

From the Red Pill to ‘White Genocide’:  
An Ethnography of the Alt-Right in Montreal

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# Abstract

Over the past decade the alt-right has grown in prominence, yet scholarly research on the movement remains scanty. This ethnography of an alt-right group in Montreal aims to help fill the gap in the scholarship. I examine the unique ethical and methodological challenges involved in studying the movement and map the alt-right in relation to the far right more generally, using the political ecosystem of Quebec to illustrate far-right sub-groupings. I build on ethnographic data to theorize about masculinities within the movement with a particular focus on gendered hierarchy-building among movement adherents. I explore the connections between the alt-right and online male-supremacism, concluding that male-supremacism constitutes one path into the alt-right. Internal divisions within the alt-right are mapped and theorized as two broad camps in dialogic tension. These camps are understood to be split between more liberal and more fascist perspectives. Ethnographic data is used to illustrate these tensions as they played out in the Montreal group. The liberal/fascist split is explored with reference to different class positions among informants, and each camp is examined in historical and geographic context. I conclude with a reflexive exploration of the motivations of alt-right adherents and a series of recommendations moving forward.

# Table of Contents

<i>List of Figures</i> .....	1
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>2. Ethics and Methods</b> .....	9
<b>The Ethics of ‘Studying Up’</b> .....	10
Activist Ethnography .....	12
Critical Ethnography .....	14
Hostile Ethnography .....	17
<b>Methods</b> .....	21
<b>3. The Far Right and the Place of the Alt-Right Within It</b> .....	27
<b>Nomenclature</b> .....	27
<b>What is the Far Right?</b> .....	32
The Dissident and Extreme Right in Québec .....	33
Right-Wing Populism in Québec .....	40
The Limits of the Centrist/Extremist Model .....	43
Terminology in this Thesis.....	45
<b>What is the Alt-Right?</b> .....	49
<b>4. Men and Masculinity in the Alt-Right</b> .....	57
<b>The Roundtable</b> .....	57
<b>Masculinity as Homosocial Enactment in the Alt-Right</b> .....	76
<b>Alt-Right Conceptualizations of Internal Masculine Social Hierarchies</b> .....	79
Alphas, Betas and the Manosphere .....	80
Signaling Theory and ‘White Sharia’ .....	87
High-Quality versus Low-Quality Men .....	100
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	113
<b>5. Secular Male-Supremacism: PUA and the Red Pill as Conduits to the Alt-Right</b> .....	122
<b>Taking the Red Pill</b> .....	123
<b>Neoreaction</b> .....	126
<b>Demographics</b> .....	129
<b>Enemies</b> .....	130
<b>Outlooks</b> .....	131
<b>Red Pill to White Genocide</b> .....	132
<b>6. The Dialogics of the Alt-Right</b> .....	135
<b>A Meeting in the Rain</b> .....	135
<b>The Character of Tensions Within the Alt-Right</b> .....	139

Cryptos and Stormers: Strategic Struggles Within the Alt-Right .....	146
Concealing Your Power Level: Philippe on Identitarianism and Respectability Politics .....	158
A Diversity of Tactics: Charity, Terrorism and the Limits of the Big Tent .....	167
<b>7. <i>Class, Race and Capitalism Within the Alt-Right</i>.....</b>	<b>173</b>
The Incompatibility of Fascism and Liberal Capitalism .....	176
Esoteric Fascism: Julius Evola on Caste, Race, and the Spiritual Aristocracy .....	186
Christian Fascism: Bernard’s Take on Satan, Jews, and Spiritual Elitism .....	192
“Red-Pilled on the JQ”: Roman’s Bourgeois Liberal Racism.....	201
<b>8. <i>‘Leukocratic’ Liberalism, Pathological Normalcy, and the Future of the Alt-Right</i>.....</b>	<b>206</b>
Pathological Normalcy .....	206
Leukocratic Liberalism .....	211
Canada and Immigration.....	214
Dual Positions.....	217
<b>9. <i>Motivations, Time Travel and the End of the World</i>.....</b>	<b>219</b>
Alienation and the Alt-Right .....	228
Time Travel.....	233
<b>10. <i>Conclusions</i> .....</b>	<b>237</b>
<b><i>References</i> .....</b>	<b>245</b>

# List of Figures

- 36** Figure 1. *A screen-capture from Atalante's Facebook page showing the group's statement on the recent provincial elections.*
- 46** Figure 2. *A diagram mapping the far right along two axes.*
- 87** Figure 3. *Various versions of the alpha/beta hierarchy.*
- 99** Figure 4. *Lawrence's vision of an alt-right signaling environment focused on the topic of heterosexual relations*
- 113** Figure 5. *Informants' understandings of high-quality and low-quality people, and their preferred mode of masculinity.*
- 142** Figure 6. *The various tensions within the alt-right, sorted into camps and organized by specific concern.*

# 1.Introduction

Over the past decade the movement calling itself the alt-right has gone from an internet fringe phenomenon to a major topic of news coverage. Many first heard about the movement through the figure of Steve Bannon, an advisor to Donald Trump at the time of his election and co-founder of Breitbart, a news site Bannon billed as “the platform for the alt-right” (Posner 2016). The ‘Unite the Right’ rally in Charlottesville in 2017, at which a counter-protestor was murdered by an alt-right adherent, shocked many people and sparked a flurry of reporting on the alt-right. Video footage from Charlottesville of hundreds of well-groomed young white men identically dressed in white polos and khakis, clutching torches and shouting “Jews will not replace us,” seemed to confirm fears of a new type of white identity politics emerging among Millennials. Clean-cut and lacking the tattooed boots-and-braces look of neo-Nazi skinheads, or the beards and Confederate trucker hats associated with rural working-class racism, the alt-right marchers hinted at a better-organized, more image-conscious brand of far-right activism. A spate of terrorist attacks committed by young men enthused with the movement complicated this sense of a more suave and palatable white supremacy but cemented the alt-right’s place in the public’s consciousness.

The dissimilarities between the alt-right and older forms of white-supremacist activism proved to involve a steep learning curve for journalists trying to cover the issue. Obsessed with in-jokes originating on niche forums like 4chan, the rank-and-file of the alt-right did not make it easy for outsiders to understand them. The more strategically-minded figures in the movement often practiced various kinds of prevarication with journalists in order to further their own propaganda aims. One stunt involved whipping up a fake controversy about the pop singer Taylor Swift being a secret Nazi, and then claiming to journalists that she was the alt-right’s favourite artist. The

bizarre character of the story ensured that news outlets ran with it, fulfilling the propagandists' goals of spreading awareness about the existence of the alt-right and making the mainstream media appear foolish and out of touch. More recently, the terrorist who murdered dozens of worshippers at a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand, included in his manifesto that he considered Candace Owens to be an inspiration to him. Owens, who is a Black conservative known for controversial statements about Hitler, may be a target of ire for the left but is certainly no inspiration to any white supremacist. Major newspapers reported the story incessantly. The shooter's manifesto was thereby successfully publicized, and his desire to mock both the media and the leftists who have called Owens a Nazi was satisfied. Journalists seem to have been hypnotized by the movement's idiosyncrasies – its use of a cartoon frog, Pepe, as a mascot, for example – and at times have struggled to get a handle on what the alt-right is about.

With my work, I have tried to shed light on the movement. Gingrich and Banks (2006) note that the unique contribution of anthropologists to the study of neo-nationalism is that we “[combine] an ability to see the world as neo-nationalists see it (while never seeking to endorse those perspectives) with scepticism towards their view of the world” (1). This is equally true of the study of other far-right movements. Anthropologists' conceptual training predisposes us to balanced perspectives which take into account both structural and individual factors (Gingrich and Banks 2006). Methodologically, the use of ethnography permits anthropologists a depth of study rarely available to journalists, and avoids the pitfalls of relying solely on textual sources such as propaganda (Blee 2003). By spending time participating personally in events with our informants, and getting to know them as people, we are able to generate valuable data which other researchers may miss. My fieldwork, I hope, goes some way toward accomplishing these and other goals with regard to the alt-right.



Of course, this does not mean that studying the alt-right ethnographically is without its complications. In Chapter 2 I discuss the important ethical and methodological questions involved in this work. Anthropological codes of conduct advocating that we support our informants in their political struggles are unsuited to situations in which doing so would itself be unethical; researchers must, in such situations, conduct their own power analysis and determine for themselves the correct ethical stance to take. Far-right informants may attempt to use anthropological work as a platform for their ideas. They may also have an incentive to deceive the researcher for propaganda purposes. The researcher's safety can also be at stake due to elements within the far right known to commit politically motivated violence. Accordingly, extra precautions may be necessary for researchers studying the far right. There are questions about whether studying the far right is itself even ethical or useful, or if it needlessly gives these groups undeserved attention or is otherwise dangerous. I address these questions and argue that the benefits of such research outweigh potential harm.

Chapter 3 provides the terminological framework for this work, defining important terms and exploring the literature on far-right politics. Definitions provided by scholars of the far right are explained with reference to the political situation in Québec. Theoretical issues involving the utility of 'extremism' models are addressed. The picture emerging in the recent literature of far-right groups which share ground with centrist liberalism is explored. My terminological choices are explained. I then offer an overview of the alt-right, building on the framework provided by the first part of the chapter. The alt-right is presented as a social movement, part of the far right, and only intelligible through its organizing principles of white- and male-supremacism. Links between the alt-right and online secular male-supremacist subcultures are established. A preliminary sketch

of the major ideological split within the alt-right, between more liberal and more fascist factions, is drawn.

The lens of gender is used to explore the alt-right in Chapter 4. Beginning with an extended fieldwork account, Chapter 4 proceeds into a discussion of the gendered interpersonal dynamics of an alt-right meet-up, examined with reference to the notion of masculinity as homosocially enacted. That is, much of the gendered behaviour of alt-right adherents can be understood as being performed primarily for the benefit of other men. The hierarchical character of masculinity in the alt-right is addressed in three sections concerning different types of boundary-making and exclusion behaviour practiced by alt-right adherents.

The first details the ‘alpha/beta’ distinction borrowed from online masculinist subcultures such as the Red Pill, having been distilled in turn from the field of evolutionary psychology. The alpha/beta distinction functions to divide men into a masculine elite and an insufficiently masculine subordinate group, implicitly constructing women as a third group excluded from this hierarchy. The second looks at signaling theory, a theoretical model borrowed by the alt-right from behavioural economics. I also apply signaling theory in an exploratory way to the behaviour of alt-right adherents. The third section deals with a distinction, drawn by many alt-right adherents, between ‘high-’ and ‘low-quality’ men, a distinction based on criteria which differ from informant to informant. Altogether these tools for establishing hierarchies among alt-right men are shown to be part of a struggle within the movement over which masculinities are to be considered acceptable.

Chapter 5 takes a closer look at the connections between online male-supremacist subcultures and the alt-right. A discussion of these subcultures’ ideological bases, and the way these overlap with the alt-right’s, is followed by an exploration of how these subcultures function

as recruiting grounds for the alt-right. Men who join these subcultures are exposed to ideas similar to the alt-right's ideas but without as explicit a racial element. They self-select as men who are able and willing to support hierarchist and supremacist ideology. Once involved, a relatively straight-forward path to far-right extremism presents itself.

The sixth chapter delves into the dynamics of the deep ideological, strategic, and aesthetic splits within the alt-right. An ethnographic interlude is followed by an explanation of some of these splits. The tensions between them are characterized as 'dialogic' in character, that is, opposing viewpoints within the alt-right remain in close dialogue with one another, sometimes achieving synthesis but usually not, all the while being influenced by one another. I delineate two main camps, with the first being a more liberal faction interested in respectability and pragmatism and the second being a more fascist faction interested in active opposition and ideological purity. Two alt-right documents are examined. The first is a call to conceal the movement's true goals and proceed with the struggle for white supremacy by covert means. The second is the leaked style guide of a major alt-right online publication, the Daily Stormer, which calls for overt, indeed over-the-top, propaganda. The two documents are analyzed with reference to the two camps. The issue of prevarication by alt-right adherents, brought up by the first document, is addressed with reference to the positions of one of the alt-right group's members most affiliated with the liberal camp. The chapter closes with a series of predictions regarding the future of the movement and the impact the ideological splits will have on it.

Chapter 7 examines the interplay of class, race and capitalism in the alt-right group. The confused and sometimes contradictory attitude toward capitalism on the far right is explored. The incompatibility of classical fascism and liberal capitalism is addressed through the lens of class identification. The historical context of the development of liberal capitalism in Europe is

juxtaposed with the development of racist thought to illustrate the roots of racism in aristocratic resistance to modernity. This aristocratic anti-modernism is further explored through the writing of Julius Evola, a prominent Italian esoteric fascist who advocated aristocratic elitism and ‘spiritual racism’. Interviews with informants are used to highlight the different ways in which racist views have been taken up in the alt-right, and the relationship between these racisms and different class identifications. I argue that the fascist wing is interested in non- or pre-capitalist class relations, in keeping with the aristocratic roots of racist thought and the subsequent prominence of Evola’s elitist anti-modernist thought in the fascist milieu, while the liberal wing is beholden to bourgeois class values. These two class identifications, I argue, also largely correspond to esoteric versus secular worldviews.

In Chapter 8, I challenge common assumptions about the racist right being insane, meaningless, based on irrational ‘hate’, or otherwise pathological. Instead, I argue, the racist right draws its ideas from sentiments which are common in the mainstream and are intimately related to the foundational values of states like Canada. I examine the rise of ‘ethnocratic liberalism’ in Europe, a form of far-right thought which seeks to retain liberal governance while redefining the country along narrow ethnic lines, and I identify the Canadian equivalent, naming it leukocratic or white supremacist liberalism, which seeks to (re)define the country along racial lines instead. I note that the high proportion of immigrants and direct descendants of immigrants among the members of the alt-right group render a totally anti-immigrant stance nonsensical, pointing to their potential embrace of a classic Canadian stance, a whites-only pro-immigration position. I argue that the capacity for racists to hold dual positions – supporting immigration for whites but not for others, for example – is understated in the literature and underlies the leukocratic liberal position.

Chapter 9 is a reflexive examination of moments of empathy shared with informants. I argue that rather than extremist thought being rooted in economic downturns or pathological causes, it is a logical result of the normal functioning of liberal capitalism, which strips meaning from people's experiences of the world and generates alienation, precarity and ecological disaster as a matter of course. I argue that extremist thought is a rebellion against liberal capitalism and that rebellion against liberal capitalism is rational and understandable. I offer an interpretation of far-right extremist thought as a desire for a kind of 'time travel', with the goal of anti-liberal far-right programs being to arrive in an imagined pre-liberal past. I conclude with an ethical injunction to resist the project of the alt-right, as it entails brutality on a massive scale. I also note that the likely result of far-right movements gaining popularity is not a fascist anti-liberal revolution but rather their appropriation by factions of the existing ruling class, which, far from dismantling existing class relations, will use these movements to consolidate power.

## 2.Ethics and Methods

The alt-right is a far-right movement. In 2018, every single extremist murder in the United States was committed by someone with ties to far-right extremism, according to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL 2019). Over 300 terrorist attacks linked to far-right extremists have occurred since 2011 (Cai and Landon 2019). People affiliated with the alt-right have published the personal information of many journalists worldwide and have coordinated campaigns of harassment involving death threats (Wilson 2018). In Québec, members of the far-right group Atalante were arrested after bursting into the Montreal office of Vice in a bid to intimidate its journalists after they published an article about the group (De L'Église 2018). A white supremacist attacker murdered six people at a mosque in Québec City in 2017. Far-right groups have ballooned in size and number in recent years, with groups like La Meute and Soldiers of Odin organizing sizeable demonstrations in the streets of major Québec cities and at the US border. Accordingly, conducting research with an alt-right group is dangerous and raises important ethical questions.

Anthropologists are enjoined by our professional ethics to protect our informants and support their political struggles. However, some anthropologists have noted that such a blanket stance precludes a detailed power analysis of the situations we find ourselves in – what if supporting the struggles of our informants is itself unethical? Further, even when broadly in agreement with our informants, our critical analyses can be experienced by them as unfair attacks. It is not always clear what can or should be done about this. Scholars engaged in ethically difficult research have advocated for forming one's own ethical position, and following insufficient professional ethics guidelines only to the degree that they are necessary to carry out the work.

Working specifically with the far right has its own unique pitfalls. It can be difficult to cultivate empathy with informants whose views are hostile toward oneself or one's friends and family. Far-right activists are sometimes eager to use anthropologists' work as a platform for their ideas and may be disappointed if this is not successful. As I have noted, an additional safety risk is involved, as the far-right is associated with politically motivated violence and reprisals and there is a strong tendency for far-right activists to be hostile to journalists, academics and other members of what is perceived as a traitor establishment. This hostility can be amplified when the target's political perspective is leftist.

