

## **Ad hominem attacks are especially dangerous in our digital age**

Alison Pearson's recent article (*I was right to support Lucy: She isn't a racist*, Daily Telegraph, 23/8/25) is apparently commonsensical and tolerant but it harbours a serious and growing human problem: the explosive destructiveness of digitally mediated ad hominem attacks, especially when justified by false 'facts'. The rapid contagion of such violent mistrust is now far greater than anything that was possible in our erstwhile, much slower, analogue era.

Pearson reports that Lucy Connolly is a good and moral woman: '... warm and bubbly ... in no way a racist...' who was subject to a 'red mist ... so many extenuating circumstances'. These were triggered by her simply and quickly believing a falsehood: that three horrific recent child murders were committed by an illegal immigrant, rather than their true perpetrator, a UK citizen (Axel Rudukabana). Connolly's post, signalling an invitation to set fire to migrant hotels, was instantly read by scores of thousands; a wave of mortally dangerous violence followed.

The 'red mist' and 'heightened emotion' that Connolly describes will be uncomfortably familiar for most of us: they are sirens to our most destructive impulses. They may be useful preliminary explanations for what follows, but never justifications. Ad hominem attacks have always had this undertow of morbid consequences, but the risks of these have increased immeasurably with our powerful digital and social media.

Clearing robust and legitimate argument from hate-thought and hate-speech has now become an urgent challenge, worldwide. Our social conventions and buttressing legal devices and codes must rise to this. Our failure to meet these responsibilities will surely invite future contagions from such thought-hatred.