Istanbul and its ancient heritage.

A sixth-century religious site of continuous worship, the Hagia Sophia was initially a cathedral of the Eastern Roman Empire, until it was converted into a grand mosque following Constantinople's conquest by the Ottoman Empire in 1453.<sup>69</sup> Tarrant's obsession with the events of 1453 suggests an application of Replacement Theory in premodern history – and the establishment of an imagined past. This historical framing is also reflected in Breivik's crusader-centric manifesto, which is adorned with the red cross of the Knights Templar on its title page.<sup>70</sup> Echoing Ahmed's theory of the nation as a 'collective body' made 'soft' and 'penetrated ... by invaders', Tarrant appears to use his fixation on Hagia Sophia to establish a geographical boundary for what is acceptable for the Muslim 'invader's' proximity to the 'body' of the white nation.<sup>71</sup> 'You can live in peace in your own lands, and may no harm come to you ... on the east side of the Bosphorus'.<sup>72</sup> writes Tarrant, in the theatrical tone of a modern-day Templar Knight. The articulation of ethno-religious boundaries between Christians and Muslims echoes the Replacement Theory tenet that non-white migrants are permitted to live within their own nations, but those who 'invade' the boundaries of 'white' nations via immigration are viable targets of terrorism.

Alongside grand historical entreaties, Tarrant also invokes more crude cultural references drawn from 4chan and the Islamophobic memesphere. The phrase 'Remove Kebab' is a refrain in the manifesto standing for the murder of Muslim 'invaders' residing in Tarrant's racially segregated geography, as well as being the title of a significant white nationalist song which Tarrant

69 Stanford J. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, volume 1, 1280–1808 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 55–70.

70 Breivik, 2083, 1.

71 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 2.

72 Tarrant, *The Great Replacement*, 28.

played throughout his livestream of the attack.<sup>73</sup> Also known as the ‘Serbia Strong’ song, ‘Remove Kebab’ has its origins in Serbian nationalist folk music. Originally titled ‘Karadžić, vodi Srbe svoje’ (‘Karadžić, Lead Your Serbs’), the 1993 song commemorates Bosnian Serb politician Radovan Karadžić, who in 2016 was found guilty of genocide against Bosnian Muslims during the Yugoslav Wars. Eventually rebadged as ‘Remove Kebab’ by unknown 4chaners in the mid-2000s, the song and its title have come to be synonymous with a crude expression of Islamophobia online and in white nationalist vernacular generally.<sup>74</sup> Interestingly, in 2083, Anders Breivik also cited Radovan Karadžić as an inspiration for his planning, listing him as one of five individuals he wished to meet: ‘for his efforts to rid Serbia of Islam, [Karadžić] will always be considered and remembered as an honourable Crusader and a European war hero.’<sup>75</sup>

## 5 The Imagined Present and Living Death

Q: Do you party a lot and what about a girlfriend/wife? A: I have partied a lot since I was 16 and I still do (with the exception of the five-last year’s [sic] where I have lived a lot more ascetic [sic]).

ANDERS BREIVIK, 2083, 1406

Although he remained in his hometown after finishing high school, Tarrant’s life changed dramatically in 2010, when his father died following a long battle with asbestos-related mesothelioma. The inheritance Tarrant received was substantial for his age – so much so that, after a workplace injury, Tarrant realised he was relatively financially independent and didn’t need to return to work. In early 2014, he left Australia for a long stint of overseas travel, visiting dozens of countries before eventually settling on New Zealand’s southern island a few years later.<sup>76</sup> Investigators have concluded that Tarrant had begun explicitly planning a Replacement Theory-inspired mass killing in New Zealand by early 2017.<sup>77</sup> This decisive two-year period (roughly January 2017 to the Christchurch attack in March 2019) is where Tarrant’s lived experience, his *imagined* present, most incorporated the worldview described in *The Great Replacement*. It