## The Ethics of 'Studying Up'

Anthropologists have long recommended that we promote the welfare of our informants and their communities. Even in the classically colonial era in which "[t]he anthropologist, like the other Europeans in a colony, occupied a position of economic, political, and psychological superiority vis-a-vis the subject people" (Lewis 1973, 582), anthropologists tended to at least partly side with the communities they studied and "try to protect them against the worst forms of imperial exploitation" (Gough 1968, 403). However, these colonial researchers "rarely questioned the basic relationship of privilege" in which they found themselves, nor did they often question their own biases (Lewis 1973, 583). Often, a putatively anti-racist stance and a commitment to 'preserving' a culture were marred by a seeming indifference to the self-professed interests of actual informants.

As a result of feminist and post-colonial interventions, anthropology has moved away from methods now broadly seen as colonialist (Speed 2008, 213), and today it is generally accepted that as ethnographers we should treat the people we study with as much respect as possible. An overly

‘objective’ detachment from the fate of informants is now usually considered unethical. The subtext – that our engagement with informants should be supportive of them – is made explicit in calls to cultivate “fieldwork solidarity” with them (Heyman 2010, 289) and is borne out in the ethical statements of the major professional associations. As Heyman notes, the American Anthropological Association considers responsibility to informants, and respect for their dignity, to be “paramount” (Heyman 2010, 288). The Society for Applied Anthropology uses similar wording, stating that “[t]o the peoples we study we owe disclosure of our research goals, methods, and sponsorship [...] To the communities ultimately affected by our activities we owe respect for their dignity, integrity, and worth” (SFAA n.d.).

However, as Heyman (2010) points out, ultimately an ethical stance formulated along these lines “does not offer a power analysis of the people and situations we study, and also the kinds of politics in which we might become involved. It seems to cover all cases equally; not all cases are equal” (289). For one, it presupposes quite explicitly that we are studying those who have less power and privilege than us. As Nader (1972) argues, it behooves us to ask “whether the entirety of fieldwork does not depend upon a certain power relationship in favour of the anthropologist, and whether indeed such dominant-subordinate relationships may not be affecting the kinds of theories that we are weaving” (5). If we take seriously the injunction to cultivate solidarity with our informants, we have effectively prohibited ourselves from studying the powerful and the oppressive – that is, those with whom it would be unethical to cultivate solidarity – ‘studying up’, as Nader (1972) puts it. If one is studying not the wretched but the privileged, not the downtrodden but the jackbooted, then the call to respect one’s informants and support their political struggles against those who oppose them becomes at best an ethically suspect gentlemen’s agreement at best and, at worst, collusion with brutality and abuse. This ethical stance also presupposes that the



people we study constitute relatively unified groups towards whom ‘respect’ can be an uncomplicated blanket position. This ignores that outside of perfectly stable and perfectly egalitarian small-scale village societies – the real-world existence of which is contested and on which anthropology no longer focuses – all groups are riven by conflict which complicates the ethical positioning of any participant observer.

### **Activist Ethnography**

Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995) calls for a “new cadre of ‘barefoot anthropologists’ [who] must become alarmists and shock troopers – the producers of politically complicated and morally demanding texts and images capable of sinking through the layers of acceptance, complicity and bad faith that allow the suffering and the deaths to continue” (417). Taking aim both at postmodern moral relativism and overly-scientistic moral detachment, she argues for anthropology as a “site of resistance” (420) and a “tool [...] for human liberation” (418). For her, this deep ethical engagement has often taken the form of intervening directly in events taking place among her interlocutors, for example by arguing for clemency on behalf of some thieves who were to be executed, or by participating in Socialist Workers’ Party campaigns in Brazil at the behest of her informants.

For Scheper-Hughes, it is not enough only to passively advocate for and ‘respect’ informants. An anthropologist must be actively engaged, and the academy must be sensitive to the fact that what historically marginalized people tend to want from anthropology, as she puts it, is not “deconstruction and the social imaginary but the anthropology of the *really real*” (417). It is no secret that the published findings of anthropologists tend to remain very obscure and of little direct use to informants; it is therefore unsurprising that informants should ask, as they did to

Scheper-Hughes, “What is this anthropology to us, anyway?” (411), and demand a more concrete contribution than an impenetrable monograph written in a foreign language. In response, Scheper-Hughes advocates becoming a “class traitor [...] who colludes with the powerless to identify their needs against the interests of the bourgeois institution” (420). Here, then, there is no particular conflict with the injunction to cultivate fieldwork solidarity; if anything, Scheper-Hughes feels that if this solidarity is not combined with class treason, it is too timid.

Speed (2008) takes a broadly similar approach, making an additional criticism of scholars who, too afraid of inadvertently harming informants to act at all, limit themselves to critical theory and textual analysis at the expense of fieldwork. Heyman (2010), likewise, criticizes the fact that many researchers decline to engage actively with informants, instead making “a choice of quietism, that we should not be involved with power processes so as not to do harm” (289). He argues that embedding himself as a participant in activist networks is the best way to study the topic of engagement and thus “go[es] beyond justifying partisan engagement in public issues” (118). In this position, he follows along lines laid by Flacks (1983), who advocates studying activists as a method of understanding social responsibility and morality.

The common thrust for these anthropologists is that following the spirit of anthropological fieldwork ethics means actively supporting the political activities of one’s research subjects – perhaps above and beyond the degree of support stipulated by generic ethical guidelines. However, if one selects certain politically active people as subjects for research based on the fact that one sympathizes with them, one is in effect willfully ignoring the political activities of people one opposes. Conversely, if one selects as subjects for research those who one opposes, participating in their activities is potentially unethical.

Heyman (2010) argues that a politicized anthropology which takes as its ethical base the guidelines of the AAA will be unequipped for morally complicated scenarios. While studying border guards, he explains, he must prioritize the human rights and dignity of migrants in order to remain ethical – but this stance cannot be gleaned from the AAA guidelines, because they have a static power analysis which simply assumes researchers are studying down and reminds them that their main responsibility is to their informants, whoever these are. While we should probably avoid *harming* our informants because of our professional ethics, he writes, that does not mean that we should accept to cultivate solidarity with people who participate in repressive organizations. At the end of the day, for Heyman (2010), “the ethic of ethnographic solidarity is insufficient without an analysis of the historical power placement and fields surrounding our specific ethnographic subjects” (291). We must analyze the power dynamics of the field in order to resolve complex ethical questions.

### **Critical Ethnography**

David Mosse (2015) found himself in an odd intermediate position, working with international aid workers in India – people who were trying to do good and with whom he broadly agreed politically, but ultimately people working for a powerful organization with practices and policies which he proceeded to expose and criticize in his ethnography. This work generated a great deal of backlash, he writes, primarily revolving around the appropriateness of harming the reputations of informants, and the validity of his interpretations. The facts involved were not contested; rather, the conflict was about “how knowledge and meaning was [sic] constituted [...] and how representations of a development project were to be authorized” (Mosse 2015, 129). In

other words, the main point of contention did not have to do with his actions in the field, but with the work he subsequently published.

However, in terms of fieldwork, it is true that when one is embedded in an organization one broadly supports, it is not always immediately obvious to everyone involved that one's ethnographic purposes may differ significantly from the goals of the organization, further contributing to potential feelings of betrayal upon publication. In such circumstances, "participant observation is to some degree an act of concealment" (Mosse 2015, 135). For Mosse, this fact leads to a set of questions concerning the nature of consent and full disclosure:

To what extent should ethnographers be explicit about their (developing) analytic perspectives, or the fact that what is recorded from intersubjective experience is destined to be recontextualized within a broad analytic schema for a different audience (cf. Descola 2005; Mosse 2006)? Would explanation of this be necessary to make consent to participate in the research properly *informed*? Perhaps more commonly [...] fieldworkers allow an ambiguity of perceived purpose so as to maintain relationships and forego critical engagement that might bring conflict or disruption. (Mosse 2015, 135)

As with Heyman and his critique of professional quietism, here Mosse argues that researchers may largely be avoiding politically-charged issues while in the field, so as to not be forced to confront ethically ambiguous situations.

Mosse writes that a good number of ethnographies involving activists result in their subjects' disappointment or anger, even if the researcher is sympathetic. This is because activists expect to see knowledge about them being framed in terms similar to how they understand themselves, and then feel betrayed when researchers focus on organizational elements – especially flaws – that activists may see as irrelevant or irreverent (Mosse, 2015, p. 132). Additionally, writes

Mosse, “the things that are of interest to anthropologists—the everyday, the contingent, the exceptional and the unintended, informal relational processes underlying official actions—may threaten the work of expertise, or of activism [and may be] awkwardly connected to discourses of failure—explained by contingent factors—and to the dividing dynamics of blame” (2015, 133). In other words, the really “juicy” parts of the anthropology of organizational cultures are rarely very flattering. Informants can feel disrespected by critical portrayals, even if the facts involved are all verifiable (2015, 133). Does this then mean that the ethnographer has failed to ‘respect’ the informants?

Mosse stresses the importance of maintaining a critical ethnographic stance towards activist organizations and NGOs, even if one sympathizes with them, and even if they may not like the results. But this position involves being ready to deal with significant backlash. Inevitably, thinks Mosse, as people become increasingly aware of the types of work that anthropologists are likely to produce, and as practices of collaborative writing and information-sharing with informants become more common, anthropology will be forced to confront new questions about consent. Specifically, anthropology will need to “respond to demands for consent to research findings or after-the-event withdrawal of consent, claimed on the grounds of [reputational] “harm” to research subjects [...] How might this demand for *interpretive consensus* play out in different contexts?” (Mosse 2015, 136).

## Hostile Ethnography

The oral historian Alessandro Portelli has engaged thoughtfully with the topic of doing fieldwork with those whom one not only seeks to criticize but actively opposes for one's own political reasons. For Portelli,

while we are bound to report as faithfully as we can what our interviewees actually said, our responsibility toward them does not extend to always agreeing with them. Sometimes our ethics as citizens, as individuals involved in the struggle for democracy, equality, freedom, and difference, may transcend the limited ethics of our profession in favour of a broader, human, and ultimately political ethics. In other words, an interview with someone who holds power over us or over others may not necessarily be subjected to the same set of ethical considerations as other interviews [...] Sometimes, when we interview the rich, the mighty, the generals, it may be highly ethical to act as spies in the enemy camp.” (1997, 66)

Portelli, like Heyman and Mosse, posits and explores an ethical position which exceeds the relatively inflexible and static posture adopted by professional ethics. Here, he takes a pro-democratic stance to be an acceptably self-sufficient ethical position. That is to say, to act in the furtherance of democratic values is to require little other justification, even if one contravenes generic professional guidelines.

Mosse's observation that many researchers make use of a cultivated relational ambiguity in their fieldwork is borne out here, as Portelli in fact recommends such a tactic when dealing with informants one opposes:

On the one hand, being open is always the best policy: [powerful informants] are often so proud, so perversely in good faith, that they will tell us anyway, and more than we even imagine. But sometimes, especially when they

have their own misgivings, they may be more wary; then, some ‘honest dissimulation’ may be in order. When I interviewed the parson of the neighbourhood where I grew up, he remembered me as a moderately church-going middle-class child, and assumed that my politics and his would be the same. He did not ask, and I did not volunteer to undeceive him. So he had no qualms about telling me how he used to filter all applications for jobs at the local factory, and make sure anyone suspected of leftist leanings had no chance of getting a job. (1997, 66).

Sehgal, discussing the politics of secrecy in ethnography, proposes a “continuum from ‘full disclosure’ to ‘total nondisclosure’, with ‘partial disclosure’ and ‘partial secrecy’ falling somewhere between these two poles” (2009, 347). Portelli however skates around the question of what precisely it means to ‘act as spies in the enemy camp’, declining to outright advocate for conscious deception and total nondisclosure. Presumably, real spies tend to do more than engage in ‘honest dissimulation’. However, presenting ambiguously and encouraging informants to draw their own conclusions, with the aim of ensuring smooth working relationships with informants who would likely withdraw their participation if they were fully aware of one’s research program and political stance, is certainly at least mildly duplicitous. This being said, Portelli does not advocate this practice of ambiguity as a way to avoid confronting complicated ethical situations, as Mosse suggests some researchers do. Rather, it is a method of engaging in research once a complex ethical position has already been reached, one which requires the participation of informants who act or have acted in ways which are themselves ethically deeply questionable.

In advocating this method, Portelli is also playing an interesting game with professional ethics. Having shown that professional ethics are not suitable for all situations – sometimes a pro-democracy ethic must supersede professionalism – he suggests we follow the letter, but not the spirit, of guidelines disallowing deception. For Portelli, one of the major failings of these guidelines, their bureaucratic legalism, can actually act to protect researchers more than

informants. In most cases that is a pitfall to be remedied with the conscientious application of good-will and common sense. But in cases of studying up, Portelli writes, “I myself realized that I take the most pains to secure written releases and approval of transcripts and quotes when I am in political opposition to my interviewees and might therefore use their material in ways they might not appreciate” (1997, 55-56). In other words, Portelli advocates strict adherence to ethical requirements not because it is moral but because it is useful.

Kathleen Blee, who spent decades studying the far right in the United States, writes about another contradiction that emerges when professional ethics are applied to those we oppose politically. Writing about neo-Nazi skinheads keen to use their interviews with her as a propaganda outlet, she notes that

although discussions of confidentiality in social science research generally assume that respondents will want their information shielded from public scrutiny, these respondents clearly wanted at least certain information about themselves to be widely distributed. In this case, confidentiality was imposed to support the academic and political goals of the researcher, against the expressed interest and desires of the informants. (1999, 995)

Blee has written extensively on the ethical and methodological complexities involved in studying racist activists. She notes the mismatch between feminist-inflected ethical ideals and the realities of doing research with people who may be oppressive and the bigoted, writing that “principles that serve well for studying sympathetic informants can prove immobilizing with members of hate groups. Would it be possible, to say nothing of desirable, to create an empathic environment when interviewing Klan members?” (1993, 604). Further, she writes, feminist principles require researchers to share their research with participants, “thereby leveling the inherent inequality between researcher and subject” (1993, 605). Speed sees this as a duty; Mosse



sees it as a possible hindrance to honest ethnography; Portelli sees it as a needless bureaucratization of a choice that ethical researchers should make for themselves. Blee, however, suggests that not only is this principle “based on romantic assumptions” (1993, 605), but also that it is doubtful that it “serve[s] any purpose” (606) in the context of studying her subjects, in this case the Ku Klux Klan. At the very least, principles such as these “assume a measure of ideological compatibility between scholar and those being studied” (1998, 388) which does not necessarily exist.

Like Sehgal and Portelli, in her work with the extremist right Blee has also grappled with the problem of disclosure. She notes that

Rightist movements [...] are difficult to access. Even moderate conservative activists often regard researchers with skepticism, fearing that their projects will be depicted unsympathetically. Extremists want to hide their identities and obscure the activities and goals of their movements, wary of arrest or of being attacked by antiracist activists. [...] Scholars of right-wing groups commonly wrestle with the limits of self-disclosure in field research. (Blee and Creasap 2010, 278-279).

Ultimately, Blee herself refrained from actively lying to informants (1998), although other researchers in similar situations have (see for example Mitchell 1993). She was prepared to hate and fear her informants (Blee 1993), and before interviews she explicitly told her informants that she disagreed completely with their views (1998). She reasons that since her neo-Nazi subjects operate so far outside the normal range of acceptable political opinion, they are used to having nearly everyone disagree with them. Rather than seeing her as a potential convert, therefore, they saw her as an opportunity to satisfy a desire – their desire for “someone outside the small racist group to which they belong to hear and record their words” (1998, 386).

## Methods

My research consisted of ethnographic fieldwork carried out at a series of meet-ups organized by an alt-right group in Montreal. In addition to these meet-ups, I carried out interviews with seven activists from the group and one non-member who was peripheral to the movement. I was able to do follow-up interviews with four of the seven members. Altogether I was involved with members of the group from June through December 2017. Preliminary research included attending, at the invitation of one of the group's leaders, a private speaking event he had organized in Montreal as a platform for one of the more prominent academics associated with the Canadian alt-right, Dr. Ricardo Duchesne<sup>1</sup>. At this event, not all other attendees had been informed of my presence, so I limited my note-taking to general observations about the atmosphere and about Duchesne's speech, and did not speak to any of the attendees except the man who had invited me.

When I began my research, academic work on the alt-right was almost completely lacking. George Hawley (2017) published a scholarly book about the alt-right as I was finishing my fieldwork, and I have cited it in my work. However, almost all of my preliminary reading was by necessity about the far-right more generally. In this thesis I have also written about the links between the alt-right and a male-supremacist internet subculture called the Red Pill. Academic research on the Red Pill was also scarce at the time of writing. During the course of my research, some mainstream media began to pick up on the links between the Red Pill and the alt-right (e.g. Zuckerberg 2016; Tait 2017; Edraki and Fegan 2018) and a small number of scholarly articles on the Red Pill have been published (e.g. Ging 2017; Van Valkenburgh 2018; Mountford 2018;

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Duchesne is a professor of sociology at the University of New Brunswick in St. John, NB. His writing on the topics of immigration and race have been controversial, sparking accusations of his being a white supremacist (The Current, 2019).

