Jeff Sparrow's Person X marks rise of ecofascism

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Before an attempted massacre at a German synagogue in September, the alleged shooter broadcast an anti-Semitic manifesto online. The man, who killed two people on Yom Kippur, the holiest Jewish day of the year, said, "I think the Holocaust never happened", adding that, "feminism is the cause of decline in birthrates in the West". He concluded: "The root of all these problems is the Jew."

The racism, misogyny and hate were familiar to anybody who delves into the far-right swamp, an easy-to-access world where memes, trolling and twisted irony are encouraged. From far-right vigilante groups openly patrolling German towns to supporters of US President Donald Trump creating fake videos showing him massacring journalists and critics, incitement to violence is increasingly part of the mainstream conversation.

These trends existed long before the internet but the web has accelerated the ability for like-minded individuals to meet, organise and strategise how to attack the designated enemies of our time: Muslims, liberal Jews, liberals in general and pro-immigration politicians. Today it may be these groups but it will soon leap to the transgender community, Hindus, Buddhists or any other targeted minority.

It's no wonder, according to the Anti-Defamation League, that far-right extremists pose the greatest threat to our way of life in the last decade, far exceeding Islamists and left-wing radicals. Ignore the likes of New York Times columnist Bari Weiss and others who argue that left-wing anti-Semitism is just as dangerous as right-wing hate because many on the left push for Palestinian rights, oppose Israeli occupation policies or are anti-Zionist. The facts simply don't support this thesis.

Journalist, author and broadcaster Jeff Sparrow makes the compelling case in this short book that in the wake of the Christchurch massacre, when 51 Muslim worshippers were killed by a far-right Australian extremist on March 15, ignoring the killer's manifesto is emotionally comforting but politically unwise. He calls the murderer Person X, never naming him, because, this killing phenomenon represents a "strategy for fascist terrorism, one that seeks to incite angry young men to conduct rage massacres, not to achieve any specific ends so much as to destabilise liberal democracies. This plan will not bring fascism to power. It will, however, result in more deaths".

Anyone with even a cursory knowledge of 20th-century history may be surprised to find that fascism is again on the rise. As Sparrow eloquently explains, Nazi Germany and its epic crimes turned fascism into a profoundly unpopular ideology for many decades after the Second World War. And yet it was sitting largely dormant just waiting for a new host. The September 11, 2001 terror attacks were the spark that kicked off the last decades' transformation into a fertile ground for hatred of Islam.

As Person X explains in his manifesto, and Sparrow rightly shows that it's a profound mistake to simply dismiss it as the ravings of a lunatic, high Muslim birthrates pose what the killer views as an existential threat to Western civilisation, essentially breeding out white Christians. This view is routinely spread in many centre-right and mainstream media outlets, showing how common this fear has become (as well as being weaponised for political ends such as ending or hugely curtailing Muslim immigration).

Sparrow constantly aims to remind readers that Islamophobia is the latest face of what used to be irrational Jew hatred. He focuses on the idea being "Eurabia", the supposed globalist plot to "Islamise" Europe. It's a nonsensical ideology. Sparrow writes: "Had such a mad notion as 'Eurabia' centred on a 'Jewish plot', its proponents would, rightfully, have been shunned." Person X begins his manifesto like this: "It's the birthrates. It's the birthrates. It's the birthrates."

Muslims are so routinely demonised and attacked in the Western media and public since 9/11 that Person X explains that the decision to target them was simply tactical. "They (Muslims) are the most despised group of invaders in the West (and so) attacking them receives the greatest level of support."

The strength of this book is that it makes us uncomfortable about forces seemingly beyond our control in the current political climate. Who would seriously look at the latest crop of

leading politicians in the US, UK, Australia or other Western nations and find them willing, knowledgeable or able to both denounce the fascist threat and know how to enact policies that would reduce its potency? The dangers rise while they offer thoughts and prayers.

Perhaps the most prescient section of Sparrow's book is his examination of Person X's ecofascism. It's a mistake to presume that the far right denies or ignores the realities of the climate crisis. In fact, Person X is very attuned to what he believes must be done. "Kill the invaders, kill the overpopulation and by doing so save the environment."

Sparrow explains that, "in theory, ecofascism celebrates 'forests, lakes, mountains and meadows'; in practice, it demands the murder of leftists and ethnic minorities." The most brutal fascist "solution" to ecological collapse is that only the strong will survive, leaving the weak to suffer and die. Not addressing rising sea levels, rising temperatures and surging bushfires is a sure way to ensure that ecofascism will grow in appeal.

Fascists Among Us is a powerful warning that many would prefer to ignore. The normalisation of alt-right talking points, from immigration to imperial wars, means that online hate will increasingly thrust itself into the public consciousness in the form of bloody retribution. Too few of our citizenry have any idea how to stop it.

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Jeff Sparrow
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