73 The phrase was also scrawled vertically on the barrel handguard of Tarrant’s rifle (Figure 5).

74 Cosentino, *Social Media*, 74.

75 Breivik, 2083, 1408.

76 NZRCI Report, 2:168–75.

77 NZRCI Report, 2:166–67.

appears that, at a certain point in their radicalisation, the *imagined* past of Replacement Theory white nationalism upended the lives of both Tarrant and Breivik, setting them both on a trajectory that ended in atrocity. Although he had a few lifelong friends, Tarrant described himself as a social introvert.<sup>78</sup> After moving to New Zealand, this introversion escalated dramatically and, like Breivik before him, he withdrew entirely from mainstream society with the attack forming in his mind.<sup>79</sup> For just over two years, Tarrant seemingly avoided all social contact beyond the perfunctory, and his daily schedule was shaped entirely around the planning of what Breivik had called ‘the operation’ in 2083, his how-to guide for the aspiring Replacement Theory terrorist.<sup>80</sup>

When police burst into Tarrant’s rented Dunedin duplex in the wake of his arrest, they found his two-bedroom flat almost bare. Despite living there for two years, the rental’s only furnishings were a desk, a computer, a chair and a mattress to sleep on.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, Tarrant was scarcely known in the local community. He had been observed regularly working out in a local gym and he was often seen shooting at the Bruce Rifle Club – but always alone. His neighbour, whom he shared a thin wall with, reported that she never heard a sound from his side of the duplex. He paid rent promptly to his property manager, who found him unremarkable, albeit strange in his lack of furnishings.<sup>82</sup> Overall, Tarrant was a ghost in Dunedin – he had no friends that he saw in person, and he forged no personal relationships beyond superficial pleasantries.<sup>83</sup> Like Breivik before him, Tarrant appears to have deliberately entered a subjective state of ‘living death’: a social and emotional celibacy – an asceticism that in many ways resembles his incarceration.

As details of Tarrant’s life in Dunedin trickled out, this notable social withdrawal and seemingly monastic asceticism was one the first biographical parallels that linked him and Anders Breivik beyond their manifestos. Breivik had also ‘operationalised’ his life years before Utøya, dedicating every waking moment to his planned terrorist attack. In 2083, Breivik describes at length the sacrifices he made to his personal life as he trained, prepared and planned. Complete social withdrawal juxtaposed with near constant online activity, an

78 NZRCI Report, 2:166, 235.

79 Tarrant, *The Great Replacement*, 35, 52.

80 In 2083, Breivik refers to his planned terrorist attack as ‘the operation.’

81 NZRCI Report, 2:184.

82 Shibani Mahtani et al., ‘Hiding in Plain Sight: In Quiet New Zealand City, Alleged Gunman Plotted Carnage,’ *Washington Post*, 22 March 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/hiding-in-plain-sight-in-quiet-new-zealand-city-alleged-gunman-plotted-carnage/2019/03/21/1846de9e-4a7b-11e9-8cfc-2c5d0999c21e\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/hiding-in-plain-sight-in-quiet-new-zealand-city-alleged-gunman-plotted-carnage/2019/03/21/1846de9e-4a7b-11e9-8cfc-2c5d0999c21e_story.html).

83 Mahtani et al., ‘Hiding in Plain Sight.’

active avoidance of meaningful relationships and a debilitating paranoia are all hallmarks of Breivik's 2010–2011 diary that is included in 2083.<sup>84</sup> Obviously, for Breivik, preparing the Oslo truck bomb necessitated covert planning and social subterfuge,<sup>85</sup> but it is eerie to reflect on the near-eremitic and affected stoicism that both men experienced as they prepared for their attacks.

In view of their manifestos, Breivik's and Tarrant's shared state of 'living death' is a logical transformation for both men, especially in how the imagined past of white nationalism romanticises a mythologised crusader ascetic and 'warrior monk' archetype. Moreover, this ascetic homage was not only reflected in their lifestyle; both men also created elaborate totems drawn from the culture, myths and symbols that run through their manifestos. The most glaring example of this was Breivik's firearms used during the Utøya Island mass shooting, which he christened in the style of Norse mythology. Breivik named his rifle 'Mjølfnir' (after Thor's hammer) and his pistol 'Gungnir' (after Odin's spear), with various runes and crusader symbols carved into the steel of both firearms for good measure.<sup>86</sup> Breivik also commissioned the creation of costumes drawn from masonic and crusader traditional dress; these are worn by Breivik in a series of elaborate studio portrait photographs that are presented at the end of 2083.<sup>87</sup> Alongside these, Breivik also posed in military fatigues that featured Knights Templar insignia, aesthetically transposing the imagined history of 2083 onto his own body. Like Himmler's Sonnenrad set into the marble floor of Wewelsburg castle, Breivik too placed enormous value in integrating symbolic history into the physical world he inhabited, perhaps as a means of legitimising his fantasy and ratifying his place in the annals of crusader history.

