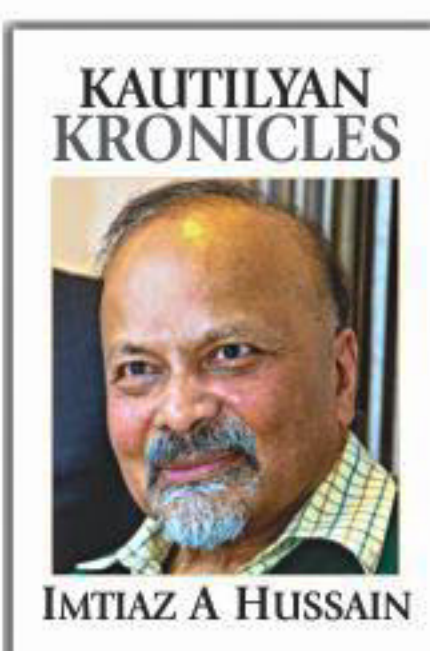


Christchurch and 'social cracks'

'Invasions' of a different breed



INTIAZ A HUSSAIN

IT was not, as Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern noted, "one of the darkest days," in New Zealand's history, but "the darkest." New Zealand is not known for "dark" behaviour, but 3/15 became "one of the darkest" days of the 21st century globally. Well-tracked Muslim *jihadi* goons have typically perpetuated them, but with Christian "lone-wolf" supremacists emerging from "society's cracks" to join them, the mainstream public must now stand up and be counted alongside intelligence agencies to prevent "copy-cat" episodes.

At stake is Brenton Tarrant's driving force. The Australian's 74-page ranting might be dubbed his "Mein Kampf" ("My Struggle"), echoing the same wrath Adolf Hitler propagated in the infamous original version of the same title. Put simply, it is "invasion"-related. For Hitler, it was directed against the economically more prosperous Jews across Germany particularly, but Europe generally; for Tarrant, it was the dark-skinned immigrants to Europe, particularly those unassimilated masses, like those he saw recently in the outskirts of Paris, mostly Muslims. His posted treatise and horror-reeking live-streaming became tools to project the "white cause," with him as the Christian crusade commander "fighting the good fight with all his might," in hymnic spirit.

That his was not the first time "invasion" was invoked by Christians against Muslims helps us understand the larger context better. Tarrant even helps sketch that big picture. His references to the Christian-Islam battles across Europe, such as at Tours in 732, Lepanto 1571, and Vienna 1683, among others, gave him both the model, and from the Tours campaign, a Frankish leader, Charles Martel, as idol. Noted historian, Edward Gibbon, elevated Martel as "the savior of Christendom" at Tours. If Abd-ar-Rahman al-Ghaffiqi's armies had prevailed, after conquering Spain, Gibbon contended "the interpretation of the Koran would now

be taught in the schools of Oxford," even more emphatically, "her pulpits might demonstrate to a circumscribed people the sanctity and truth of the revelation of Mahomet (sic)" (from his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1776). Such an image hardened in Tarrant's mind.

It was not the only one, as he explains. Education played an enormous part—that is, the dimming effect of it for white, western youths, like him. By making alternate explanations readily available, even if in distorted forms, education softens die-hard interpretations and impressions to varying degrees. Yet the bedrock intellectual catalyst of the modern age is eroding. The 17th century English Enlightenment, the late 18th century French *philosophes*, and the very late 19th century German surge to find a "spot under the intellectual sun" must now confront global rivals. China, for example, accounts for more than 20 percent of all scientific publications and more researchers than the United States (Chris Parr's June 2016 article in World Economic Forum site), making intellectual property rights the Rubicon in trade talks.

One handmaiden of the English Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, which distinguishes developed from less developed countries today, is also depicting growing global contours. After World War II, the western world accounted for more than two-thirds of the world's gross domestic product (GDP), by the 1990s barely half, and today, less than one-third, with China and the United States flip-flopping their share of the global economy, the latter from 25 percent in the 1980s to 15 percent today, and China spiralling up from 2 percent then to 17 percent today. For white western college students like Tarrant, had he not dropped out, these developments threaten the cardinal assumption of automatic post-graduation employment, together with all the privileges of a post-industrial society, like a social safety network. It does not take knowledge of rocket-science to deduce how anti-foreigner sentiments can be fanned by those unwilling to strive like their less-endowed and less-complacent Asian counterparts, particularly

migrants disinterested in assimilating. No one understood this better than Tarrant. No one understands that better than other nondescript or unengaged students, a galloping proportion of western societies today against its trickle-sized presence half a century ago. This dissatisfied western population is the fearful time-bomb capable of rivalling Islamic *jihadis* in how macabre their heinous actions can be.