Dignam and Rohlinger 2019). Many of my claims about the Red Pill are, however, based on my own original research.

In my interviews, I broadly followed a technique outlined by Busher (2016) in his work on the English Defence League (EDL). Busher uses an interview style, itself based on Wengraf's (2001) Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method, which asks participants to tell the story of their journey into EDL activism, largely uninterrupted. In this model, the participant is asked not to justify their actions, which inevitably leads to both defensiveness and the reciting of slogans, but rather simply to describe their path in getting to where they are. The interviewer does not intervene often, instead letting the participant speak at length, and noting particular points of interest in the narrative. Subsequently, the participant is asked to expand on these points of interest in greater detail. This method produces less rigidly programmatic responses, and exposes the emotional states associated with various events in the participant's life, providing valuable data. In addition, this method was useful for Busher in determining the various paths of entry to the EDL that his participants took; for example, some entered through their connections to soccer hooligan scenes, others through other far-right groups, still others as disenchanting leftists, and so forth.

I asked participants to tell me about their lives, starting at the beginning and ending with the present. In doing so, they also told me the stories of their recruitment into, or discovery of, the alt-right. Like Busher I then teased out important details. This interview style focused less on why informants joined the alt-right than on how they joined. Busher (2001) notes that someone's decision to join a group is usually the result of many different decisions based on many different factors, each with separate motivations, which interviewees may not even be consciously aware of. Accordingly, I did not ask specifically why informants joined. However, many of them told me anyway. Although inevitably alt-right talking points were used – Blee (2003) notes that people

tend to interpret events in the past through the frame of their present beliefs – this method allowed me to gather important data exposing grave tensions and points of significant ideological confusion within the movement.

Impression management can be a problem for any anthropologist studying a political movement, as politicized informants are typically keen to present a specific, ideologically-informed front (Busher 2016). But we cannot understand racist groups only by listening to their propaganda (Blee 2003). One way in which both Busher (2016) and Blee (2003) navigate this difficulty is by not focusing on groups' leaders. Leaders have a much more vested interest in presenting the group a certain way, whereas individual members may have significant disagreements with the main leadership, or may not be well-versed in the group's propaganda, or up to date on the group's current strategy for talking to media or researchers. Accordingly, they can be much more open and less likely to simply regurgitate pre-approved lines. I spoke to leaders, but made sure to also work with members not in leadership positions as well as members who were critical of the leaders.

Prevarication is a particular problem in the alt-right, which is notorious for pranking journalists and being purposefully confusing in its written material. In addition, as I discuss in chapter 6, one wing of the alt-right is invested in a form of respectability politics predicated on appearing as moderate, bourgeois, and unthreatening as possible. I discuss a strategy recommendation written by an alt-right activist and subsequently shared by antifascist activists calling for the alt-right to retreat fully into crypto-racism and no longer be open about its real views and goals. Given such an atmosphere, it was necessary for me to treat everything my informants said with a high degree of skepticism. This compounded the pre-existing anthropological

understanding that there is often a “distinction between a people’s claims about their beliefs and their actual practices” (Gingrich and Banks 2006, 8).

In my fieldwork, I disclosed as little as possible about my personal life and political views, for my own safety. When pressed on my political views, I was vague; when asked directly whether I agreed with what my informants were saying, I did not lie. However, I tried to be careful not to detail my own positions. Following Portelli, I did not ‘volunteer to undeceive them’ as to their own assumptions. Following Blee (1998), I agreed with my informants whenever they said something that I thought made sense, and stayed neutral when they said things that I found objectionable. For example, if someone related the sentiment that politicians are crooks, I agreed; if they said that a conspiracy of pedophiles and Jews are attempting to wipe out the white race, I said “hmm” and let them continue. On some occasions I engaged with interviewees’ statements in order to more fully understand their views, up to and including challenging claims they made. However, I did this infrequently and mostly tried not to argue with my informants, in order to maintain an atmosphere in which they felt comfortable expressing themselves and in order to avoid falling into pre-packaged alt-right debating points.

Following the ethical obligations laid out by the University, I aimed not to deceive my informants actively. However, again following Portelli, I was able to ‘honestly dissimulate’ by carefully managing my own appearance in order to generate as much trust as possible and for my own safety. I tried to appear as much as possible like an unremarkable, conservative, heterosexual middle-class white man potentially amenable to alt-right viewpoints. I bought clothes chosen to indicate no countercultural leanings and which looked reasonably similar to what my informants typically wore without obviously mimicking them. These clothes also covered all of my tattoos. I took out or hid my piercings and cut my hair to resemble the current mainstream men’s fashion,

which was similar to the undercut favoured by many in the alt-right. As much as possible, I monitored my speech patterns to make them seem neutral or friendly.

Professional ethics dictate that we must protect the privacy of informants. I have, to the best of my ability, followed this directive to the letter. I use pseudonyms for all informants, do not identify leaders, and do not name locations. I have edited transcripts to remove identifying information and have modified descriptions of events in order to further protect the identity or locations of informants where appropriate. To the best of my knowledge, nothing that I have written can be used to definitively identify specific individuals.

When I attended alt-right meetings, I asked the group's leadership to inform the members that I would be there and taking notes. When I spoke to anyone at these meetings beyond basic greetings, I identified myself as an anthropologist and briefly explained my research according to an oral consent script approved by Concordia University. I gave interviewees a copy of a more detailed consent document, also approved by the University, for which I asked their verbal indication of understanding. This document gave informants a date by which they could withdraw their participation, explained that all identifying information would be removed from any final published work, and explained that they could refuse to answer any question and end the interview at any time. It noted that they would not be paid and that they could decline to be recorded if they chose. I told informants that as far as I knew, upon acceptance my thesis would be public record if they wished to read it. I did not ask anyone to sign any documents in order to further protect their anonymity.

Standard anthropological ethics dictate that we should, whenever possible, support our informants in their political struggles. As discussed in the previous section, these ethics are insufficient to account for objects of study such as far-right extremism. I have instead pursued

what Portelli (1997) calls a ‘pro-democratic’ ethic, an anti-racist and feminist orientation opposed to the goals of the alt-right project. Even if I have written a piece involving a good deal of theory, I have worked to ground my theory thoroughly in fieldwork, as Speed (2008) suggests. I have tried to produce, following Scheper-Hughes (1995), an “anthropology of the really real”, research which will be useful for scholars and activists who wish to understand the alt-right in order to combat its influence. As with Blee (1999), I have to the best of my ability avoided producing content which could be useful to far-right activists for propaganda purposes. I have tried to use my SSHRC funding for a socially useful purpose, that is, lifting the veil from alt-right organizing, exposing the facts about the movement which its adherents seek to conceal, demystifying it, and providing readers with practical information to be used in the ongoing struggle for freedom, democracy and human dignity in this country. Busher (2016) notes that there is an ethical question involved in even deciding to study the far right at all; some anthropologists have avoided fieldwork with this type of group for the sake of “moral hygiene” (Gingrich and Banks 2006). Like Busher, I contend that the benefits of having accurate knowledge about these groups outweighs harms potentially caused by giving them a measure of attention and publicity. I follow Berlet in arguing that the task of anthropologists “is to explore the links between the ideological and the material practice [of these groups], not merely as an intellectual exercise that increases the subtlety of our analysis but as a way to rip away the curtain to reveal the unfair power and privilege hiding backstage” (Berlet 2004, 46).

# 3. The Far Right and the Place of the Alt-Right Within It

## Nomenclature

There is no real consensus on what constitutes the so-called ‘far right’, or even which terms are appropriate to use to talk about it. Various permutations of the terms *far*, *radical*, *hard* and *extreme* are used by different scholars, often with qualifiers such as *neo*, *organized* or *populist* tacked on. Norwegian terrorism expert Tore Bjørgo (2009) ponders how to get youth to disengage from the *extreme right* and from *right-wing extremist* groups, while prominent right-wing studies scholar Cas Mudde (2010) refers to the *populist radical right*. Elsewhere Ambrose and Mudde (2015) propose *far right* as an umbrella term to encompass the distinct forms *extreme right* and *radical right*. Meanwhile, Berlet and Lyons (2000) split the far right between *extreme* and *dissident*. Elizabeth Carter (2017), in her mapping of these terms, recommends ‘extreme right’ as the most precise term, but notes that other terms are regularly used.

Sub-groupings have their own names as well, such as the New Right or, of course, the alt-right. There are widely-known schools of thought such as fascism, neo-Nazism, or neo-nationalism, and more obscure tendencies such as ‘esoteric Hitlerism’ or the so-called ‘National Bolshevism’ and ‘national anarchism’<sup>2</sup>. Adherence to different tendencies frequently overlaps,

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<sup>2</sup> Esoteric Hitlerism is interested in the occult elements of National Socialism and typically treats Hitler as a deity, Messiah or spiritual leader. Branches of this school have connections to UFO and Hollow Earth theories while others have focused on the orientalist mysticism associated with some fascist thinkers. National Bolshevism is an attempt to merge fascism and communism ideologically and is relatively uncommon outside of Russia. National



sometimes in contradictory ways. Some social movements and organizations hover around the edges of the far right proper, with a mix of positions and an ambivalent relationship to liberal democracy making them difficult to categorize clearly.

The picture is further complicated by the fact that organized racism is deeply intertwined with the far right, bringing with it its own slew of terminology and terminological complications. The public often conflate terms like ‘white supremacist’ with ‘Nazi’ – and indeed, Nazi imagery like the swastika or totenkopf<sup>3</sup> is sometimes taken up by racists who have little to do ideologically with 20<sup>th</sup> century German National Socialism. Scholars speak of organized racism, white supremacism, white power, ‘new racism’, or cultural racism. Racist activists themselves, meanwhile, often favour terms like ‘white nationalist’, ‘white separatist’, or ‘identitarian’, with those who study and comment on these activist groups sometimes accepting these self-identifiers as valid.

An additional stumbling block for the analysis of racists and racism is the stigma usually associated with open, overt racism in the mainstream in many places, including Canada. Some racist activists use coded language and deny being racists as part of a strategy to be more appealing to the public and to avoid the legal implications of some of their rhetoric. Racist groups may downplay or disavow the biological arguments and supremacist rhetoric of traditional organized racism. An alternative ‘ethnopluralist’ pitch, meant to be more palatable than calls for genocide or race war, emphasizes the equality of races, at least in terms of their right to an existence, while maintaining that ethnic groups should be clearly delineated and contained in monoracial territories (Gattinara and Pirro, 2018). Another, the ‘white genocide’ angle, presents whites as the endangered

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anarchism is a form of racist thought that calls for racially or ethnically segregated communities to self-govern without states.

<sup>3</sup> Death’s-head in German, the iconic skull-and-crossbones symbol used by the SS.

victims of a conspiracy to wipe them out through such demographic weapons as non-white immigration and the legalization of abortion and non-heterosexual sexualities (Perry, 2004).

Whether or not their self-images are especially accurate or would be agreed upon by others, some people adhere to such narratives while sincerely believing themselves to be non- or even anti-racist. As with individuals whose politics can reasonably be seen as far-right, yet who reject this label, their rejections should be treated by scholars as a “social facts” even if we disagree with their claims, because these claims are “causally significant” (Busher 2016, 115). Claims to non-racism by people who seem objectively to hold racist views, for example, can indicate a desire to avoid stigma associated with overt racism or could be interpreted as a strategic deception to throw off opponents. These claims can also indicate simply that the term ‘racist’ is contested, with people holding quite different ideas of what the word means; the definition involving structural power and privilege favoured by progressive academics tends to be at odds with the more popular conception involving individual, irrational hatred and hostility. Both are distinct from my own definition, the one I generally employ in this book: racism as an ideological stance, one which assumes that ‘race’ is a biologically and socially valid method of categorization; that group identity based on this categorization is desirable; that traits like the capacity to innovate or to live peacefully are heritable, and that this heritability is fixed, genetic, and determined by ‘race’; and finally that loyalty to one’s racial group should equal or surpass loyalty to a state, local community, or other identities.

For all these reasons, it is not always easy to disentangle the various strands of far-right and racist ideology. A wide diversity of thought characterizes both the scholarship on the far right and the groups and tendencies it studies – and often, as much diversity can be found within groups

as between them. Mapping out the place of the alt-right in all this, and even deciding whether to use the term alt-right at all, is a challenging endeavour.

Activists opposed to the spread of far-right ideas in North America have pointed out that by using the alt-right movement's own name for itself, we may be helping it obscure its true goals and intentions. They argue, correctly in my view, that the alt-right is simply a type of far-right white supremacy. Why then should we refer to it as anything else? The only thing 'alternative' about this form of rightism, goes the argument, is its blatant racism; and even that is not very alternative, since the right-wing extreme of the political spectrum<sup>4</sup> has been espousing racism since the concept of race was first developed (Kale 2010; Arendt 1979; Benedict 1942; Allen 2012). The argument goes that to call these activists 'alt-right', instead of just 'racists' or what have you, is to allow their project of repackaging neo-Nazism for public consumption to succeed.

I am sympathetic to this argument, and I believe that the term alt-right, as the Associated Press puts it, "may exist primarily as a public-relations device to make its supporters' actual beliefs less clear and more acceptable to a broader audience" (Daniszewski 2016) – or at least that it once did. However, I choose to use the term on three grounds. The first follows George Hawley, who explains his choice by noting that:

At this point, the racist nature of the Alt-Right is well known, and it will be evident to the reader that I am not using the term to downplay this element of the movement. Relying exclusively on the umbrella term "white supremacist" would furthermore mask the ways the Alt-Right differs from other manifestations of the racial right. (2017, 3)

Unlike Hawley, I am not necessarily convinced that the average reader understands what the alt-right is about. That being said, I do believe that following the events of the 2018 Charlottesville rallies in particular, the mainstream media has mostly become aware of this hidden-in-plain-sight

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<sup>4</sup> Not that right-wing extremism is the only historic site of racism.

fact, and the public is accordingly more familiar with this reality than before. My evaluation is that the term is understood by many to refer to a variety of white supremacist, but what exactly that means and how it should be interpreted is not always clear. Therefore, like Hawley, I am explicit about the fact that the movement in general, and the particular group with which I conducted fieldwork in particular, is deeply invested in racism, and indeed can only be understood through its racism, because racism is its organizing principle to which other considerations are subordinate. Also, like Hawley, I identify useful distinctions between the alt-right and other similar racist groupings.

The second reason I choose to use the term is that even if it was invented by straight-ahead white supremacists to mask their values, which appears to be the case to some degree, it has since taken on a life of its own. Any movement is more than just whatever its leaders say it is (Blee 2003). This is especially so with movements which are as amorphous and decentralized as the alt-right. One distinction of the alt-right as compared to older, more established versions of North American white supremacy has to do with its membership, particularly the low median age of its adherents and its heavily internet-based diffusion. Recruits brought with them some of their pre-existing ideas and subcultural tendencies, and generated a body of rhetoric, symbology, and habitus largely specific to what they were calling the alt-right. In other words, if the alt-right was created as a smokescreen, it has become a genuine phenomenon in its own right.

Finally, there is the simple reason that my informants belong to a group which calls itself an alt-right organization. Though not all of them self-identify comfortably with the alt-right – some are more comfortable calling themselves fascists – the majority use that descriptor for themselves, including amongst themselves, and it is the term preferred by the group's founders and the term used in its online literature. As Busher (2016) argues, reflexive ethnography treats informants'

realities as part of social reality, regardless of the content of those realities; while reserving the right to treat the claims of my informants with skepticism, in this work I nevertheless accept the term alt-right as a political identifier.

## What is the Far Right?

What is it that we are even talking about when we refer to the ‘far’, ‘hard’, or ‘extreme’ right? Are these simply relative terms, or do they refer to anything concrete? Are they pejoratives, or serious scholarly terms? Are they valid internationally? Cross-culturally? Trans-historically? Are there meaningful distinctions between them? Carter (2017) writes that “almost every scholar of right-wing extremism has pointed to the difficulties associated with defining the concept” (28), and I am no exception. In order to speak clearly about our subject of study, we need consistent terminology; unfortunately, while terminology abounds, consistency is lacking.

However, a number of classificatory schemes exist. Berlet and Lyons (2000) as well as Ambrose and Mudde (2015) provide robust and flexible definitions of the far right and its subdivisions in their work. Caiani et al. (2012) offer a list of characteristics of the extreme right to build up a generalizable definition, arguing that a definition anchored in specific characteristics is needed so as to avoid the ambiguity of political terms defined only by their positions relative to one another. Carter (2017) takes perhaps the most ambitious approach, developing a complex model along three axes, designed to cover all possible permutations of an ‘extreme right’ position. In the following sections, I will go through some of the existing systems of classification, ending with my own position developed with reference to them.

