The Hanau shooting shows how Germany is returning to its Nazi past

The shooter's attitudes are at the extreme end of the spectrum, but they are increasingly at home in Germany's media, politics, and even sport

Haluk Yildiz

Sunday 01 March 2020

The tragic far-right terrorist shootings in Hanau last week showed the rest of the world what ethnic minority Germans have always known – Germany's dark past is not behind it.

Modern Germany has a carefully cultivated image where it can "celebrate" multiculturalism, without disclosing the conditions of that coexistence. It is willing to welcome a million migrants, but is less happy when those migrants want to do something other than take menial jobs and have kids – two things that "native" Germans are less willing to do. Germany is liberal, on its own terms – not those of its minorities.

Last week's terrorist attacker, Tobias Rathjen, uploaded a 24-page document in which he attacked ethnic minorities in Germany, and announced that certain groups needed to be "completely annihilated".

Although his attitudes are at the extreme end of the spectrum, they are increasingly at home in Germany's media, politics, and even sport.

Rathjen's violent acts are far from isolated: the Hanau shootings follow the killing of a local politician in June and an attack on a synagogue in October that killed two people. The city of Dresden, the birthplace of one of the country's many far-right movements, Pegida, has gone so far as to declare a "Nazi emergency", stating that it has a serious problem with the far right.

As recently as a few weeks ago, German police arrested 12 members of a far-right terror cell, which planned to attack mosques across ten German states to trigger a race war. One of the men arrested was a serving police officer who had previously been suspended over suspicions of links to far-right activities.

This is not an outlier. In 2018, five police officers were suspected of operating a neo-Nazi cell within the Frankfurt police force and allegedly threatened to kill the two-year-old daughter of a German-Turkish lawyer. Even the German military is investigating more than 500 soldiers suspected of far-right extremism. Minorities in Germany cannot even trust those who are supposed to protect them.

The German state, along with its society and culture, has been carrying far-right tendencies for generations. After a period of incubation, the virus appears to have returned.

This may be news to those outside Germany, but it's all too familiar to its ethnic minorities. Even something as simple as renting a house is fraught with difficulties if you are a person of colour or your name is not typically German. The country's racism watchdog has declared that discrimination in the housing market is commonplace and becoming increasingly open.

German politics is also being pulled further and further to the right. The far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD) is riding the wave of xenophobia and making worrying political gains. AfD is now the third largest force in the national parliament, with Angela Merkel's liberal consensus being slowly chipped away, along with the polite facade of societal tolerance on which it was built.

While a majority of Germans believe that AfD was partly to blame for the terrorist attacks last week, the problem is much more widespread than just a single political party. The seeds of the AfD were planted by the established parties' hate speech against migrants, Muslims and refugees. They are all guilty.

Islamophobia, the seemingly last "acceptable" form of racism, is Germany's most worrying racist problem. In a recent study, about half of Germans polled saw Islam as a threat. Unsurprisingly, Rathjen's manifesto selected a number of Muslim majority countries for annihilation. It is no wonder that he chose shisha bars as his targets, since they are synonymous with Middle Eastern culture in the eyes of many.

But many of Rathjen's attitudes are unfortunately typically German. Islam is not even recognised as a religion in Germany, cementing German Muslims' status as second-class citizens. Halal meat is heavily restrictedas German law requires meat to be anaesthetised before slaughter, which is contrary to many halal standards. Halal producers are therefore forced to import meat from other countries.

Against this backdrop, there are too many Rathjens to count: More than 100 mosques and religious institutions were attacked in 2018. In the same year, there were 813 recorded hate crimes against Muslims, including insults, letters and physical assaults. Germany is becoming increasingly hostile to Muslims from every background.

Turkish Germans, who are predominantly Muslim, comprise the largest minority ethnic group in Germany, and have been living in Germany since the 1960s. However, their identity as Germans is constantly under attack by the rest of society who continue to view their presence in the country as temporary. Their livelihood is also affected by rampant discrimination – a study found that ethnic Turks are 11 per cent less likely to be interviewed for jobs.

Mesut Özil, the Arsenal footballer and World Cup winner, felt forced to quit the national team, lamenting that he was German when the team won, but an immigrant when they lost. And the state actively encourages this all-or-nothing approach to the German Turks' nationality – they have to choose between either nationality before the age of 23 or they will lose their German passports. No wonder then that Turkish Germans are suffering from an identity crisis.

This is why I founded BIG Partei, a German political party built on the principles of multiculturalism and human dignity.

In response to the horrific killing spree in Hanau, we are calling on the federal government to adopt both an anti-racism law with severe penalties and real security measures to protect persons and institutions at risk.

