Europe's Homegrown Terrorists

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Two weeks after the fatal terrorist attacks of July 7, 2005, in London, and one day after another failed attack, a student, Jean Charles de Menezes, was in the London Underground when plainclothes police officers gave chase and shot him seven times in the head.

Initial eyewitness reports said he was wearing a suspiciously large puffa jacket on a hot day and had vaulted the barriers and run when asked to stop. Anthony Larkin, who was on the train, said he saw "this guy who appeared to have a bomb belt and wires coming out." Mark Whitby, who was also at the station, thought he saw a Pakistani terrorist being chased and gunned down by plainclothes policemen. Less than a month later, Whitby said, "I now believe that I could have been looking at the surveillance officer" being thrown out of the way as Menezes was being killed.

The Pakistani turned out to be a Brazilian. Security cameras showed he was wearing a light denim jacket and clearly in no rush as he picked up a free paper and swiped his metrocard.

"The way we see things is affected by what we know and what we believe," wrote John Berger in Ways of Seeing. "The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled."

When some Western commentators see a terrorist attack they are apparently far more comfortable with what they believe than what they know.

So it was on Friday when news emerged of the appalling attacks in Norway that have left an estimated seventy-six dead and a nation traumatized. Rupert Murdoch's Sun in Britain (the bestselling daily newspaper) ran with the headline "Al Qaeda massacre: Norway's 9/11." The Weekly Standard insisted: "We don't know if al Qaeda was directly responsible for today's events, but in all likelihood the attack was launched by part of the jihadist hydra." Jennifer Rubin at the Washington Post then claimed: "This is a sobering reminder for those who think it's too expensive to wage a war against jihadists."

In just a few hours an entire conceptual framework had been erected - though hardly from scratch - to discuss the problem of Muslims in particular and non-white immigration in Europe in general and the existential threat these problems pose to civilization as we know it.

Then came the fact that the terrorist was actually a white, Christian extremist and a neo-Nazi, Anders Breivik, raging against Islam and multiculturalism. Unlike Muslims in the wake of Islamist attacks, Christians weren't called upon to insist upon their moderation. No one argued that white people had to get with the Enlightenment project. But the bombings - and the presumptions about who was responsible - suggest that the true threat to European democracy is not Islam or Muslims but, once again, fascism and racists.

The belief that Muslims must have been involved chimes easily with a distorted, hysterical understanding of the demographic, religious and racial dynamics that have been present in Europe for well over a generation, variants of which are also at work in the United States today.

The general framing goes like this. Europe is being overrun by Muslims and other non-white immigrants, who are outbreeding non-Muslims at a terrifying rate. Unwilling to integrate culturally and unable to compete intellectually, Muslim populations have become hotbeds of terrorist sympathy and activity. Their presence threatens not only security but the liberal consensus regarding women's rights and gay rights that Western Europe has so painstakingly established; and overall, this state of affairs represents a fracturing of society that is losing its common values. This has been allowed to happen in the name of not offending specific ethnic groups, otherwise known as multiculturalism.

One could spend all day ripping these arguments to shreds, but for now let's just deal with the facts.

There have been predictions that the Muslim population of Europe will almost double by 2015 (Oner Taspiner, the Brookings Institution); double by 2020 (Don Melvin, the Associated Press); and be 20 percent of the continent by 2050 (Esther Pan, Council on Foreign Relations). Republican presidential hopeful Rick Santorum told Sarah Posner of Religion Dispatches: "The number I heard is every 32 years the population, the European population of Europe will be reduced by 50 percent. That's how bad their birthrates are.

This is in many respects a dying continent from the standpoint of European-Europeans."

This is nonsense. The projections are way off. While Muslims in Europe do have higher birthrates than non-Muslims, their birthrates are falling. A Pew Forum study, published in January 2011, forecast an increase of Muslims in European population from 6 percent in 2010 to 8 percent in 2030.

The Norwegian terrorist Breivik feared a Muslim takeover.

But Muslims make up 3 percent of Norway. Black Americans have a greater presence in Alaska.

But even if these predictions were true, so what? There's nothing to say Europe has to remain Christian or majority- white.

Nor do immigrants struggle to integrate. In Britain, Asian Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus all marry outside of their own groups at the same rates as whites. For most ethnic minorities in Britain, roughly half or more of their friends are white. Only 20 percent of those born in Britain have friends only from their own group. According to a Pew Research Center survey, the principal concerns of Muslims in France, Germany and Spain are unemployment and Islamic extremism.

In most of Europe the official politics of multiculturalism that the likes of Breivik and more mainstream politicians rail against - a liberal, state-led policy of encouraging and supporting cultural difference at the expense of national cohesion - is an absolute fiction. Last year German chancellor Angela Merkel claimed the "multikulti" experiment had failed. Earlier this year, British Prime Minister David Cameron said the same thing. The truth is that neither country ever tried such an experiment. "We never had a policy of multiculturalism," explains Mekonnen Mesghena, head of migration and intercultural management at the Heinrich B"ll Foundation. "We had a policy of denial: denial of immigration and of diversity. Now it's like we are waking up from a long trance."

The real object of their ire is the existence of "other" - meaning non-white - cultures and races in Europe: the fact of "other" cultures, not the promotion of them. The single greatest obstacle to integration in most of Europe is not Islam or multiculturalism but racism and the economic and academic disadvantage that comes with it.

And, finally, Muslims are nowhere near the greatest terrorist threat. According to Europol, between 2006 and

2008 only .4 percent of terrorist plots (including attempts and fully executed attacks) in Europe were from Islamists.

The lion's share (85 percent) were related to separatism.

That doesn't mean there isn't a problem. But it's not on the scale or of the nature that those first out of the gate on Friday claimed it was. Put bluntly, if you have to assume anything when a bomb goes off in Europe, think region, not religion.

But there are some in Europe who are struggling to cope with the changes taking place - who are failing to integrate into changing societies and who harbor deep-seated resentments against their fellow citizens. That is a sizeable and growing section of the white population so alienated that it has once again made fascism a mainstream ideology on the continent.

In Germany the bestselling book since the Second World War by former Bundesbank board member Thilo Sarrazin blames inbreeding among Turks and Kurds for "congenital disabilities" and argues that immigrants from the Middle East are a "genetic minus" for the country. "But the subject is usually hushed up," he wrote. "Perish the thought that genetic factors could be partially responsible for the failure of parts of the Turkish populations in the German school system."

A poll published in the national magazine Focus in September 2010 showed 31 percent of respondents agreeing that Germany is "becoming dumber" because of immigrants; 62 percent said Sarrazin's comments were "justified." In Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France and Italy, hard-right nationalist and anti- immigrant parties regularly receive more than 10 percent of the vote. In Finland it is 19 percent; in Norway it is 22 percent; in Switzerland, 29 percent. In Italy and Austria they have been in government; in Switzerland, where the anti-immigrant Swiss People's Party is the largest party, they still are.

Breivik was from a particularly vile strain of that trend.

But he did not come from nowhere. And the anxieties that produced him are growing. Fascists prey on economic deprivation and uncertainty, democratic deficits cause by European Union membership and issues of sovereignty related to globalization. Far right forces in Greece, for example, are currently enjoying a vigorous revival. When scapegoats are needed they provide them. When solutions are demanded they are scarce.

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