## The Dissident and Extreme Right in Québec

Berlet (2004) uses *far right* (or hard right) to include essentially all non-electoral right-wing movements – that is, right-wing movements outside of mainstream conservative political parties. This section of the political landscape is made up of both the *dissident right*, which is generally reformist and may overlap with mainstream conservatism, and *extreme right* groups, which are more revolutionarily-minded and often deeply invested in racist politics.<sup>5</sup> The dissident right and extreme right share “common styles, frames and narratives” (Berlet 2004, 23), particularly black-and-white thinking, millenarianism<sup>6</sup>, conspiracism, populist rhetoric, and authoritarianism (Berlet 2004, 24-25). The extreme right is distinguished as consisting of “militant insurgent groups that reject democracy, promote a conscious ideology of supremacy, and support policies that would negate basic human rights for members of a scapegoated group” (Berlet 2004, 22). Groups of the dissident right may have similar or more moderate goals, but hope to achieve them through reform, while remaining unaffiliated with, or critical of, existing political parties.

Within the Québec context, the dissident right is represented by groups like La Meute, founded in 2015. La Meute, which is French for ‘the Wolfpack’, is a nationalist, anti-Muslim, anti-immigration social movement in Québec very similar to the UK’s (now largely defunct) English Defense League (EDL). La Meute organizes demonstrations and rallies to protest multiculturalism and the ‘Islamification’ of the province (Howard 2019). Like the EDL before the exit of its former leader Tommy Robinson (Busher 2016), the group toes the line between the respectability politics

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<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere, Berlet swaps these terms around: in *Right-Wing Populism in America* (2000), what is here referred to as the ‘extreme right’ is called the ‘Far Right’, while the ‘Hard Right’ is used to refer to what is here called the ‘far right’. These differences aside, the relationships between the different gradations remain similar in the two works.

<sup>6</sup> Belief in the coming End Times, new era, or other world-changing shift.

of a conventional social movement and the aggressive posture of an insurgent group. Members, most of whom appear to be middle-class, middle-aged men and women from smaller towns, with little experience in political organizing, march with huge black banners emblazoned with their emblem, a wolf's paw-print in white. The group's leadership officially disavows overt racism, purports to accept immigrants who 'integrate', and rejects the far-right label. At the same time, its rhetoric is populist, nationalist, and xenophobic. Its literature stokes terror about the danger of Québec being turned into a "land of Islam" by radical Muslims, who want to implement in Québec "a misogynist, homophobic, pedophilic, barbaric and archaic system governed by Koranic tribunals" (La Meute n.d., translation mine). The federal Liberal Party is regarded with fury by La Meute for its relatively open stance on immigration. Media have consistently described the group as an inflammatory far-right organization. The picture of La Meute as a far-right group – and thus a group outside of mainstream party politics – is complicated, however, by the fact that their list of demands (see La Meute 2018) has almost in its entirety been adopted by, and was allegedly inspired by, the Coalition Avenir Québec ('Coalition for Québec's Future'; CAQ), the governing party in Québec at the time of writing (Robichaud 2018)<sup>7</sup>. There is, therefore, significant overlap between the politics of groups like La Meute and the measures which mainstream parties are prepared to take to garner votes. Far-right ideas are not cleanly separate from mainstream politics; they are thoroughly enmeshed and exist within the same political 'ecosystem'.

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<sup>7</sup> As I am writing this, the CAQ has successfully pushed through a law, called the Loi 21, which denies a number of types of employment to anyone wearing a religious symbol and denies government services to anyone wearing a face veil. At the last minute, a clause was added establishing a body which would enforce this law by entering places of employment such as schools and hospitals and informing on teachers or doctors wearing religious symbols. The law is framed as guaranteeing the state's *laïcité*, a French legal concept similar to 'secularism', and as protecting the rights of women who, it is argued, are oppressed by Muslim religious garb. Many commentators, however, understand this law to be based primarily in a desire to repress difference, and note that forcing women to uncover their hair is at least as oppressive as forcing them to cover it. La Meute's manifesto (2018) calls for exactly such a law, and while the CAQ frequently dissociates itself from the group, La Meute is strongly in support of the government's policies.

Meanwhile, the extreme right in Berlet's (2004) model is represented in Québec by Atalante, an openly racist Québec ultranationalist group formed in 2016 which rejects immigration entirely. Atalante espouses far-right anti-capitalism summed up by their slogan, "*action sociale, préférence nationale*", calling for social 'justice' prioritizing white Québécois. Members have attacked the offices of journalists (De L'Église 2018) and the group's founder is the singer of a neo-Nazi skinhead band from Québec City called *Légitime Violence* ('Legitimate Violence'). Its literature condemns liberal democracy as a whole. Far from taking their direction from the governing Coalition Avenir Québec, or endorsing its positions, Atalante mocks the party as *la Coalition de la girouette*, 'the Coalition of the Weathervane'. The party is accused of opportunistically riding the wave of nationalist sentiment, being uncommitted to real xenophobia, and being as untrustworthy as the other major parties:

So who will you vote for? The old, corrupt Liberal Party, as popular [*as in 'close to the people'*] as a \$75 grocery bill? Sovereignists without sovereignty?<sup>8</sup> The communist party of one single city?<sup>9</sup> Maybe the Coalition of the Weathervane? Liberal democracy is not the power of the people! Liberal democracy is the power of finance and foreign interests! (Atalante 2018, my translation)

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<sup>8</sup> The centrist Parti Québécois, in favour of Québec nationalism and separation from Canada

<sup>9</sup> Québec Solidaire, a left-wing party (also sovereignist) most popular in Montreal



Atalante Québec added 23 new photos.

Ça y est, nous sommes en plein carnaval de bouffons. Le spectacle grotesque de la démocratie libérale bat son plein. Une ribambelle de bourgeois ringards et bêcheurs vous promettent mer et monde. Idéologiquement tous bien alignés sur le phare mondialiste à quelques nuances près, ils sont tous pourris. Toujours à l'écoute des portes feuilles mondiaux et des intérêts étrangers, jamais ils ne vous font de faveurs. Année après année, vous allez, comme un troupeau trotant vers les urnes, élire les nouveaux ripoux du laxisme. Dans un système où le bien commun est relégué en arrière plan derrière un individualisme toxique, ce sont les lobbys de tous genres qui prennent le rôle de courtisans. Les politiciens refusant tous de prendre les questions identitaires et démographiques de front, il ne vous reste qu'à voter pour le candidat le moins pire du lot. Alors pour qui voterez-vous? Le vieux parti libéral corrompu aussi près du peuple que des épiceries à 75\$? Des souverainistes sans souveraineté? Le parti communiste d'une seule ville? Peut-être la coalition de la girouette?

La démocratie libérale ce n'est pas le pouvoir du peuple!

La démocratie libérale c'est le pouvoir de la finance et des intérêts étrangers!



September 24 at 7:52 PM · Public

*Figure 1. A screenshot from Atalante's Facebook page showing the group's statement on the recent provincial elections.*

These two groups differ significantly in tactics, goals, orientation toward democracy, and numbers (La Meute is an order of magnitude larger). However, a shared adherence to the qualities described by Berlet (2004) unite the two organizations under the auspices of the far right. Both think of the world in fairly apocalyptic terms. Atalante espouses the theory that white Québécois are being oppressed and displaced in their 'own' country, a view typical of extreme-right racist organizations, while La Meute worries about the takeover of Sharia law in a country where at last count, fewer than four people in a hundred were Muslim (Statistics Canada 2013). While Atalante disdains all mainstream political parties, both groups retain a special disgust and suspicion toward

the Liberal parties, both federal and provincial. This suspicion merges into a right-wing conspiracy theory holding that ‘liberal elites’ are attempting to displace native-born white settler populations in North America. This conspiracy theory is ubiquitous on many far-right websites; some versions hold that the politicians are dupes too stupid and craven to realize what is going on, while others see them as pawns for shadowy influences, often Jewish. Stances on authoritarianism differ between the two groups, but both display authoritarian tendencies, with Atalante favouring an ultranationalist program of ‘*rémigration*’ (forced repatriation) (Perron 2017), and La Meute proposing that its political adversaries be labelled terrorists:

... any group (anarchist, student, religious or political) or person who is an apologist on social media for violence against the population or police; who commits vandalism against private or public property [in the context of a demonstration]; who uses intimidation and violence to infringe on the freedom of expression and on the right of citizens to peaceful assembly; who intimidates citizens because of their political convictions; or who participates in a demonstration while masked, should be considered domestic terrorists and treated as such (La Meute 2018, 7-8, my translation)

While a purported commitment to freedom of assembly clashes with an authoritarian orientation, La Meute is mainly an organization which organizes demonstrations; it relies on unimpeded freedom of assembly (at least for itself) in order to exist. Coupled with La Meute’s proposals that terrorism be considered “high treason”, and that “first-generation immigrants”<sup>10</sup> be stripped of their citizenship and deported if found guilty of such (La Meute 2018, 7-8), this measure would harshly criminalize and disenfranchise the main form of active opposition to La Meute’s street presence, confrontational counterdemonstrations.

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<sup>10</sup> Implying, of course, that there is such a thing as ‘second-generation immigrants’.

Berlet's own work complicates this picture of the far right. Berlet and Lyons (2000) stresses that the distinction between 'mainstream' and 'fringe' right-wing political groupings should not be overemphasized. There are both major differences between different elements of the far right and direct links between 'fringe' and 'mainstream' right-wing groups. Perhaps most tellingly, conservative and dissident groups, and dissident and extremist groups, habitually recruit from one another (Berlet 2004).

Thus we might expect both hardcore, revolutionarily-oriented groups like Atalante and mainstream parties like the CAQ to share adherents with, or poach adherents from, an organization like La Meute. There is sufficient ideological overlap for this to be the case, and individual activists who feel more moderate or more radical than the party line of their group are susceptible to recruitment by another. Further, ideas held by both La Meute and Atalante are, to use Busher's phrase, "routinely rebroadcast" (2016, 174) at them by mainstream Québec media. Yesterday, I read an op-ed in the *Journal de Montréal* entitled "Symbolically expelling the Québécois from their own home: We must not yield" (translation mine). The article, by widely known conservative writer Mathieu Bock-Côté (2019), argues that in Québec, it is "less that the majority rejects minorities than it is the inverse", and that "Canada is using mass immigration to demographically submerge [the Québécois]". Canada is being helped in its plot by

a faction of [Québec] elites, accomplices to the federal regime, who have come to believe that it is only by adhering to the most extreme multiculturalism that we can purge ourselves of our supposed identitarian demons. In this, we see signs of the mental Canadianization of a part of our ruling class, and in particular, our academic, judicial and media elites (Bock-Côté 2019, translation mine).

Essentially, traitors are selling the Québécois out and helping Ottawa commit cultural genocide against them, because they are afraid of being called racist. This narrative is in virtually all respects identical to the 'white genocide' theory propounded by neo-Nazi and other far-right groups around the world. It simply switches 'Canada' for the Jews and declines to mention the word race while

strongly hinting at it. The gap between mainstream nationalist ideas and far right racist ones is not as wide as many might think.

At the same time, as organizations, Atalante, La Meute and the CAQ all officially disavow one another (with the exception of La Meute supporting the CAQ). This is not only for politically expedient reasons; genuine and important differences exist between these distinct types of grouping.

With regard to their hostility toward liberal capitalism, no mainstream party in Québec shares any common ground with Atalante, except perhaps for some of the most left-leaning activists in the social democratic party Québec Solidaire, who disagree with Atalante on everything else. Certainly the centre-right, pro-business party bosses of the CAQ or the Parti Québécois have no time for revolutionary far-right anti-capitalism. La Meute, meanwhile, is run by a leadership which claims to sincerely consider itself non-racist. While from a progressive perspective there are certainly valid reasons to be wary of La Meute's positions, it is a fact that they are calling neither for genocide nor for mass '*rémigration*' like Atalante. Nor are they particularly critical of democracy as such. They make repeated references to themselves as the "silent majority" (La Meute 2018) and feel betrayed or unrepresented by most of the political parties, but do not disavow the institution of liberal democracy itself. Rather, they position themselves as defenders of the liberal order against the illiberal forces of radical Islam and the perils of multiculturalism, which they avow "leads inevitably to social chaos" (La Meute 2018, 3).

A complex right-wing political ecosystem exists in Québec. Mainstream ruling-class nationalists run the governing party. They also control much of the francophone media. The *Journal de Montreal* is owned by Québecor Media, a large conglomerate whose CEO is Pierre Péladeau, a billionaire and former leader of the Parti Québécois (Forbes 2019). The activists

making up La Meute typically hold positions aligning with Berlet's definition of the dissident far right, while currently enjoying considerable ideological consonance with the government. La Meute as well as mainstream writers like Bock-Côté strenuously deny being racist. At the same time, they echo conspiracy theories about multiculturalism which are in almost all particulars the same as the neo-Nazi 'white genocide' theory, or the similar *Grand remplacement* (Great Replacement) conspiracy theory popularized by French writer Renaud Camus (2011). Their opposition to multiculturalism is set up as a defense of liberalism and of a beleaguered Québécois nation. It is shared, meanwhile, by an extreme-right scene which rejects liberalism entirely and calls for revolutionary action to accomplish similar goals, coupling this with a critique of capitalism from the right. Together these right-wing positions make up a spectrum with constant movement back and forth of both ideas and individuals.

### **Right-Wing Populism in Québec**

Berlet and Lyons suggest that *right-wing populism* is an important element in this web of far-right ideas. Populist movements combine appeals to 'the people' (defined inclusively or narrowly) with some form of anti-elitism, whether directed at real elites or the scapegoated or non-existent targets of conspiracy theories (Berlet and Lyons 2000, 5). Such movements typically represent the combined interests of

1. Mid-level groups in the social hierarchy, notably middle- and working-class Whites, who have a stake in traditional social privilege but resent the power of upper-class elites over them, and
2. "Outsider" factions of the elite itself, who sometimes use distorted forms of antielitism as part of their own bid for greater power. (2000, 2)

Some populist movements are repressive. A repressive populist movement, according to the scheme provided by Berlet and Lyons, “combines antielite scapegoating [...] with efforts to maintain or intensify systems of social privilege and power” (2000, 5).

Right-wing populist movements are classified by Berlet and Lyons as a sub-type of repressive populist movement. They are organized around a backlash against progressive reforms or gains made by the left (2000, 5). These movements combine their limited anti-elitism with, paradoxically, a “strongly hierarchical and elitist conception of society” (Caiani et al. 2012, 191) which excludes many individuals from ‘the people’. Typically, they advocate a *producerist* philosophy: an understanding of society which constructs and valorizes a ‘just right’ productive social class while demonizing elites above and lazy parasites below. In some cases, these may be articulated respectively as ‘liberal<sup>11</sup> elites’ and welfare recipients; in racist iterations, usually Jews and people of colour. This non-Marxist, racialized understanding of class obscures actually existing class relations and leaves some factions of the ruling class untouched (Berlet and Lyons 2000). It requires that people’s grievances be “directed away from the real causes of a social problem onto a target group demonized as malevolent wrongdoers” (2000, 7). This process makes use of a conspiracist worldview which “assigns tiny cabals of evildoers a superhuman power to control events”; such cabals are the “major motor of history”, represent the forces of Evil, and have tentacles of influence in all areas of society (2000, 10). It must not be forgotten, however, that these conspiracy theories often contain a grain of truth. At the very least, the nexus of producerism, scapegoating and conspiracism typical of right-wing populism often reflects

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<sup>11</sup> In this case, usually understood to mean ‘progressive’ or ‘leftist’ rather than ‘pro-business centrists’.

“partially legitimate grievances” (2000, 14) about the concentration of wealth and the difficulty of meaningful political participation for ordinary people in a capitalist liberal democracy.

La Meute again provides us with a good example. While La Meute consists mainly of middle- and working-class white Québécois, its populist message serves the interests of the pro-business nationalist faction of Québec City elites. This faction, represented electorally by the CAQ and the right wing of the sovereigntist Parti Québécois<sup>12</sup>, is able to mobilize nationalist sentiment and anxiety about Québécois identity in the context of Canadian multiculturalism to win elections against the Liberal Party. This is accomplished primarily by scapegoating Muslims. A tiny proportion of the population, and almost non-existent outside of major cities, Muslims are accused of constituting an existential threat to Québec society. Multiculturalism is presented as the vector for this threat. Multiculturalism is championed in Québec chiefly by the provincial Liberal Party, strong in Montreal. Thus, it becomes possible to depict the authors of disaster as consisting of these Montreal elites and their suspect immigrant allies.

In right-wing populism, producerists see themselves and their group as self-evidently productive, and elite and subordinate out-groups as parasitical, regardless of actual productive output. A ‘friendly’ faction of the ruling class is usually left untargeted. A version of this line of thinking is mobilized in relation to the issue of the integration of immigrants in Québec, with integration replacing production as the key criterion<sup>13</sup>. This line of thinking claims that the main problem facing Québec society is the non-integration of migrants, especially Muslim ones, as facilitated by Montreal liberals. In this version of the producerist tripartite distinction, ‘we’ are self-evidently ‘integrated’ either by virtue of being *pure laine* (that is, descendents of French

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<sup>12</sup> The leader of the CAQ, François Legault, is a right-wing defector from the PQ.