We need to crack down on hate speech and online extremism – the recent bill passed in Cabinet is welcome but more is needed. Only now, in response to the Hanau attacks, has security been increasedto protect sensitive sites, but we must be proactive and not reactive.

Most Germans want to put the past behind them. But that can only happen if we build a future based on safety and respect, in shisha bars and in the Bundestag.

Haluk Yildiz is the founder of BIG Partei (Bündnis für Innovation und Gerechtigkeit), a multicultural political party, headquartered in Berlin

https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/germany-neo-nazi-history-rathjen-hanau-shooting-a9366111.html

euronews.

Nativist populism is destroying Europe. Only multicultural populism can save it
I View

26/07/2019

*By **Haluk Yildiz***

Populism is destroying Europe, and in doing so it has become a dirty word. This has informed the response: from Britain to Sweden, elites have tried to solve the populism problem by entrenching the positions of mainstream political parties.

"The alternative to nativist, white supremacist populism is inclusive, multicultural populism."
 - ***Haluk Yildiz -***
Founder of BIG Partei, candidate in May's EU parliament elections

This appears to be failing, as the rise of populism continues. The real solution is to fight populism with populism: to neuter the nativist populism of the AfD, Brexit and Le Pen with an inclusive, multicultural and inclusive populism. This requires not only a new generation of politicians, but perhaps a new style of political party.

Populism has become a buzzword, perhaps to the point of being devoid of meaning. But a party being devoted to the "populus" should not be an exception; it should be the rule. The first political party to use the name was the US Populist Party, founded in 1892 to promote interests of farmers and workers - something all parties would claim to support.

In this linguistic sense, all parties should be populist: there is nothing inherent to populism meaning it is necessarily far right, racist or nativist.

The fact that populism has become an insult in Europe's policy circles suggest that there is at least some disdain for the populus themselves. That the populists are wrong for encouraging the people to subvert the existing order.

The opposite of populism is, then, not just "the existing liberal order". The opposite of populism is elitism. And the elites know it.

This kind of attitude is to be expected in dictatorships, or even democracies with an authoritarian tendency. It is not acceptable in developed democracies - and the old parties should know better.

As smug liberals continue in their smugness and self-satisfied outrage, the populists - and the populus that fuels them - continue to drift further from the influence and control of the elites. It is no coincidence that populist parties portray themselves as revolutionaries in the spirit of, say, Che Guevara, rather than the intellectual heirs of Hitler and Mussolini.

In a desperate attempt to regain ground from the new populist parties, the old parties have tried to portray themselves as the true revolutionaries, for example when Tony Blair declared after the Brexit upset that "we are the insurgents now".

Blair's reaction is significant, because it was arguably his brand of marketable centrism that sowed the seeds of today's insurrections. From the late 90s into the new millenium, Blair in Downing Street and Clinton in the White House, soon joined by Merkel in Berlin, proved that it didn't really matter if you were right wing or left wing, as long as you were centre-right or centre-left.

Those politicians (in particular Blair and Clinton) were not just democrats - they were technocrats. Using the tools of marketing and public relations to a greater extent than ever before, they reached unparalleled levels of popularity through focus groups, advertising, and media management.

This electoral competence allowed them to make serious mistakes in governance, and still remain in power.

But these technocrats had a shelf life: as technology evolved, the old technocrats were swept away. As scrolling news took over from rolling news, the old methods began to fail. And the populus started to feel cheated.

As the populists have risen and risen, the only alternatives provided by the liberal order are apathy (which ironically further empowers the insurgents as centrist votes disappear, giving the populists a higher share of the vote), or a further entrenchment of elite entitlement.

But there is another way. Perhaps the solution is to first accept that the old parties are gone for good (this is clearest in the UK, where both main parties are currently imploding). Although they did once represent regular people, the clearest evidence that this is no longer the case is how staunchly uniform their leadership is: beyond the occasional token minister of immigrant background, those parties are practically colonial in outlook when it comes to the minorities of their respective countries.

Perhaps the problem is not populism per se, but the type of populism: nativism. The alternative to nativist, white supremacist populism is inclusive, multicultural populism. We have already seen successes for new, diverse political parties in Holland with Denk, and in Austria with NBZ.

These parties are genuinely grassroots, and I hope that as their new politics spreads across Europe (including my party, BIG Partei), they can provide a counterbalance to the far right. A much needed counterbalance that the old parties have simply failed to deliver.
One of the challenges is funding. Although the far right across the continent have received widespread ideological and financial support from abroad, we have no choice but to launch Go Fund Me campaigns and solicit donations on street corners and community centres.

It seems that the new, multicultural populism is more dependent on the will of people than any political movement that has come before.