What compounds this cocktail is not just the waning of the intellectual western clout, but also the growth of a facilitative instrument: technology. Paradoxically, it was the slipping of technological competitiveness of the first two industrial revolutions (based on textiles, steel, mass-production), that unwittingly fed this "invasion"-mindset, like the outcry against low-cost Asian or Latin exports. Yet the third and fourth industrial revolutions (computers and artificial knowledge) might have given "invasion"-minded western youths the very revival instrument they seek: Internet-driven social

media. It has empowered them enormously to believe their eroding competitiveness can be salvaged. Driven by affluence-triggered complacency into "social cracks", they now see escape outlets. Previously, under the transparent vigil of a democratic order, it was hard, if not impossible, for "invasion"-minded subscribers to mobilise. Now they know they have an applauding, and hopefully growing, audience, waiting in the wings.

We notice that in recent western elections, three of the most illustrious (and original) democratic countries were dented, perhaps

"invasion"-minded flock may be bristling inside those "social cracks", grabbing any opportunity, like a Charlottesville-type event, to spring out, or simply dive off the deep-end through "copy-cat" actions. It is why only a vigilant public, informed, if not of the past, then crucially, of the present, must rise to the occasion. Their vital task would be to prevent any more "dark" plunges by keeping a wary eye on the democratic process. With a boom in democratically-elected populists across the west, the rest of the world stands with bated breath as to the uncharted waters that may have to be crossed.

That is not hyperbole. Hitler became a decision-maker democratically in 1932. Though without an absolute majority, he manipulated all power-levers. By March 1933, his Enabling Act placed Germany right in the palm of his murderous hands. Brutal history followed, but the sagacious leadership of Konrad Adenauer, Helmut Schmidt, Helmut Kohl, Angela Merkel, among others, restored German pride, and Europe's automatic decision-maker at crucial crossroads.

Merkel's chancellorship might become Europe's buck-stopper amid the current downward spiral. Her 2021 retirement decision was partly influenced by "invasion" forces, after she stood up, alone across Europe, to embrace petrified Syrian refugees, or, in Tarrant's language, "invaders," much like Ardern gallantly did after 3/15. Preserving Merkel's rock-solid leadership stands between continued US influence and Europe regressing to its war-scarred past. Enough waters have flown under trans-Atlantic bridges to shift Europe's leadership mantle towards Germany. How it delivers will be pivotal, but one useful global ripple would condemn New Zealand's "darkest" hour to where it now belongs: in history, not a future predicament.

Having entered the "global heart" through her election victory, then giving birth in office, Ardern's next baby must be a *Newer Zealand*, one hopefully as "compassionate" as the old.

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The New Zealand national flag is flown at half-mast on a Parliament building in Wellington, after the shootings in Christchurch on March 15, 2019. PHOTO: AFP

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Journalism's risky tech attraction



ALEXANDRA BORCHARDT

TECHNOLOGY was supposed to solve some of the world's biggest problems. Connect everyone to the Internet, it was once assumed, and democracy would follow. Collect enough data, and all of our questions would be answered. Put everything online, and algorithms would do the rest. The world would practically run itself.

Instead, we now know that digital technology can be used to undermine democracy; that it raises more questions than it answers; and that a world that runs itself seems more like an Orwellian nightmare scenario than a noble goal. But while technology isn't the solution, it isn't really the problem either; our single-minded focus on it is.

Consider the experience of the media industry, where the digital revolution has wreaked havoc on prevailing business models over the last decade. Publishers and editors responded by putting all their faith in technology: tracking all manner of metrics, embracing data journalism, hiring video teams, and opening podcast studios.

More recently, media organisations have shifted their attention toward artificial-intelligence solutions that track audience preferences, automatically produce desired content and translations, alert journalists to breaking news, and much more. In the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism's latest annual report on media trends, 78 percent of respondents in a non-representative survey of international media leaders said that they planned to invest more in AI this year.

But the final frontier in the quest to save

journalism, many believe, is the blockchain—the distributed ledger technology that underpins cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin. That remains to be seen: the first attempt to leverage the blockchain to free journalists from ad-driven business models, by Civil Media Company, had a bumpy start.

There is nothing wrong with using technology to solve problems, including those created by technology, or to give a company a competitive edge. That is what *The Washington Post*, for example, has been doing

there is no regard for the people using it. And that does not mean just audiences. After years of chasing the latest tech trends, the media industry is increasingly confronting burnout among existing management and staff, and a shrinking pool of new talent.