<sup>13</sup> This is not to say that regular producerism is not also in evidence, but it does not seem to be a major focus of groups like La Meute.

settlers), or because ‘we’ descend from European immigrants deemed to have been satisfactorily assimilated. These *new* immigrants on the other hand, who are mostly people of colour, mostly fail to integrate. They are culturally parasitical, taking advantage of Québec society without giving back to it. Liberal Party politicians, associated with Canada, English-speakers, immigrant communities, Jews, and the multicultural metropolis of Montreal, are seen as foreign, corrupt, and out of touch, and profiting at the expense of regular folk. As with regular producerism, this version can take both overtly racist and non-racist forms. In Québec, mainstream and dissident groups typically avoid overt racism, while extreme-right groups mobilize it and claim that non-European immigrants are incapable of integrating for racial reasons.

### **The Limits of the Centrist/Extremist Model**

Many ideas leveraged by the populist right are shared by people who are not part of these movements. Many people would agree, for example, that ruling elites are interested primarily maintaining their power, or that anger toward them is justified. Producerist ideas positing exploitation from above reflect observable capitalist dynamics. Populist appeals to ‘the people’ are not discursively anomalous, as they make use of common patriotic and democratic themes found in constitutions, anthems, military propaganda, and other trappings of the nation-state. Because of this overlap of ideas, Berlet and Lyons (2000) caution against a reliance on what they call the ‘centrist/extremist model’. This model implies that the far-right is occupied by a fringe of unbalanced people with insane ideas, while the centre is the purview of rational debate and reasonable policy. Berlet and Lyons (2000) note that “movements involving aggressive White supremacy, demagogic appeals, demonization, conspiracist scapegoating, antisemitism, hatred of



the Left, [and related themes] have repeatedly been at the center of [US] political conflicts, not at the fringe” (2000, 17). Further, Berlet writes, “Right-wing hate groups do not cause prejudice [...] – they exploit it” (2004, 19). The policies of mainstream, ‘respectable’ institutions and politicians can have disastrous consequences and can emanate from sites of deeply engrained prejudice. Once again, then, media which is freely available and operated by above-ground media corporations contributes to and often includes ideas and opinions which overlap with the far-right.<sup>14</sup>

Cas Mudde (2010) also cautions against viewing the non-mainstream right as a pathological or otherwise deeply abnormal phenomenon to be compared to a reasonable and moderate mainstream. In a manner similar to Berlet, Mudde defines the far right in terms of its rejection of liberal democracy (Ambrose and Mudde 2015). It is then subdivided into the ‘extreme’ and ‘radical’ right, largely corresponding to Berlet’s ‘extreme’ and ‘dissident’ categories. For Mudde and Ambrose, “the extreme right rejects democracy per se, that is, both popular sovereignty and majority rule, while the radical right accepts democracy but challenges *liberal* democracy, in particular pluralism and minority rights” (2015, 14). However, Mudde notes that many ideas common on the far right, such as authoritarianism, militarism, racism and sexism, and so on are very much a part of the mainstream and in fact can originate there (2010). If anything is pathological, for Mudde, it is the society as a whole more than it is far-right activists, who are in many ways simply taking mainstream ideas to their logical conclusions.

Carter (2017) details a pattern of ideological flow between different European right-wing parties, some of which fall closer to the center and some much further to the right. Carter (2017) defines right-wing parties through their “emphasis on the notion of inequality of individuals” and

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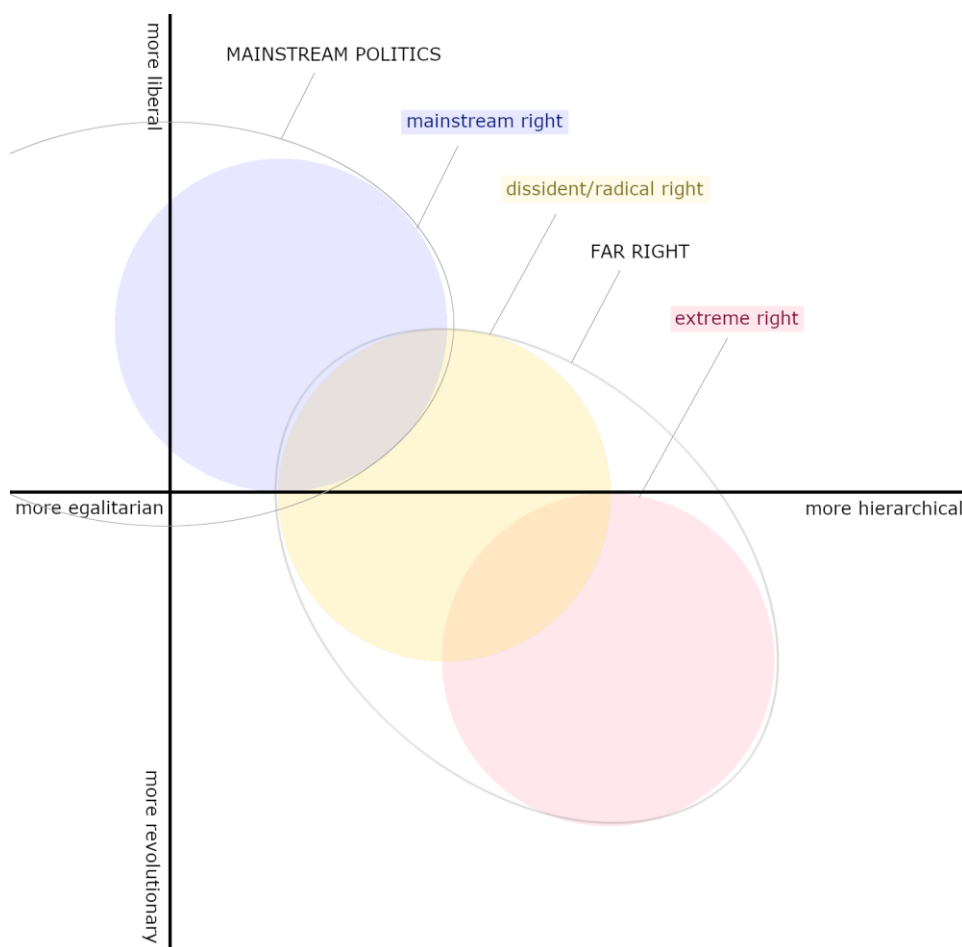
<sup>14</sup> For example, in Québec, a notorious network of right-wing talk radio shows based in Québec City have been blamed for radicalizing Alexandre Bissonnette, the terrorist who attacked a Québec City mosque in 2017 (Solyom 2019).

insistence on “the necessity of institutionalised social and political inequality” (31, citing Saalfield, 1993). For Carter, racism and fascism may be “paradigmatic” (31) of right-wing extremism, but are ultimately functions of its inegalitarian principle, and are not therefore strictly necessary to satisfy a definition of right-wing extremism. Extreme right parties exist which are neither fascist nor particularly concerned with race, and the extreme right is instead defined through its illiberal stance or hostility toward mainstream liberal democracy. Its inegalitarian principle, which Carter argues is the defining characteristic of the right, is shared with mainstream right-wing parties. Carter’s study shows that non-racist neoliberal populists, who largely accept liberal democracy, share ideas with neoliberal xenophobes and with neo-fascist groups which reject democracy but are not particularly racist. However, these neoliberal populists do not tend to share ground with neo-Nazis or other authoritarian xenophobes. Meanwhile, racist, fascist neo-Nazi groups share ideas with other authoritarian xenophobes, neoliberal xenophobes, and neo-fascists, but not with the neoliberal populists. A constant back-and-forth of members and ideological points exists between these right-wing groups, with the neoliberal parties being the closest to the centrist mainstream and the neo-Nazi parties furthest.

### **Terminology in this Thesis**

In this thesis I draw on a loose synthesis of the terminology outlined above. I map right-wing movements along two axes (see Figure 2), the first being their degree of commitment to revolutionism versus liberalism. This is the measure used by many scholars to determine if a movement is ‘extremist’ or not (Carter 2017). The other axis plots groups’ commitment to egalitarianism versus hierarchy, following Bobbio’s (1996) insight that the tension between these

two principles is fundamental to the left-right split in politics. I make a three-part distinction between the mainstream right, the dissident right, and the extreme right, while allowing for significant overlap between the mainstream right and the dissident right, and between the dissident right and the radical right. Note that throughout this work I employ the terms ‘liberal’ and ‘liberalism’ to refer to the dominant political-economic order emphasizing capitalism, individualism, and representative government, not to progressivism, left-of-centre politics, or social democracy.



*Figure 2. A diagram mapping the far right along two axes.*

The mainstream right, being conservative, is not at all committed to revolutionism, preferring some version of the liberal status quo, and has some tolerance for egalitarian politics due to its relative proximity to the centre and the need to garner votes. The dissident right is ambivalent toward liberalism, overlapping with both liberal and revolutionist tendencies. It is open to change through reform but has a strong tendency toward directing hostility at mainstream parties and politicians. The ultimate goals of a particular dissident right group may be consistent with the continuation of the liberal order even if no mainstream party supports those goals. It has little to no tolerance for true egalitarianism – activists in the dissident right may support certain egalitarian principles like equal rights for women, for example, but are typically committed to institutionalizing other forms of inequality such as barring Muslim immigrants from entering a country. They may also support the principle of inegalitarianism in other ways, such as through a strong adherence to capitalist economic policies, support for imperialism, religious antifeminism, or other policies. The extreme right is opposed to liberalism altogether and is profoundly hierarchist, with this principle often being manifested most directly in the form of white supremacism and/or fascism. Despite their opposition to liberal democracy, extreme-right parties do occasionally participate in elections (Carter 2017; Caiani et al. 2012), in much the same way that a revolutionary communist party might run candidates while decrying the bourgeois state.

In order to be able to make a distinction between mainstream and non-mainstream right-wing politics, I refer to the dissident and extreme right collectively as the far right. Right-wing populism can span all three categories, depending on the content of a particular movement's messaging.

This model is a heuristic device. These categories are, in the end, unstable, relational and historically contingent. There is no easily available objective measure of what is 'more' or 'less'

hierarchical. Is a party which advocates social democracy for one racial group and expulsion for others more committed or less committed to egalitarianism than one which calls for cutthroat, deregulated, highly-stratified neoliberal capitalism presided over by a diverse ruling class? Some of the policies advocated by far-right groups today were unexceptional in the North American mainstream less than a hundred years ago, such as banning non-white immigration. At the same time, the recent neoliberal economic policies of mainstream parties have in some countries, such as the United States, resulted in levels of income inequality not seen since the Great Depression (Roser and Ortiz-Ospina 2013), and 50 years ago may have been seen as extremely right-wing.

The policies which mainstream parties are willing to adopt vary not only over time but regionally as well, pointing to the relative nature of terms such as 'extreme'. Policies enacted by a ruling party in one country may be seen by the electorate of another country as unacceptably far to the right. In the United States, for example, the near-total monopoly on the political apparatus by the Democrat-Republican duality has had profound impacts on the political possibilities in that country, resulting in a very different political landscape than in some European parliamentary democracies. With no competition from third parties and no significant faction advocating left-wing economic policies, the Democrat-Republican two-party state has been able to pursue its pro-business agenda relatively unchecked (Chomsky 2003; Miller 2004; Stanley 2017). The two parties have also managed to fend off the formation of far-right parties able to challenge their power from further to the right. However, there is a significant portion of the US ruling class affiliated with the Republican Party willing to court dissident and even extreme right-wing tendencies, meaning that in the United States, a number of far-right policy points have been taken up by elements of the Republican Party (Caiani et al, 2012). In Québec, as I have shown, the ruling CAQ party shares considerable common ground with a dissident-right group, La Meute. This

illustrates the degree to which political categories are unstable and the interaction which can occur between the far right and the mainstream right.

## What is the Alt-Right?

The alt-right is primarily a kind of ideological clearing-house for North American Millennial white- and male-supremacism. These forms of supremacism are its organizing principles, without which it cannot be understood. As with other far-right movements based in white supremacism, it seeks to “reassert a narrow, exclusive understanding of the national identity” along racial lines (Perry 2004, 76). As a movement its main goal is the creation of what adherents term the ‘ethnostate’, a racially regimented ‘homeland’ for whites to be established somewhere in North America. Individuals within the movement do not always agree on how this is to be accomplished or even whether it can be accomplished, with a few arguing that it may be impossible. The final character of the ‘ethnostate’ is also controversial, with significant disagreement over (or lack of attention to) this imagined state’s economic and social policies beyond its white supremacism. Even the degree and type of racist policy the ‘ethnostate’ would exercise is open to debate, with suggestions from my informants ranging through a number of options. Some advocated the total exclusion of non-whites, while others suggested capping the non-white population at a few percent of the total and restricting non-whites from citizenship.

Several of my informants remarked that they were not opposed to “Chinatowns in big cities” so long as the population of non-whites did not surpass a low threshold beyond which it would become difficult to maintain white supremacy.

The place of white women in such a society is also debated. Positions on women range from a valorization of white women as mothers of white children -- typical of traditional neo-Nazi groups but a minority position in the alt-right -- to extreme hostility toward women as a group and, in turn, calls for their disenfranchisement and even enslavement. Others within the alt-right focus on rolling back the advances of gender equality, arguing that feminism has been disastrous for whites, particularly because of low birthrates among white women, but also because it has robbed men of leadership positions in society which are believed to be their ‘natural’ purview. A position universal among all of my informants was that women do not belong in politics (several made the notable exception for Marine Le Pen of France’s National Rally party, well-regarded by many in the alt-right).

The alt-right is a big-tent social movement without any clear leader or organizing committee. Its firm commitment to racial and gender inequality locates it within the far right, but the range of positions held by adherents means that it straddles the ‘dissident’ and ‘extreme’ subcategories. Some members of the group I studied are committed fascists, opposed to liberalism entirely. Others have positions which are essentially liberal in character, though this is not to say that they are not supremacists. Their liberalism is like the liberalism of a century ago, in that it is essentially for white men only; ultimately they are not opposed to representative democracy, individual rights and freedoms, relatively free markets or even immigration, so long as access to these are denied to people of colour and, where applicable, to white women. Indeed, many of the alt-right’s liberals do not have a single position on issues such as abortion or immigration. Rather,

they have one position for whites -- abortion should be illegal, immigrants are welcome – and hold the opposite view as regards people of colour.

Some segments of the alt-right or at least some individuals within it support political terrorism, as evidenced by the recent string of attacks carried out by men influenced by the alt-right. This string of attacks culminated in the murder of 50 people in Christchurch, New Zealand on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2019 by a follower of the alt-right. Others within the movement condemn political violence for ethical or strategic reasons. I informed interviewees that if they discussed carrying out political violence with me, I could be legally obliged to violate confidentiality, so it is impossible to say with certainty what positions were held by my informants. Some members of the group I studied told me they considered violence to be “political suicide”. Some had engaged in militia training and at least one member claimed to be a member of the Canadian Forces.

The eclecticism of the alt-right does not mean that it has no defining characteristics. One element uniting the movement is its denigration of what adherents often call “trashy racists”, with a particular emphasis on right-wing skinheads<sup>15</sup> and the Ku Klux Klan. My informants all think of themselves as more sophisticated than these groupings, members of which are indeed noted by scholars of the far-right for their “relatively simplistic ideological background” (Caiani et al. 2012, 3). Almost all of my informants had completed post-secondary education, all seemed well-read, and most were, if sometimes not particularly consistent, at least articulate. This is in keeping with the alt-right’s connection to so-called “high-brow white nationalism [...] complete with quasi-scholarly journals, books and websites” (Hawley 2017, 26). Specific intellectuals are well-regarded by the alt-right and academic credentials are used to bolster claims and cultivate gravitas (Busher 2016). Particularly admired are Jared Taylor, founder of *American Renaissance*; Kevin

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<sup>15</sup> Although less well-known because of the notoriety of the neo-Nazi variety, left-wing skinheads opposed to racism and neo-Nazism also exist. In some cities, such as Montreal, they make up the majority of the skinhead presence.



MacDonald, editor of the *Occidental Observer*; and, especially in Canada, Ricardo Duchesne, a professor of sociology at the University of New Brunswick and the author of *Canada in Decay: Mass Immigration, Diversity, and the Ethnocide of Euro-Canadians*.

Another defining characteristic of the alt-right is its status as one of the first social movements of any note to spring largely from internet culture. Years before alt-right activists began meeting up around North America to discuss things in person and plan actions ‘IRL’<sup>16</sup>, the roots of the movement were establishing themselves on Reddit, 4chan and the forums of the so-called ‘Manosphere’, a collection of masculinist websites. This genesis has had a number of important effects on the makeup of the movement. The alt-right’s noted obsession with internet memes is one. The low median age of its adherents is another. Also as a result of these beginnings, the alt-right is, to paint with a broad brush, aesthetically and strategically distinct from older white supremacist and fascist groups in North America. The classic symbols of neo-Nazism – SS lightning bolts, German eagles, death’s heads, plenty of black and silver – are often used by the alt-right with several levels of irony attached, while a fondness for in-jokes and meme culture manifests in symbols like Pepe the Frog, a comic book character appropriated by the alt-right as a symbol for their movement and a far cry from a threatening Nazi aesthetic.