While Tarrant lacked Breivik's sartorial pageantry, he nevertheless made his own totems to maintain continuity for white supremacist terrorism. Alongside his Sonnenrad tactical vest and Celtic cross dog tags, Tarrant also decorated his primary firearm with ideological graffiti (Figure 4). In crude white marker pen, Tarrant's rifle is festooned with names, memes, Nordic runes, 4chan insults and racial epithets. The shiny white text is stark and legible against the matt black of the rifle, which is notable in the context of Tarrant's decision to livestream the attack. Due to the headcam POV of the livestream, this placed the rifle

84 Breivik, 2083, 1414–71 ('Knights Templar Log').

85 However, excluding this approximately eighty-day period in which Breivik was constructing the truck bomb (see 2083, 1414–72), I concur with Seierstad, *One of Us*, who frames much of Breivik's years-long social withdrawal for the Oslo/Utøya attack as largely unnecessary in terms of logistical necessity.

86 Seierstad, *One of Us*, 178–79.

87 Breivik, 2083, 1510–12.



FIGURE 4 The rifle Tarrant used in the attack, adorned with the names of other white nationalist shooters, victims of radical Islamic terrorism, Nordic runes and racist slogans  
SOURCE: 4CHAN

prominently at the centre of the video, in a manner similar to first-person shooter video games.<sup>88</sup>

With this unique POV, Tarrant's rifle is on full display for the duration of the attack, and flashes of the various texts are visible – a real-time summary of *The Great Replacement* on show throughout the massacre. On the buttstock and pistol grip of the rifle are the names of two modern white nationalist terrorists, Anton Pettersson and Alexandre Bissonnette. Pettersson targeted ethnic Arab immigrants in the 2015 Trollhättan school attack in Sweden, while Bissonnette entered a Quebec City mosque in 2017 and shot six worshippers to death and injured nineteen others. While these two terrorist events preceded Tarrant's own attack in Christchurch by only a few years, the remaining names, symbols and dates on the rifle reach far back into the imagined past of white nationalism. For example, on the top rail of the rifle is the name Skanderbeg, the Ottoman Turkish name of Gjergj Kastrioti, an Albanian Ottoman officer. In 1443, Kastrioti led an insurgency against the Ottoman Empire after deserting the Caliphate during the Battle of Niš, later becoming the ruler of the Krujë, Svetigrad, and Modrič provinces located in modern-day Albania and Macedonia.<sup>89</sup>

Skanderbeg's prominence on Tarrant's rifle is one of many historical references that return to his fixation with Turkey, its Ottoman past and the

88 Tarrant was a lifelong player of first-person shooter video games, notably the Call of Duty (COD) franchise (NZRCI Report, 20168, 170–71). Breivik also used COD as a form of crude target practice, calling it 'training simulation.' See Breivik, 2083, 1418.

89 Camil Muresanu, *John Hunyadi: Defender of Christendom*, trans. Laura Treptow (Portland: Centre for Romanian Studies, 2001), 37.

Caliphate's former imperial presence in Europe. The weapon's adornment also alludes to Tarrant's prolific international travel following his father's death. From 2014 to 2018, Tarrant took multiple trips to the Balkans, Eastern Europe and Turkey. His travels to Turkey are particularly revealing, as he eschewed the traditional tourist sites of Anatolia in favour of obscure historical markers of Christian military history. Alongside various historical ruins of the Crusades, Tarrant visited the remote Tokat Castle, the purported site of Vlad the Impaler's incarceration by the Ottomans in the fifteenth century.<sup>90</sup> A totem of *The Great Replacement* and a product of his 'living death', Tarrant's rifle is a collision between his childhood love of military history, the hardened racism that developed in his adolescence, and the Replacement Theory ideology that defined his adulthood.<sup>91</sup>