According to the Reuters Institute report, some 60 percent of media leaders are concerned about burnout on their teams, and 75 percent now worry about retaining and attracting staff. Another report, Lucy Kueng's *Going Digital. A Roadmap for Organizational*

constantly changing news situations. But, in the past, they could at least count on the news organisations that employed them to offer stability and consistency. Now, they must also navigate relentless, tech-driven organisational change—often poorly explained and hastily introduced. The level of uncertainty can drive away even the most loyal staff.

To be sure, change is unavoidable; the digital age demands constant adaptation. But making needed adjustments without destroying morale requires implementing a people-oriented approach. This is not a straightforward process. For tech solutions, managers can attend shiny digital conferences, take some sales team's advice, sign a contract, and dump the new tools on their newsrooms. With people, they have to listen carefully, acquire an in-depth understanding of the problem, and then devise their own strategy.

A good place to start is leadership. In any industry, the key responsibilities of an organisation's leaders include making their employees feel secure and appreciated. That means paying attention to employees' needs and fostering an organisational culture that provides them with a sense of belonging and purpose.

A similar approach must be applied to audiences. Not even the most accurate metrics can provide the needed guidance, if nobody understands what they actually mean, why they were chosen, or what their psychological impact would be (on audiences or staff). While data can deliver useful insights about audience preferences, listening to people can lead to very different impressions and conclusions.

For example, the data might show that more content means more page views; but if audiences long for fewer distractions and higher-quality reporting, flooding the market with robot-produced content will not satisfy them. Likewise, users might click on a larger share of articles if algorithms are used to

personalise their experience; but if users become bored by the same topics and perspectives, personalisation will not help.

Tech-based solutions are a means, not an end. That is why *The New York Times*, for example, is leveraging its digital success to invest more in journalism. Last year, the company added 120 newsroom employees, bringing the total number of journalists there to an historic high of 1,600.

For organisations without the clout—and digital revenue—of the *Times*, a people-oriented approach may also be needed to secure investment. With the limits of the ad-driven business model becoming increasingly apparent, many media leaders—close to one-third, according to the Reuters Institute survey—believe that in the future foundations and non-profits will play a central role in supporting the media.

But persuading foundations and philanthropists to open their hearts and wallets will require human connection and engagement, not algorithms or AI-enabled software. Potential funders need to be convinced that journalism is as noble a cause as, say, cancer research.

Technology alone cannot encourage democracy, help answer important questions, and facilitate effective leadership by boosting accountability. But, to some extent, high-quality, responsible journalism can. If it is to fulfil that purpose, however, news organisations must not allow themselves to be swept up by every new tech trend. If they treat technology as more than a tool for implementing people-centred strategies, the people they need—both staff and audiences—will continue to vote with their feet.

Alexandra Borchardt is Director of Leadership Programs at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

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The New York Times building, on Sept. 6, 2018. PHOTO: ANGELA WEISS/AFP

A WORD A DAY



SCRAPEGUT
NOUN

A fiddle player

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH


ACROSS	30 Shooters, e.g.	6 Whole
1 Weary word	32 Wonders to behold	7 Foul up, as plans
5 Mother of Castor and Pollux	34 Smelter supply	8 By the way
9 Sachet scent	35 Enter port	10 Sidewalk stuff
11 Comic strip unit	36 Bert's buddy	11 Course numbers
12 Trig topic	38 Correct, as text	16 Arms collection
13 Texas player	39 Was partisan	18 X in a letter
14 Early auto	40 Store in the hold	21 Parting tool
15 Sci-fi invader	41 Base meal	23 Ward workers
17 Gambler's IOUs		24 Emotional shock
19 Convoy member	DOWN	25 Moved quickly
20 Rider's straps	1 Burglar's bane	27 Bleacher, perhaps
21 Animator's frame	2 Straight	28 TV show
22 Dictation expert	3 "Earth in the Balance" author	29 Urge forward
24 Six-pt. scores	4 Gal of song	30 Patch up
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29 Lyricist Gershwin		33 Wall climber
		37 Crater part

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER


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BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



WHERE'S MY BALL? I FOUND IT, SIR! BACK HERE! IT SHOULD BE HERE. BRING IT UP!

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott



HAMMIE, DON'T YOU THINK YOUR TOENAILS ARE GETTING KIND OF LONG? NO. I'M GROWING THEM OUT SO I CAN CLIMB TREES AND CLIFFS LIKE A WOLVERINE. FIRST THEY TELL YOU TO SET GOALS, AND THEN THEY TAKE THEM AWAY!