The roots of the alt-right in the masculinist internet give the movement a particular stance on gender. While the far right in general is effectively universally sexist (Blee 2003; Ferber 2004), organized as it usually is as a backlash against progressive movements like feminism (Berlet and Lyons 2000), segments of the alt-right take things to unprecedented extremes. Blee (2003) writes that while positions on women varied between the racist groups she studied in the US, in every case their construction of women included the notion of white women as “passive but wronged”

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<sup>16</sup> ‘In Real Life’.

by men of colour (115), requiring racist male violence in response. This construction of womanhood is almost totally absent from the alt-right. It has been largely replaced with a construction of women lifted from a set of masculinist and male-supremacist internet subcultures sharing a common vocabulary and ideological starting point. These subcultures include so-called ‘pick-up artists’ or PUA; ‘neo-masculinity’, a reactionary form of sexism promoted by writer Daryush Valizadeh; ‘Men Going Their Own Way’, or MGTOW, a heterosexual male separatist movement; and more recently, the ‘incel’ (‘involuntary celibate’) subculture. Common to these subcultures is an unrelenting hostility toward women and the enduring belief that they are essentially genetic automatons, programmed to have sex only with the most ‘alpha’ men, including, much to the anxiety of far-right activists, black men. For the alt-right, white women’s mass refusal to initiate a racially motivated baby boom stems from the success of feminism at dismantling the structures that traditionally kept women’s racially treacherous instincts in check. From this perspective, women are not ‘passive and wronged’ but unleashed and genetically programmed to be unthinkingly and treasonously promiscuous.

The alt-right is not a political party and does not contest elections<sup>17</sup>. Instead, the alt-right is largely focused on propaganda. The method and sophistication of its propaganda is another factor setting the alt-right apart from older US racist groups. The alt-right is influenced by the French *Nouvelle Droite*, or ‘New Right’ (Hawley 2017), whose activists are students of Gramsci and act accordingly (Griffin 2017). The alt-right has picked up the French New Right’s propaganda strategy of ‘right-wing Gramscianism’ (Griffin 2017, Gaillard-Starzmann 2006). This stance hopes to affect the world not so much through policy proposals and demonstrations (though both movements do sometimes hold demonstrations) as through a concerted effort to influence popular

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<sup>17</sup> Though some groups calling themselves ‘parties’ have been affiliated with it, such as the Traditionalist Worker Party in the United States.

culture, recognizing, following Gramsci, that “cultural hegemony must precede political hegemony” (Griffin 2017, 21). Thus, alt-right propaganda is often carefully crafted to appeal to its target demographics, using black humour, irony, plenty of images including internet memes, and simple, understandable language (Feinberg 2017). It tends to be much less dedicated to preaching to the choir and signaling ideological purity than the propaganda of older US racist groups insofar as it is more focused on recruiting fence-sitters and disseminating racist memes through the internet. A major goal of this propaganda for both the alt-right and the modern far right generally is “normalizing and rehabilitating Nazism to a point where its ideas no longer create repulsion among the general public” (Griffin 2017, 20).

This French influence aside, the alt-right is largely US-based and its focus remains the United States. Several of my informants told me that they paid more attention to US news than to current events in Canada (not, it must be said, particularly unusual for many Canadians). However, the alt-right scene in Montreal was said by my informants to be one of the most active in North America and included several of the movement’s high-profile figures. The group with which I did research did have some ties to other Canadian organizations and shared at least a few members with other Québec-based far-right groups. Some of these organizations were treated with a great deal of contempt, however, particularly La Meute, which was dismissed as an ineffectual mob of Boomer civic nationalists but a potentially useful recruiting ground nonetheless. The Montreal alt-right group also overlapped significantly with an ‘identitarian’ group (see Chapter 6) with which it shared some of its leadership figures. This second group was dedicated to promoting a more palatable, serious, and classically liberal brand of ethno-nationalism.

There are some ideological points on which the movement as a whole largely agrees. A commitment to white racial chauvinism of some kind unites them, as does anti-Semitism. The

‘ethno-state’ is another anchoring idea, together with the defense of settler colonialism, with adherents arguing that Canada and the US were always meant by their early leaders to be white supremacist states. The alt-right is nationalist, but not necessarily patriotic, in that adherents conceive of themselves as being loyal to a racially defined white nation and not to a civic state. Some version of the ‘white genocide’ conspiracy theory, which claims that Jews and progressives are attempting to erase the white race through demographic warfare, is used to understand the phenomenon of immigration. Muslim migrants are particularly reviled for their perceived cultural incompatibility, while the Islamic world is in some ways admired for what alt-right adherents see as a ‘strong’ culture including institutionalized patriarchy and high birthrates. Biological determinism, antifeminism, and male supremacism of some sort are nearly universal. Right-wing anti-imperialism is very common, as adherents see foreign adventurism as costly, of little benefit to whites, and forcing Western countries to be unnecessarily embroiled in the affairs of non-whites. Anti-globalization rhetoric grades into vague right-wing anti-capitalism; attitudes on capitalism vary but as a whole the alt-right can be said to be opposed to the prevailing corporate order to some degree though many members are not explicitly anti-capitalist. It is also, as a whole, implacably opposed to all forms of leftism. A profound commitment to hierarchy and elitism is uncomfortably coupled with populist rhetoric about workers and regular folk. Similarly, a purported concern with the environment is very common though, at the same time, anthropogenic climate change is usually seen as a hoax being leveraged by enemies of the white race to weaken Western countries economically.

All this adds up to a portrait of a political tendency firmly in the far right, heavily influenced by, but distinct from, neo-Nazism, the French New Right, and other fascist schools which have grown up since WWII. A strong fascist wing exists as a result, but at the same time, the alt-right’s

emergence in the heart of liberal capitalism has resulted in a willingness on the part of many members to accommodate liberalism to some degree so long as rights and freedoms are reserved mainly for white men. These members share a vision of an explicitly white supremacist Canada legally enshrining the dominance of heterosexual men. For some this state would be aligned with conservative Christianity; others, in keeping with the alt-right's generally secular bent (Hawley 2017), see Christianity as more of a cultural symbol than a sincere object of faith. This vision, far from having to be *imported* from Nazi Germany or Mussolini's Italy, reflects a desire to *return* to what my informants see as the foundations of the modern liberal Canadian state. Canadian alt-right activists share with many of their leftist opponents an understanding of this state as having been predicated on white supremacy and heteropatriarchy.

The alt-right proposes policies considerably more extreme than any serious political party in Canada and is far more dedicated to institutionalized racial and gender hierarchy than is considered acceptable in the mainstream. Together with the fact that the more liberal wing of the movement is in constant dialogue with the overtly fascist wing, the alt-right can comfortably be categorized as a far-right movement. It is a mistake however to assume that this makes it somehow foreign, alien or un-Canadian. Many of the tenets upheld by the alt-right were, within living memory, considered relatively uncontroversial in this country. Liberal capitalism can easily accommodate exclusion and repression based on race and gender and, indeed, has for most of its history.

## 4. Men and Masculinity in the Alt-Right

### The Roundtable

The first time I went to an alt-right meet-up I was early, but I wasn't the first to arrive. Two young men, out of their teens but not by much, were loitering near the door. Both were broadcasting tough nonchalance as hard as they could, but their excitement was clearly discernable. One was dressed quite neutrally, while the other was dressed in his full alt-right regalia. He wore a trenchcoat-style jacket, in military camouflage, with the flags of a couple of eastern European countries sewn on. A black t-shirt underneath proclaimed a pro-Pinochet message. Around his neck hung a *Schwarze Sonne* or Black Sun, an esoteric swastika-like symbol used by neo-Nazis. His hair was cut in the severely parted 'fashy'<sup>18</sup> haircut popular in the alt-right, and modelled after the undercut favoured by German officers in WWII. Tall and lean, he gave the impression of being gangly – though his Instagram, when I looked him up later, included a number of photos of him shirtless, showing off built-up muscles well-lit from above for maximum bulge. His desire to look like a scary fascist was almost palpable. I took all this in in a moment, my senses heightened by adrenaline. His name was Andrei.

Our host was late, so as we stood by the door, I introduced myself as the anthropologist, hoping that my contact had done as he had promised and informed everybody coming to the meet-up that I would be attending. Almost right away, the postures of the two young men shifted and they perceptibly relaxed. I believe they initially saw me as a fellow alt-right adherent. In hyper-

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<sup>18</sup> From 'fascist'. This is a term used by people within the alt-right.

masculine settings, especially in cases where people are on edge because they are in potentially dangerous or compromising situations, the arrival of a stranger is always an occasion for an anxious sizing-up. However, finding out that I was the researcher meant that I was established not to be part of the peer group among whom confrontation and status-jockeying was relevant. I was outside the power structure of the alt-right group and therefore not a threat, at least not in the sense of threatening the social positions of these young men vis-à-vis the others in the group.

They became quite friendly, and Andrei immediately launched into an account of the exciting fight that he and his friend had just narrowly avoided. On their way to the meetup, they had encountered a man in the metro who Andrei described as “a Latino antifa” (antifa meaning anti-fascist) who had objected vigorously to Andrei’s t-shirt, Pinochet being a Chilean dictator perhaps best-known for his habit of throwing leftist critics out of helicopters. With a wounded attitude, the pair invited me to commiserate with them about the affront of a Latin American holding robust views on the topic. Andrei was keen to show that he had not been afraid of “the antifa.” Confiding to me with an awkwardly forced casualness that he had “a black belt in karate,” Andrei explained that he had used his martial arts training to de-escalate the situation, avoiding a confrontation in the metro itself. However, the obstinate adversary had waited for the duo outside the metro in order to accost them again. Here, Andrei’s friend had “almost” pulled a knife, but had decided not to. He showed me the knife conspiratorially.

It was at this point that the story trailed off, as the somewhat embarrassingly un-dramatic nature of the confrontation became obvious to me and Andrei’s friend – though apparently not to Andrei, who tried to tell the story three or four more times as the night went on, to anyone who would listen. Each time, he started by telling listeners about his black belt. Most of the attendees had some sympathy regarding being confronted by antifascists, and validated Andrei’s sense of

injustice about the episode. His bragging about his expertise in karate, however, was greeted with polite subject-changing and in some cases, barely veiled contempt – though one young man named Derek made a joke about the idea of de-escalating the fight, asking “what, you don’t like to skin your enemies alive? What are you, a cuck<sup>19</sup>?” Finally, Andrei asked one of the leaders of the group to gather the attendees together so that he could tell everyone at once about the altercation. The older man put him down, gesturing at the six or seven men sitting nearest and telling him, “This is what you’re going to get” before wandering away himself, clearly not willing to put his name to Andrei’s grandstanding. Andrei appeared ashamed and didn’t mention the story again.

By that point, of course, our host had already let us into the outdoor area where the meet-up was to take place. At the beginning of the night, there were only six or seven of us, sitting in lawn chairs on the gravel expanse. They drank beer or vodka and cracked jokes about cannabis being inappropriate for whites due to its association with black people. The only leadership figure present at that point was about a decade older than most of the other men. He asked them their ages and acted surprised when they said 19, 20, 21.

A few friendly-seeming men asked me questions about myself and my work. One asked me what it meant to be Canadian, what Canadian culture meant to me. I stumbled over my words, unsure of how much to disclose about my views. “Well,” I said, “I don’t know. Shouldn’t I be asking *you* that question?” They laughed and seized on my uncertain answer. It was evidence, they said, of Canadian culture having been almost entirely destroyed, primarily through changing patterns of immigration but also through the fecklessness engendered by leftism. One man used the past tense to refer to Canadian culture. Another said that “true Canadians are Anglo-Slavic”, a notion apparently based on the large number of Eastern European immigrants who arrived in the

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<sup>19</sup> A favourite alt-right insult, short for ‘cuckold’; see p. 87 for a more detailed discussion.



19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was unclear if he thought that this meant that Canadian culture was an amalgamation of Anglo and Slavic influences, or that it should be, or if this was meant to refer only to the genetic inheritance of “true” Canadians. The Québécois, in this formulation, were treated as a separate nation from a separate ethnic stock. I could see why this ‘Anglo-Slavic’ idea could be a popular idea among the attendees, as a disproportionate number of them seemed to be of Eastern European extraction.

As more people arrived, the attendees began boasting about their influence within the far right. One man told me that he ran a group doing militia training in rural areas. He offered to put me in touch with leaders of other far-right outfits like La Meute and Soldiers of Odin. Others spoke about the meme pages or chat forums they administered. The actual leaders of the group mostly refrained from engaging. I noticed one attendee whom I recognized as a very popular and influential neo-Nazi online content creator; throughout the night he was relatively tight-lipped and refrained from bragging. Andrei on the other hand said he ran a popular fascist Facebook page of which the others seemed not to have heard. He then segued into an account of how he had started out as a Titoist – Josip Tito being the president of communist Yugoslavia until his death in 1980 – but had then become an ‘anarcho’-capitalist<sup>20</sup> for a while before converting to fascism. His time as a right-wing ‘anarchist’ had apparently given him a soft spot for the left-wing variety, and he spent some time trying to convince the other attendees that in a more perfect world, “anarcho-communism would work”. This was greeted with general derision, and he backtracked unhappily.

More men began to arrive, and the volume increased as the sun began to set. The mood was reminiscent of the opening stages of a house party thrown by somewhat socially awkward high school boys, right down to the total absence of any women. Many of the men seemed to be

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<sup>20</sup> Anarchists, classically being a variety of socialist, in general reject the claim of pro-capitalists to the prefix ‘anarcho-’.

meeting in person for the first time, though they mostly seemed to be acquainted with each other's online handles, and the awkwardness was conspicuous as they tried to translate internet personas into viable offline masculinities. There seemed to be a roughly 50/50 split between men cultivating a studied aloofness and men enthusiastically swapping alt-right bona fides, throwing around shibboleths like 'cuck', 'degenerate', and 'beta' with gusto. Many wore alt-right merch: T-shirts and other gear emblazoned with Pepe the Frog, Kekistan logos, and various elaborate memes and in-jokes<sup>21</sup>. Others wore the emerging uniform of the movement popularized by figures like Richard Spencer – a prep-school look harking back to 1950s styling, featuring button-ups and khakis. I began to circulate a bit, trying to make contacts other than the leader figure who had originally guaranteed me access, speaking to men standing in little knots spaced across the area.

One, a recent immigrant to Canada named Felix, explained how he had entered the alt-right through the so-called 'Manosphere' – a constellation of websites, blogs and forums focused on men's issues, with content ranging from relatively tame 'men's rights' ideas with some sympathy for moderate feminism to hardcore reactionary male-supremacism. In particular, he recounted his enthusiasm for a Manosphere figure called Roosh V, real name Daryush Valizadeh. Valizadeh is an American author known for writing books on 'pick-up artistry' or PUA<sup>22</sup>, also known to insiders as 'game', a subculture or community in which men share strategies for manipulating or coercing

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<sup>21</sup> 'Kekistan' is a good example of how elaborate these memes and in-jokes can become. 'Kek' is internet slang for laughter or humour; it derives ultimately from the way Korean users of the 90s online game *Starcraft*, which lacked support for Korean Hangul script, would indicate laughter. In Korea, 'hahaha' is written by repeating the Hangul character representing the consonant 'k', yielding 'kekeke'. 'Kek' became further popularized when the development team of the game *World of Warcraft* built it into the game as the Orcish 'translation' for 'lol'. 4chan users realized that Kek is also the name of an Ancient Egyptian frog-headed diety; they associated this diety with Pepe the Frog, an innocuous comic book character-turned-meme since appropriated as a symbol by the alt-right. Eventually the fictional country of 'Kekistan', whose denizens worship the Pepe-god Kek, became a meme, with its own forum on Reddit and a flag modeled after the Nazi *Reichskriegsflagge* (War Flag). While Kekistan was not originally an alt-right invention, and indeed is still claimed by some to be a satirical send-up of the alt-right's obsession with militarism and Nazi imagery, the meme has been appropriated by alt-right internet users and the Kekistani flag is used by some in the movement as a 'plausibly deniable' alt-right symbol.

<sup>22</sup> Throughout, I refer to both 'pick-up artists' and 'pick-up artistry' as PUA.

women into sex. In his books, Valizadeh details his purported sexual successes in various countries to which he claims to have traveled, and maintains a website on which he publishes articles and essays on his male-supremacist ideology, which he calls ‘neo-masculinity’. In more recent years, he has retained his focus on gender but has shifted to writing more broadly about far-right politics. His non-European parentage aside, he is relatively well-regarded by some in the alt-right though not, by any means, by all – some see him firmly as a ‘degenerate’ despoiling white women.

I lingered on this conversation, because the influence of this type of male-supremacist ideology on the alt-right was a topic of great interest for me. In fact, my research had originally been focused on followers of figures like Valizadeh. I had shifted toward my current program of study when, upon contacting the leader of a PUA group in Montreal to ask about doing research with them, I discovered that the group had transitioned wholesale into an alt-right organization. I had asked if I could conduct some interviews and fieldwork anyway, and my contact had accepted the proposition. Given that access to far-right groups is typically very hard to secure, I had elected to alter my topic of research to cover this alt-right group.

