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From the Taliban to Andrew Tate there is a proliferation of global misogyny

Different groups online are coming together to amplify each other's voice and promote misogyny online, write Dr Sajjan M. Gohel and Eve Register.

In the three years since the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan, they have **systematically dismantled the rights of women**. Their violations range from women being banned from receiving an education, to restrictions on employment and freedom of speech. Even women's ability to move and travel has been heavily restricted and the draconian dress code they were once subject to has been reinstated. Afghan women face constant monitoring, harassment, arbitrary detention, torture, and sexual violence by the Taliban through its oppressive **Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice**.

Despite the Orwellian nature of Afghanistan, the Taliban are very keen to promote the country through social media. This is particularly ironic given that during the Taliban's first reign in Afghanistan in the 1990s, they banned technology as they deemed it an affront to religion. Today, technological developments are fuelling new forms of gender-based intolerance. This applies to the growing phenomenon of people based in the West that serve as fanboys for the Taliban.

Andrew Tate

This movement has conveniently converged with Andrew Tate, a misogynistic social media influencer. Disturbingly, Tate is one of the most Googled people worldwide. The hashtag '#AndrewTate' on YouTube has **amassed over 13 billion views** and even after several of his **social media accounts were banned** for misogynistic and hateful content, his internet presence continues to grow. Since Tate's **conversion to Islam** back in October 2022, his online audience has further diversified and expanded to incorporate a number of new groups that resonate with his messaging.

Tate's **conversion** is seen as purely **opportunistic**, a view corroborated by a man who used to work for Tate's infamous 'War Room', an online community that teaches the **grooming of women**. He describes Tate's conversion as part of a **strategy to reshape his image** from pimp to pious family man. Just weeks after his conversion, **Romanian police arrested Tate** on charges of human trafficking, rape and the formation of a criminal gang to sexually exploit women and Tate, likely aware of these allegations prior to his arrest, may have intended this rebranding to distance himself from such charges.

It should be noted that prior to Tate's conversion, he **associated with** some of the most infamous figures of the British far-right's anti-Islam movement, including the founder of the English Defence League Tommy Robinson. After Tommy Robinson found out he was being **sued for bullying a Syrian refugee** in a viral video in 2019, he, joined by Tate, **turned up at the door** of one of Robinson's critics to harass him. Such a relationship with the leader of an organisation founded on Islamophobia makes his conversion seem deeply contradictory and undoubtedly expedient. Tate even expressed in a recent interview that Robinson **'is doing his very best to protect England from Islamisation'**.

Tate's position and status within social media has also enabled him to influence young men to adopt some of his misogynistic mindsets and behaviours. One Muslim woman describes how her fiancé rapidly became **'very controlling'** and began **'promoting patriarchal gender roles'** after listening to Tate's podcast, behaviours that led to the cancellation of their engagement months later.

In addition to Tate's influence on individuals, he has also been able to connect with larger groups and entities, the Afghan Taliban being one example of significant concern. The Taliban welcomed Tate's conversion and publicly expressed that they were **'worried about Andrew Tate'** as he continued to be held in custody following his arrest. Sameera Khan, who worked for the **Kremlin-sponsored** Russia Today news channel, announced in December 2022 that she helped set up a **'Twitter space with the Afghan Taliban to discuss the detainment of Andrew Tate'**, adding that the Taliban believe the West **'need Andrew Tate because we are oppressed by feminists'**. Through the creation of such online spaces for Tate and Taliban supporters to connect, internet personalities with large followings like Khan have been instrumental in expanding Tate-Taliban linkages and cultivating a new ideology that blends the misogyny of Tate with that of the Taliban.

Another key figure in the Tate-Taliban community is British danger tourist Miles Routledge also known as 'Lord Miles'. Routledge started visiting Afghanistan as a danger tourist destination to create content for his YouTube channel but was **arrested by the Taliban in March 2023** after he tried to start a goldmine without a permit. He was held by the Taliban for eight months on suspicion of being a British spy, but claims to have bonded with his detainers and **describes his detention as a 'holiday'**. On his return to England, Routledge was invited to be a guest on Tate's podcast where he repeatedly praises the Taliban or Talibros, a now viral term which was originally coined by Routledge himself and has since been used by people seeking to paint the Taliban in a positive light.

One other influential group that has actively interacted with Tate since his conversion is known as the 'akh right bros', a collective of male influencers who favour 'a version of Islam that is rife with misogyny'. A recent study of this group has also identified elements of akh right discourse borrowed from the ideology of white supremacists in the way they reject multiculturalism. Two notable members of this community, Mohammed Hijab and Myron Gaines, have used their popular social media platforms to host Tate and discuss his conversion and the intersection of their views with his own.

In a podcast episode released in 2023 featuring a discussion between Hijab and Tate, the two men have a debate about 'gender positions' where they agree that a woman belongs to her husband and that 'devils and demons' are responsible for people thinking women can fulfil a traditionally male role. Although many of the most recognised akh right members do not discuss or show active support for the Taliban, the akh right study did find evidence of connections between akh right bros and global jihadist movements including the Taliban.

There are unifying elements of akh right-Tate collaboration that also help explain the engagement of other extremist sects with Tate. Tate, along with all these groups, depend on an algorithm that rewards extreme views to disseminate their content and make money from their posts. The extremity of their discourse is a key factor in their videos' ability to go viral and as the algorithm continues to reward their provocative content, there is continued incentive to continue their extremist discourse.

When content creators from different extremist sects of the online community collaborate, the merging of their support bases sky-rockets engagement with this collaborative content, generating larger profits and further reinforcing the algorithm rewarding this extremism. The rapid proliferation of such disturbing content may also lead to the disengagement of more moderate voices who want to distance themselves from this extremism, leaving a void that this extremism can then fill.

Forging new networks

The Taliban likely hopes that by encouraging bloggers, vloggers, and social media activists to visit Afghanistan and normalise the indefensible, it can condition the world to learn to live with the Taliban's abuses. It requires remarkable hubris to assume that these people can demystify the fractured, complex and murky nature of how the Taliban govern in Afghanistan over journalists, academics, and practitioners who have spent decades deciphering the Taliban and their allies, such as al-Qaeda.

As yet, the UK Government does not recognise the Taliban as the legitimate administration of Afghanistan and has no formal diplomatic relations either. Despite this, the Taliban has been able to utilise familial and tribal ties in the West to try and recruit Afghans that migrated abroad, such as former translators for Western militaries. In addition, second generation Afghans that have no direct knowledge of Afghanistan but are seeking identity, are being preyed upon.

Through these networks, the Taliban are working to assemble a collective of men that can be used to funnel narcotics, illicit money and even weapons. These networks will also be utilised to spy on and monitor Afghan women that were forced to live in exile and are seeking to alert the world to the dire situation in Afghanistan. Aside from its close ties with al-Qaeda, the Taliban are demonstrating the traits of a hostile state actor, burnished with the agenda of misogyny and ideological extremism.

Meanwhile, the Taliban are also increasingly **'addicted' to social media** and are trying to expand their online presence, a growth aided by their relationship with Tate who has already given them significant visibility in the West. Potential online collaboration between Tate and the Taliban in the future may enable the Taliban to capitalise on the algorithm that has propelled Tate to global notoriety. At the same time, it will serve to fuel **sexism, misogyny and sexual harassment** in **classrooms** and across the West as young impressionable men are exposed to the warped ideas of the **'manosphere'** and drawn to its creepy and insidious agenda.

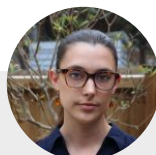
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