These are but a few of the key cultural markers that cement Brenton Tarrant in the ideological canon and mythology of white nationalist terrorism. While limited in scope, this exegesis of *The Great Replacement* and the lived experience of its author offers a foundational background for those seeking to interpret the opaque worldview of digital white nationalism. When viewed in isolation, Tarrant's manifesto and the particulars of his biography may at first glance seem inane – the delusional tableau of a violent psychotic. However, when paired with an ethnographic understanding of Replacement Theory, white nationalist subculture and its antecedent idol Anders Breivik, evidence of a continuous political history emerges. While this subculture is puerile, it nevertheless continues to produce protégés with clear ideological lineage. And while most of these protégés merely spout racist ideas on fringe social media, a select few transcend the digital space and transform their discursive vitriol into direct action.

## 6 Conclusion

In the wake of the Christchurch terrorist attack, it is now a criminal offence to download or print *The Great Replacement* in New Zealand.<sup>92</sup> In Australia and abroad, there have been understandable appeals to ignore the manifesto as well

90 'Terörist Tarrant, kale manzaralı odada kalmış,' *Bursa Haber*, 19 March 2019, <http://www.bursahaber.com/genel/terorist-tarrant-kale-manzarali-odada-kalmis-h1522552.html>.

91 NZRCI Report, 2:168.

92 'Christchurch Shooting Video Officially Objectionable,' Classification Office, 20 March 2019, accessed 1 January 2021, <https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/news/latest-news/christchurch-attacks-press-releases/#christchurch-shooting-video-officially-objectionable>.



as suppress the name and biographical particulars of its author. Nevertheless, in the near two years since the attack, the Christchurch shooter has been beatified, memed and idolised in various white nationalist online social spaces. As of January 2021, I am lurking in multiple active Australian, American, Russian and European Telegram channels that often venerate the Christchurch shooter by name.<sup>93</sup> These channels share the livestream of the attack frequently, as well as so-called ‘Saint Tarrant’ memes based on his likeness. Such images often stylise him as a religious icon – often he is depicted in robes, a warrior monk in fresco, his hands in Christian chironomia (Figure 5). Despite the efforts of the New Zealand government, Tarrant has a persistent international online fanbase that runs relatively free. They continue to espouse the principles of Replacement Theory, which now includes Breivik and Tarrant as incarcerated political heroes of the cause.

This essay has selectively compared the life and writing of two white nationalist terrorists, in an attempt to highlight their similarity as digital natives, as well as decode the complex cultural, historical and political ideology that radicalised both individuals. It has also advanced a new emotional and phenomenological framework that contextualises their subjective hate in the broader milieu of white nationalist masculinity and feelings of vulnerability. Ignoring the online subculture of white nationalist mass shooters, the emotions and ideology of Replacement Theory and the complex imagined history that underpins it will likely ease the trauma arising from events like Christchurch in the medium term. However, in reading *The Great Replacement* and 2083 as comparative texts, it is clear that little has changed since Utøya. And while this essay cannot reasonably speculate as to Tarrant’s likelihood of committing a similar atrocity *without* Replacement Theory having radicalised him, understanding the cultural and emotional world that encouraged him to do so is nevertheless urgent.

In spite of broad revulsion to white nationalist terrorism in the mainstream, their imagination endures. Tarrant and Breivik are beatified online, memed as saints in chains, lauded and venerated for their actions. And though I observe frequent 4chan hoaxes that parody imminent Tarrant inspired massacres, it is almost certain that in time, another young white man’s hate will find Replacement Theory, and emotion will again transform into direct action. Perhaps he already exists and has begun writing his manifesto. He may already be experiencing his ‘living death’. Once transformed, he and the dead will not

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93 Telegram is a freeware VOIP service favoured by radical groups for its end-to-end encryption.

matter. Like Breivik and Tarrant before him, the next man will regard himself as another grain of sand in a long history, a mere speck on the beach of white nationalist imagination.



FIGURE 5 4chan meme venerating Tarrant in the style of a Christian icon. Note the anachronistic inclusion of the headcam, Sonnenrad, the graffitied rifle (see Figure 4), *The Great Replacement* held in the right hand and the left hand fixed in Christian chironomia

SOURCE: 4CHAN