Felix and another man named Joe explained to me that things had been shifting in the Manosphere. It wasn’t just Valizadeh, either; there had been a concerted shift in many of the Manosphere communities toward explicitly far-right political stances, including various nativist and racist positions. Felix told me, “At a certain point, Roosh stopped talking about game and moved on to politics.” I asked them about the Red Pill, a Reddit.com forum dedicated to a heady mix of extreme male-supremacist rhetoric and PUA strategy. Joe waved a hand. “Oh yeah,” he told me. “Red Pill guys don’t countersignal much anymore.” As mentioned earlier, countersignalling is a term appropriated by the alt-right from social psychology and behavioural

economics. In these fields, the term refers to a phenomenon arising in an environment in which many individuals are all attempting to signal their fitness, wealth or another desirable quality. In such a setting, it may be in the interest of some particularly fit or wealthy individuals to *decline* to signal, thus standing out from the crowd by showing that they don't need to signal like the rest. I go into more detail about countersignaling in the next section. In alt-right circles, the term retains some of its original meaning but also seems to sometimes simply be used as a synonym for 'disavow'.

Felix and Joe were members of the group when it had been dedicated purely to PUA topics and were thus some of its most senior figures. They had not simply watched the shift in the Manosphere from specifically gender-based thinking to broader right-wing extremism; they had been part of it. After a period of plying their pick-up 'artistry' in Montreal bars and nightclubs, and becoming more and more well-versed in Red Pill ideology, 'neo-masculinity', and Manosphere anti-feminism, they had made the leap to white supremacy. As Joe told me, "If you're already ready to go against feminism, which means going against the whole establishment, then becoming a 'racist' is not a big deal." He rolled his eyes and made air quotes as he said the word 'racist'.

For these men, the tepid liberal progressivism of the North American mainstream is indistinguishable from a perceived 'feminist' establishment. Indeed, from the hyper-reactionary perspective common among Red Pill adherents, who regularly advocate for male-only suffrage and an end to careers for women, the two may as well be the same thing. Rejecting the concept of female autonomy is not of course a stance which springs from a vacuum; this perspective is rooted directly in the Christian patriarchy historically underlying Canadian and US settler society, a fact which my informants were happy to underline. Further, sexist attitudes which minimize women's

agency or yearn for more patriarchal relations are by no means rare in North America. However, to bluntly and apologetically propose the end of women's participation in the public sphere as a key ideological tenet, and one largely based in secular thinking at that, is today a radical departure from the norm. A departure like that can easily pave the way for further dramatic political developments, such as the swerve toward fascism.

Throughout the evening, resentment against feminism remained a theme. A man with bulging muscles and an intense stare named Jean-Christophe, wearing a little girl's bright purple backpack (he explained that this was to point to if he was accused of being sexist or homophobic), told me that he had been falsely accused of sexual misconduct by feminists and had lost his position at an institution as a result. Standing very close and gazing at me intently, he showed me PDFs on his phone to prove it. Documents about the investigation into his sexual misconduct flashed by on the screen, all the allegations ending with the words '*validé*' or '*verifié*'. I found the experience very disturbing. Regardless of his animosity toward feminists, Jean-Christophe later told me that having more women in the group would be good for appearances, as their presence would make members "look less like virgin losers".

Blee (2003) writes that although women in the far-right certainly exist, groups are overwhelmingly male-dominated. By the time the main event of the night was ready to begin, I counted about 20 men present, a number which fluctuated throughout the night, and one woman. The lone woman was on the arm of a muscular, broad-shouldered man with boots and closely cropped hair wearing a shirt emblazoned with a cisgender pride slogan.

By this point the sun was starting to set and the evening air was getting cooler. A leadership figure gathered all the attendees into a circle where they sat on an assortment of folding chairs and benches. Some of them were clearly drunk, and it took a while to wrangle them into position. The

manoeuvring was interrupted by the arrival of three or four men carrying a huge Red Ensign, the old colonial flag of the Dominion of Canada, to cheers from those gathered – including, unexpectedly, from some of the francophones present. They put it up against a wall in a corner. Finally, the main facilitator of the meeting stood and began to give a speech about the group.

“We are fascists, yes,” he told them. “But we’re also a networking group. And because of that, we need flexible rules and flexible membership, to a degree.” One of the men in the crowd joked, “Diversity is our strength,” mocking a slogan associated with Trudeau’s Liberal Party, to which others shouted assent. Another clarified, “European diversity,” to laughs from the group. A third said, “Well, actually, Aryan.” People began to joke about Italians and their apparently questionable status as true Aryans. An Italian-Canadian man with slightly darker skin than many of the other attendees squawked in a falsetto, “I’m different!” to general hilarity.

The man making the speech was able to quiet them down and continue. He explained that in the interests of unity on the far right, it was necessary for the group to embrace members with varying political positions. Therefore, he proposed a roundtable for the men to voice their views and introduce themselves and their political backgrounds to the others, thus giving the group as a whole a better idea of what ideas were represented within it. This was of course an anthropological goldmine, and an unexpected opportunity – my contact had not mentioned anything about this happening. It would be an unparalleled chance to get a good handle on the diverse, sometimes even paradoxical viewpoints within the alt-right movement. For the next few hours, I scribbled notes frantically as they spoke one by one.<sup>23</sup>

The hulking man with the cisgender pride shirt, Greg, was seated next to the leader and so went first. He told the group that he was new to the alt-right. “I just got into it,” he said. “I’m fresh.

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<sup>23</sup> Some of the quotations in the following section are not verbatim, as I was not permitted to record and was writing down keywords instead, while also occasionally writing out full statements verbatim when time permitted.

I didn't used to be into this stuff, I didn't know about any of this stuff really. I was a nice guy. Then I went to a demonstration to counter Antifa because I didn't like what they were doing. It got me thinking. Then I just started looking into things." He became interested in (relatively) moderate anti-Islam movements, he said, but quickly realized that "radical Islam is only a symptom of the problem." The real issue, he learned, was demographic. White women of childbearing age make up only 2% of the world's population, he informed the group<sup>24</sup>. He gestured at his girlfriend: "This one's mine, so fuck off, I'll kill ya." The men guffawed while the woman looked at the ground with a small smile on her face. He had realized, he concluded, that the real 'diversity' issue facing the world was that its white population was threatened with extinction, so he had become a white nationalist and joined the alt-right. Now he was eager to learn more and contribute to the movement.

The next person in the circle was Greg's girlfriend, whose name I never got. As she opened her mouth, a man yelled, "The girlfriend says nothing!" Another shouted "White Sharia!" to laughter and cheers. She closed her mouth. The men looked on with expressions of glee. I stared in amazement. The next man began to speak as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

"It's too bad there's not more people here," he said, "but there's a reason for that. Leftists say 'black lives matter'. But they never talk about white lives. White lives matter too. We have white lives! And what do white lives mean? White lives mean working hard, self-sacrifice, making things happen. White lives mean responsibility. And that means that some people are out working,

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24 A claim associated with Andrew Anglin of the neo-Nazi website Daily Stormer. By a very narrow definition of 'white', this statistic may be more or less accurate. Of course, like many demographic statistics leveraged by white supremacists, it lacks context. In particular, it relies on the listener assuming that this is a very low number, since 2% sounds small; but 2% of the world's population is still 150 million people. It also relies on the listener being unable to easily estimate the proportion of other groups made up of women of child-bearing age, and thus not knowing that, for example, the Arab League has a total female population of only around 207 million – less than 3% of the world's population – and this figure includes children, women past menopause, and members of non-Arab minority groups.

or taking care of their families, so they can't be here. But they will be." He predicted that the alt-right would grow vigorously in the near future, including by assimilating disillusioned leftists. "Most leftists aren't really our enemies. If they're white, we'll fight for them. We fight for all white people." This point was greeted with a combination of nodding and skeptical looks. The irony of having just silenced the only white woman present appeared to be entirely lost on the group, or else they did not perceive it to be ironic. Fighting *for* someone, after all, is not the same as respecting them as a political actor.

Next in the circle was a young man who qualified himself as an avowed Trumpist. "Trump, people started hating on Trump after the election because he didn't do that, or he didn't do this. But Trump came back recently. He's back. And me, I'm a hardcore Trump supporter." He went on to describe himself as "alt-light", a term used by alt-right activists to denigrate figures related to the movement who are not seen as being committed enough to race or gender supremacism. A leader interrupted to assure the group that he trusted this man, even though he was alt-light, and that therefore they should too. The man continued, referring back to the previous speaker's comments about people on the left of the political spectrum. "Most liberals," he said, "are liberals because they've been indoctrinated." The implication was that if white liberals could be deprogrammed – or if their indoctrination could be interrupted – then they would be more likely to embrace the tenets of the alt-right.

At this point attention turned to Émile, the figure I had identified earlier as a prominent neo-Nazi content creator. He spoke a bit about his work writing articles for fascist websites before moving on to some current events in the far-right universe. A few months earlier, a man named Devon Arthurs had murdered his two roommates in Tampa, Florida. All three were members of the US white supremacist terrorist organization Atomwaffen Division, a group that has been linked



to several other murders and members of which have been arrested on terrorism charges (Swenson 2018). Atomwaffen Division advocates propaganda by the deed, the violent overthrow of the US government, and purposefully precipitating race war through terrorism. Arthurs told police that he had recently converted to Salafist jihadi Islam and that he had killed his roommates and fellow Atomwaffen members for mocking his conversion. Émile told the group that “the guys in Atomwaffen are young, and not very wise.” One had converted to Islam, and killed the others; Émile’s takeaway was, “If you have different views, if you have any group of people and there are different views within that group, there will be violence. It’s just the way the world works, and we know this. So we need uniformity in some parts of our lives, like religion, et cetera, in order to have peace and stability. It can’t always be about freedom. People are starting to move away from a Judaized, freedom-oriented direction.” For Émile, the cause of violence is difference itself, whether that difference applies to a minority group within a given state or a jihadi in a neo-Nazi terror cell. Freedom, which breeds difference, is thus in opposition to peace. By this logic, then, peace can be achieved through ethnic cleansing and coerced uniformity.

He went on to offer his views on the left. “The left is radicalizing in an absurd and disgusting direction,” he told his listeners. “And we couldn’t wish for a better opposition. They’re obsessed with trannies and genderfluid faggots and all this.” At the mention of the word ‘genderfluid’, laughs erupted from the group. “They’re not serious. When people see us fighting Antifa, they see heroes. We look like superheroes. Because what do they see? We’re in shape, we look good, we’re normal people! Antifa is a bunch of disgusting blue-haired freaks and they’re degenerates. So we look good next to them. They’re the perfect opposition.” Everyone was laughing and nodding. This was a significantly different take than Andrei’s, who I noticed was looking sullen. Throughout the night, I got the sense that Antifa was an object of ridicule and

derision as well as of fear and hatred. Here their attitude toward Antifa reminded me of the archetypal Nazi attitude toward Jews, who as part of such an attitude are described in the same breath as both subhuman weaklings and as superhuman, indeed practically supernatural, overlords (Ferber and Kimmel 2004). In the same way, Antifa was consistently characterized as consisting primarily of hysterical, out-of-shape stooges of suspect sexual orientation, while also routinely alleged, sometimes by the same people, to be a shadowy force financed by Jewish billionaires and the intelligence apparatus and to have access to secret paramilitary training camps. (Felix, for example, told me in an interview: “We can’t fight Antifa in the street – we will lose. They have military training and financial backing from George Soros. You can look it up.”)

A quiet, well-dressed man named Philippe was next to speak. I had interviewed Philippe already as part of my preliminary contact with the group, and knew him to be an articulate speaker in French and English. He liked expensive drinks, seemed to be in a position of some authority, and was significantly older than most of the group members. His speech praised the efforts of the primary leader figure in the group: “I spent many lonely years knowing no one who shared my sentiments. Thanks to him, I am no longer alone.” He recounted his transition from skepticism about immigration and a concern about the influence of Islamic fundamentalism to full-fledged white identity politics, and spoke at length about how alone he had felt during that period and the difficulties of being a white nationalist in Montreal. He was very happy that the group had been formed, he told his listeners, and reminded them that thanks to the group’s leadership, the alt-right movement in Montreal was the largest of any Canadian city. Joe butted in to point out that since it was so difficult to be a nationalist in general in Montreal because of the city’s notoriously left-leaning bohemianism, the alt-right could successfully integrate defectors from the flagging Québec sovereigntist movement through an emphasis on European heritage. This would help the alt-right

continue to grow in the city. Philippe agreed, and encouraged group members to look to the example of their leader. “Be like him,” he told them. “Be a leader. And if you aren’t a leader, that’s fine, not everyone is – give your *time* to leaders.” As Philippe finished his speech, group members began shouting ‘Heil!’ and performing the fascist salute, laughing, pleased at this ironic-but-not-ironic reference to WWII-era Nazi protocol.

Joe was next and continued on his line of thought regarding Montreal as a recruiting ground for the alt-right. It made sense that Montreal would have a strong scene, he said, precisely because the city was, in general, so left-wing. That lefty status quo provoked a backlash which clever leaders could exploit. The group’s bilingualism (almost everyone present was fluent in both languages, in classic Montreal fashion) and openness to specifically francophone Québec nationalism also helped in that regard, he noted, appealing to Montreal’s specific demographics. After all, he said, the alt-right was pro-European, not specifically pro-Anglo; and Montreal was in Québec, and Québec, he said, “is French territory, which we acknowledge”. In left-leaning spaces in much of Canada it is usual to begin events with a land acknowledgement naming the indigenous nations for which that area is ancestral. Joe was effectively carrying out the white nationalist version of this practice, substituting the area’s settler nation for its indigenous ones.

At this point, someone asked our host if he could use the washroom inside. Suddenly about half the group stood up, clamouring that they needed to go too. While the rest of us waited for them, I talked to a few men I had not yet met. One man told me that a teacher in his public school had told him never to have children, because white children – *specifically* white children – were bad for the environment. He assured me that this was a common occurrence and evidence of widespread anti-white prejudice in Québec society<sup>25</sup>. Another man, Derek – the attendee who had

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25 Of course I cannot test the accuracy of his claim. However, the reader may be interested to know that at the time of writing, typing in quotation marks “white children are bad for the environment” into Google produces exactly one

earlier spoken of skinning one's enemies alive – was trying to explain to me that the hardcore anti-Semitism common in alt-right rhetoric was “actually just used to hook people who are in the middle class of the IQ range and get them into the movement. It's the easiest way for them to understand what's going on. It's serious but it's not really serious.” Derek is young, and was drunk enough to be staggering slightly and slurring his words. I stared at him, a little shocked, thinking through everything I had heard and read up to that point. Certainly, the anti-Semitic rhetoric to which I had been exposed thus far had seemed completely sincere. Was this man trying to tell me that it was essentially a cynical ruse, taking advantage of existing anti-Jewish prejudice to explain a kind of vulgarized, pseudo-Marxist populist economics to people deemed too unsophisticated to understand the real deal? Unfortunately, upon questioning the man proved too inebriated to explain himself and seemed to get more and more confused about his own statements as I gently tried to tease some sort of clarity out of him.

By this time, it was dark and getting quite chilly, and I was feeling underdressed as well as increasingly burnt out from being on edge all evening. More or less everything I had heard all night made me feel viscerally ill, and I was constantly worried about accidentally giving myself away as someone who enthusiastically engaged in most of the behaviours these men thought of as ‘degenerate’. A sleeve riding up too high could reveal my tattoos; my septum piercing falling down from where I had tucked it up inside my nose would immediately arouse suspicion. I was watching my speech patterns and mannerisms closely, but I knew I had already inadvertently said a few things through the evening that had slightly undermined the aura of ‘neutral’, straight, WASPy

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result. It is a tweet by a white nationalist about the ‘Coudenhove-Kalergi Plan’, the subject of a conspiracy theory which alleges that early European federalist Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi left behind a secret plan to replace indigenous Europeans with Africans, to be ruled over by Jews and the remnants of the European aristocracy, and that this plan is today being carried out by the top echelons of European Union. The tweeter seems to be alleging that occasional statements by environmentalists arguing that people should have fewer children are actually directed specifically at white parents as part of the Coudenhove-Kalergi plot to exterminate whites.

masculinity that I was trying to cultivate. Even my clothes were causing me discomfort, since I was trying to blend in to some degree and was wearing a far stuffier outfit than I was used to. I was starting to feel distinctly nauseated and a little light-headed from the constant adrenaline. I kept reaching into my tote bag to grip the comforting heft of the hammer I had stashed in it in case of the worst of worst-case scenarios.