Haluk Yildiz is the founder of BIG Partei (Bündnis für Innovation und Gerechtigkeit), a multicultural political party, headquartered in Berlin. He is a candidate in May's EU parliament elections.
https://www.euronews.com/2019/05/06/nativist-populism-is-destroying-europe-only-multicultural-populism-can-save-it-view

COLOGNE

A leading German-Turkish politician said on Sunday he has received numerous Islamophobic letters and death threats in recent weeks, ahead of European Parliament (EP) elections on May 26.

Haluk Yildiz, the leader of the pro-immigration Alliance for Innovation and Justice (BIG), said the letters were sent by some unknown persons and included xeonophobic insults and threats.

"In one of the letters they were saying that we have crossed the line. They were claiming that it is only Germans who have a say in this country," he said, adding that they take these threats very seriously, due to increased neo-Nazi violence in recent years.

"But such threats will not deter us, we will continue our political struggle here," he said. Yildiz is the leading candidate of BIG, a small party founded in 2010 by a group of migrants in Germany.

The party is hoping to win a seat at the European Parliament for the first time.

https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/germany-muslim-politician-receives-death-threats/1482084

I am a Muslim, I was born and bred in Germany but I do not identify as a German | View

27/03/2019

*By **Maha Walter-Kamano***

Europe has a reputation around the world as a beacon of tolerance and multiculturalism, led by Merkel's welcoming of a million refugees in the last four years. But this reputation is rapidly crumbling - and Muslim women across the continent are feeling the effects.

Although I am born and bred in Germany, I do not identify as a German - simply because Germans do not identify with me. Despite my professional successes and activism, my fate is as grim as my Lebanese mother's in navigating life in a country and continent rife with racism. It is only through increased visibility, vocalness and ultimately political participation that Muslim women can survive. And fortunately, the tide is beginning to turn.

Although it is tragic to see Europe succumbing to its old ghosts of racism and white supremacy, there is no reason why the continent should be uniquely immune to it. The formation of the EU was primarily about solidarity and cooperation between European states, and not about expanding those values between Europe and its neighbours in Africa and the Middle East.

It is historical coincidence that support for the EU (and specially Schengen) has become a left wing position, since this was originally about freedom of movement within Europe for native Europeans.

This backdrop helps us understand why those same EU institutions are now being targeted by the hard - and the far - right, who want to either destroy Europe, or maintain its structures as a protectionist block. They support Europe in so far as they want to Make Europe Great Again and put Europe First. And they define Europe primarily as a negative. They know Europe mostly by what it is not: Africa or the Middle East.

This may sound like a dystopia, but it is already happening. EU elections have never had the same prominence as national or even local elections, particularly among minorities and immigrant communities who can have lower democratic literacy.

This has allowed the EU parliament to swing to the right. Far right groups in Brussels have 37 MEPs, using their platform to hammer a range of targets. At the top of their hit list is Muslims in general, and Muslim women in particular.

And there has been very little response from many of the traditional national parties. Perhaps knowing that the Muslim vote was beyond their reach, ballot box realpolitik meant that there was little cost to them looking the other way.

And Muslims themselves are barely represented in Brussels: there are only 3 Muslim MEPs out of a total of 751. And since they are all men, Muslim women are invisible in the EU parliament (with the exception of some of the cleaners).

If this trend is allowed to continue, it will get worse, not better: right wing blocs are planning on using May's EU Elections to move Brussels even further right. This may not affect the life of many "native" Europeans, but those with an immigrant background - and especially Muslim women - will likely pay the price with their relationships, behaviour, clothes and even their thoughts being policed in an increasingly hostile climate.

Muslim women must accept part of the responsibility for this. As a population, European Muslim women have historically been some of the least politically active citizens. And as mainstream political parties have at best used them tokenistically and at worst shunned them entirely, this has become entrenched.

But things are beginning to change. In my political party, for example, my immigrant Muslim background is the norm, not an anomaly. My fellow candidates' families hail from Turkey, North Africa, the Balkans and Africa. And many of them are women.

Just as the far right have quietly built their support base into seats in Brussels, I hope we will be able to do the same in our communities, many of whose members have never voted. And next time Muslim women are mentioned at the EU parliament, I hope there will be someone to talk back.

Maha Walter-Kamano

Maha Walter-Kamano is a German activist, whose parents moved to Bonn from Lebanon and Guinea. She is an EU Parliamentary candidate for BIG Partei (Bündnis für Innovation und Gerechtigkeit), a grassroots political party founded by Germans with an immigrant background.

https://www.euronews.com/2019/03/27/i-am-muslim-i-was-born-and-bred-in-germany-but-i-do-not-identify-as-a-german-view