Eventually, most of the men returned from inside and the ragged circle reformed. Providing a counterpoint to what Derek had just been telling me about anti-Semitism, the next speaker, Ben, launched enthusiastically into a lecture about “the Jews” and explained his understanding of history as seen through an anti-Semitic lens. He had discovered, he told his listeners, that the history of interreligious hatred in Europe was largely the history of Jews trying to kill or control Christians, rather than the other way around. Hitler had had many Jews in the SS, he assured us, and the Holocaust had not really happened. Instead, the German Nazis had been defending against the Jewish-organized persecution of Christians – a persecution which Ben believed stretched back many centuries and penetrated every aspect of European society, and which by WWII had reached its pinnacle in the form of the Bolsheviks, who were Jews intent above all else on slaughtering Christians. “The Jews hate Jesus more than vampires hate garlic,” he said. “But I love Jesus, and I love Hitler. And if we don’t come back to Christianity, I don’t think there’s a movement. You have to learn about Christ. If you don’t learn about Christ, then the Jews have stolen your history. Your history is in the Bible, and the Jews have stolen it from you, trying to make you believe that Christianity is a Jewish religion. It’s not. Actually, the true Israelites were the *enemies* of the Jews.” According to Ben, Jews successfully convinced European gentiles of a false history, even though the real history is written down in Christian holy texts. Further, both the increasing liberalization of many Christian denominations and the declining rate of worship in the general population are

the results of a Jewish conspiracy to strip whites of their history and their heritage, making them more amenable to conquest and control. This conspiracy, he believed, had been ongoing since time immemorial and stems from a grudge beginning specifically with the Roman conquest of ancient Judea two millennia ago. The duty of white Christians, for him, is to reclaim their religion – the more orthodox the denomination, the better – and thus their identity from the shadowy influence of these resentful evildoers.

An immigrant from Russia was next to speak. He told the group, “It’s easier to be red-pilled in Russia because Russia is really racist.” Since it is more acceptable in Russia to express racist views in public, he explained, people are freer to develop fully-fledged white-supremacist viewpoints. He went on, “Me, I’m not a Nazi, I’m a pure fascist. A traditional fascist. I’m a European-culturalist, a white supremacist in the proper sense of the word.” He was not at all against multiculturalism, he related; it was just that he believed that “monoethnicism is the real multiculturalism”. He explained that if there is the same mix of ethnic groups everywhere, local cultures will disappear and therefore multiculturalism will be impossible. Rather, local cultures should be protected through a policy of monoethnicism – one ethnic group per area – thus maintaining the world’s overall diversity of cultures. (The glaring fact of his being an immigrant belonging to a foreign ethnic group from the other side of the world did not seem to bother him.) Nowadays, he said, there are “kebabs<sup>26</sup> everywhere you go. That’s why I’m an identitarian.” Why would you want to travel anywhere if everywhere was all the same, he asked? Conversely, he pointed out, when he had gone to Thailand on vacation he had enjoyed it very much because it was so different. He wanted Thailand to retain its difference, just like he wanted European countries to retain theirs.

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26 ‘Kebab’ is used as a derogatory term for people of Middle Eastern descent.

I heard versions of this argument many times during my research and began to call it ‘the Tourism Model of White Supremacism’. Typically it involved a claim that very soon, European countries would be 30% black, 20% Arab, 20% Chinese, and 30% white. Sometimes other variations on these percentages were used but they were always similar numbers. Incidentally, estimates of the actual numbers of these groups in the European Union vary widely, but using the highest estimates I could find anywhere online (12 million people with some African ancestry, 6 million Arabs, and 3 million Chinese), the current percentages would be 2%, 1%, and 0.5% for those groups respectively – not exactly a crushing demographic tide for the 512 million EU citizens. The argument continues – often using Venice as an example for some reason – by claiming that in this imminent future, all places in Europe previously worth visiting will be essentially the same. Everywhere one goes, one will encounter the same mix of blacks, Arabs and Chinese, none of whom will have assimilated to the local country’s culture, and the indigenous population will be so subdued by its demographic collapse relative to other groups that it will stop generating meaningful culture. Instead of encountering Italian culture in Italy and German culture in Germany one will simply find the same handful of monolithic foreign cultures throughout Europe.

More than once I was asked, triumphantly, whether it would be worth it to go to Venice if, when I got there, I was to discover that my gondolier was Chinese. The implication is that this would detract from the sense of authenticity consumed by tourists in Venice. Of course, what tourists consume is firmly a simulation of authenticity anyway, as the fleet of Venetian gondolas, once the primary means of transportation within the city, are now exclusively used for ferrying tourists around in circles and are no more ‘authentic’ than the horse-drawn carriages in the Old Port of Montreal. It is difficult to escape the suspicion that the people advancing the Tourism

Model have rarely interacted with any of the non-white descendants of immigrants in Europe, or in Canada for that matter. A francophone rapper from the banlieues of Marseilles whose grandparents were Harkis, Algerians who fought for France during the 1954-1962 Algerian War of Independence and later settled in the metropole – is clearly culturally distinct from a Dutch computer scientist whose parents came to Europe from Iraq during the 1990-1991 Gulf War. Both are distinct from a Yemeni fisherman’s wife. In the Tourism Model of White Supremacism, no meaningful distinction exists between these three examples while an unbridgeable gulf separates them from white Europeans. The Marseillais recording a rap album in France, in French, about the streets of his native city, is in this formulation not an example of urban French culture but the negation of it.

After the Russian had finished speaking, a man who claimed to be a soldier in the Canadian military recounted that he was being required to take classes as part of his service. In these classes, he said, “the girls are all feminists. The leadership is indoctrinating people to love fags and trannies. The Minister [of National Defense, Harjit Sajjan] is a fraud and a traitor. It’s disgusting.” He was deeply disillusioned and hated what was going on in the Canadian military, he said, although there were “still good guys left.” He went on to ask if anyone was interested in coming with him to a 48-hour militia boot camp to take place in a northern US state, at which participants would learn military skills and tactics. Several men were interested and indicated that they would talk to him after the meeting. The final speaker was Derek, who slurred about “chinks and niggers” and Zyklon B<sup>27</sup> for several minutes before trailing off.

Although only about half of the attendees had spoken at the roundtable, it was cold and dark, and a lot of people were drunk and their attention spans were flagging. The circle broke up

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27 The poison gas used in Nazi death camps.



as people began to drift off to talk in small groups. My ability to stay neutral waning dramatically, I politely told people that I needed to go. I walked a few blocks away to where I had locked my bike and released an enormous outpouring of tension by crossing half of Montreal in ten minutes. Arriving at my partner's communal loft apartment – shared by half a dozen loving, compassionate artists and musicians, its DIY walls and homemade fixtures imbued with a decade of vibrant Montreal counterculture – I bolted down the meal they had prepared for me and basked in the atmosphere of safety and acceptance. I suddenly realized that my shoulders had been tensed and raised for hours, and with a sigh, I let them drop.

## Masculinity as Homosocial Enactment in the Alt-Right

Ferber (2004) writes that it is impossible to “understand [organized racism] without examining it through a gendered lens”. Far-right racist movements present themselves as the defenders of white men while these men are also “repeatedly attacked by the movement for becoming feminized (and unsettling the natural order) and are encouraged to become ‘real’ men” (Ferber 2004, 8). White masculinities, and therefore white men, are in a fraught position in such movements, with members perpetually needing to prove themselves to each other. This echoes cyclical claims of ‘crises of masculinity’ in contemporary Western societies, almost always figured as crises of white masculinity; white masculinity is frequently the object of idealisation and anxiety at the same time (Kimmel 2018; Connell 1995; Atkinson 2011).

I started the chapter off by noticing the tension in the postures of the two young men I met before the meet-up. This type of tension was palpable throughout the night. As I noted, the attendees were virtually all male. The gender dynamic was, in other words, one of male

homosociality. As such, the men were engaged in ‘homosocial enactment’, a term used by Kimmel (1994) to describe that aspect of hegemonic masculinity which relies on the attention and approval of other men in order to reproduce and maintain itself. Such homosocial enactments are performed more for the benefit of other men, and to establish a place in a masculine hierarchy, than to impress women. As such, they require an element of competition between men in order to be coherent, as hegemonic masculinity is always constructed in relation to subordinated masculinities (Connell 1987). This dynamic of male posturing figured throughout the evening, with attendees’ grappling for a comfortable position within the group’s emerging hierarchies cutting through what Blee describes as the “forced conviviality” typical of racist gatherings (2003, 153).

In order to successfully navigate masculinity as a homosocial enactment, men need to appear as though they are embodying a given masculine ideal relatively effortlessly. “Masculinity as a homosocial enactment,” writes Kimmel, “is fraught with danger, with the risk of failure, and with intense relentless competition” (Kimmel 1994, 64); to be seen to be trying too hard is to fail, so making an effort to assert oneself in such a setting involves risk. If one’s attempt falls flat, one not only fails to reach one’s target of respect but in fact can incur a penalty as a poser or a try-hard. Andrei made repeated efforts to assert himself. He wore a head-to-toe fascist outfit, with haircut and jewelry to match; tried multiple times to tell a story meant to demonstrate his virility, expertise, and attachment to the fascist cause; and attempted to exhibit his general free-thinking edginess by namedropping other extremist political tendencies with which he had been involved in some way (e.g., Titoism; ‘anarcho’-capitalism; etc.). He failed to pick up on the loud signals coming from the men around him that his attempts were failing to impress and were, indeed, incurring a social penalty – he had try-hard written all over him. Derek was in a somewhat similar situation, making jokes about skinning people, talking about Zyklon B, and making incessant use of racial slurs and

alt-right in-group terminology like “cuck”. He, however, was less obviously trying to appear threatening or unique – seemingly more concerned with just seeming edgy and part of the group – and so incurred less of a penalty.

Greg, on the other hand, brought with him one of the most important props for an atmosphere of homosocially enacted masculinity: a woman (Connell 1987; 1995). He could make a threat (“this one’s mine, so fuck off, I’ll kill ya”) and it was both a successful joke that got a laugh and immediately credible as a real threat due to his muscular build, combat boots, and air of easy confidence. His behaviour and appearance successfully achieved the appearance of being ‘natural’. Likewise, figures like Émile, who had a large following on neo-Nazi websites and was occasionally invited to give speeches at far-right events in other regions, did not need to make comments about gas chambers or murder in order to be heard and taken seriously; nor did he need to brag about his clout, as it was already well-established. In Émile’s case, things he has written online are in any case so much more extreme than any of Derek’s edgy slurs that his reputation as a risk-taking extremist needed no defending. Though Émile is quite a bit less imposing physically than some of the other attendees, he was not trying to make any non-credible claims to physical intimidation– no boots or shaved head, no obvious Nazi insignia, no tight T-shirt over bulging pectoral muscles – and so incurred no penalty on that front.

Viewed through this lens, much of what takes place at an alt-right meetup can be seen as posturing undertaken as part of the competition involved in a North American masculine homosocial dynamic. According to Kimmel (1994), generally speaking, men’s most primal fear is that other men will see that they are not who they are pretending to be; that their efforts to prove themselves are ultimately fraudulent. They are afraid of being unmasked as the sissy or the faggot. For this reason, many masculinities can be said to use misogyny and homophobia as organizing

principles: distance from womanhood and homosexuality is one barometer of success (David and Brannon, 1976). In order to stave off the terror, many men will engage in risky behaviours and go to great extremes to build up this distance.

Of course, increasingly large numbers of men are relatively unconcerned about being identified with femininity or queerness, while still retaining an attachment to masculine gender (Anderson 2012). Also, for those for whom this is a concern, this may not be because they personally feel that to be feminine or queer is to be fraudulent, but rather because they understand that to be feminine or queer can result in severe reprisals in the form of violence perpetrated by those who do. However, Kimmel is certainly right in that men – and indeed everyone – are often engaged in signaling gendered qualities that they feel to be desirable, downplaying qualities they don't, and trying to make sure they don't slip up in the delicate balancing act involved in getting the level of effort just right. In some circumstances this signaling may be relatively passive. In high-stakes male homosocial environments populated by young men, these signals can reach a fever pitch.

## Alt-Right Conceptualizations of Internal Masculine Social Hierarchies

The alt-right as an intellectual community has some understanding of these signals and has adopted theoretical languages for dealing with them and the male social jostling from which they spring. Based on my fieldwork, I have identified three separate but interrelated conceptualizations used by alt-right adherents regarding social hierarchies among relative peers, or internal masculine

social hierarchies. These three conceptualizations are the alpha/beta distinction, the high-quality/low-quality distinction, and signaling theory.

### **Alphas, Betas and the Manosphere**

The alt-right has deep connections to the ‘pick-up artist’ (PUA) scene and the rest of the reactionary masculinist parts of the Manosphere. Masculinism is an ideology which justifies patriarchy, naturalizes certain perceived differences between men and women, assumes that heterosexuality is ‘normal’, unquestioningly accepts the dominant or traditional sexual division of labour, and “gives primacy to the belief that gender is not negotiable” (Brittan, 1989, p. 4). The reactionary masculinism with which PUA thought is deeply embroiled is strongly influenced by ‘evolutionary psychology’ (Van Valkenburgh 2018; O’Neill 2018). This perspective, rejected or criticized by the majority of scientists studying evolution today (Van Valkenburgh 2018; Fuentes 2017), attempts to argue that an “adapted universal psychology” underlies all human behaviour and thought, and that direct conclusions can be drawn about various contemporary human behaviours based on hypothesized prehistorical environments, and vice versa (Fuentes 2017, 3). In the PUA community, male social behaviour is scrutinized zealously and combed over for clues regarding what women might like, which are interpreted according to an evolutionary psychology framework. A categorization system for male social hierarchy has been developed in which men are split into categories based primarily on their sexual success. This system functions as one “interpretive key” (Busher 2016, 78) for men affiliated with the alt-right, a way to frame and make sense of things. The classic distinction is alpha/beta, sometimes including omega, with an alpha

male signifying a man who is very sexually successful, beta describing mediocrity, and omega, when used, referring to those men who are exceedingly unsuccessful in their sexual life.

Critics of evolutionary psychology have noted that the field has a tendency to take ‘commonsense’ beliefs from dominant Western discourses and uncritically legitimate them using evolutionary theories. A common critique is that scholars in the field tend to ignore the wild profusion of existing human social structures where these structures conflict with their theories, preferring to base their ideas on an idealized “calculus of genetic self-maximization” often derived from the study of non-human animals (McKinnon and Silverman 2005, 106). Another critique is that the conceptualization of human prehistory that forms the basis for much of the theorizing done by evolutionary psychologists is not supported by the available archeological and anthropological evidence. This conceptualization tends to be one of a Rousseauian, essentially pre-cultural ‘State of Nature’, in which all humans lived in tiny isolated bands of close kin until a few thousand years ago with the rise of agriculture. The evidence instead suggests that “from the very beginning, human beings were self-consciously experimenting with different social possibilities”, including relatively large communities, and mobilized labour on a large scale for ritual building purposes (Graeber and Wengrow 2018). A tenet of evolutionary biology, echoed by masculinist pseudoscience, is that prehistoric humans evolved in circumstances (tiny bands) under which women had less access to subsistence due to the necessities of childcare work, and therefore needed a man to access resources for them, while men needed to “attract fertile women and ensure their fidelity” (McKinnon and Silverman 2005, 108).

This vision naturalizes the single-earner patriarchal nuclear family while failing to account for such human cultural commonplaces as babysitters (grandparents, friends, siblings and older children taking care of younger children) and efficient food production labour undertaken by

women in pre-/non-agricultural societies. Food production by sex varies between contemporary hunter-gatherer societies, with women providing the majority of subsistence calories in many groups (Coddington et al. 2011) and typically gathering steady but small harvests adequate to provide for themselves and offspring (Bird et al. 2009).

The common understanding of gender relations in the reactionary masculinist world is that women are hypergamous<sup>28</sup> and Machiavellian by nature because they evolved under circumstances where men wandered in a state of prehistoric liberty, un-henpecked, while women tried desperately to find strong men to impregnate them with superior genes. Some versions of this origin myth of the sexes also involve the claim that, in evolutionary settings, women would often or even usually try to then cuckold an oblivious male who, though weaker and inferior, could be relied upon to provide for her. In doing so he would essentially be furnishing her and her offspring with prehistoric child support payments (see for example Tomassi 2014). This story retroactively applies contemporary male anxieties around sex, sexuality, and gender relations to an imagined evolutionary past, and in so doing normalizes masculinist tenets – such as very strong gender differentiation, male superiority, female unproductivity and domesticity -- as fundamentally natural qualities of the material world rather than culturally specific, socially constructed variables.

One of the male anxieties at issue here is reflected in the preferred alt-right insult for men: ‘cuck’. This epithet, remarkably versatile in its layered connotations, is well worth a quick aside. Cuck is short for cuckold, a term with multiple interrelated meanings. The conventional meaning is a man who is unknowingly raising a child fathered by another man. A second meaning refers to a role within a kink dynamic, in which a woman has sex with another man while her partner, the ‘cuckold’, watches or sometimes participates in a submissive and often homoerotic capacity. A

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28 Hypergamy is the practice of mating with men of a higher social rank than one’s own.

third meaning refers to a category of pornography depicting variations on the above, often with a strong element of sexualized racial tension (or racialized sexual tension), as the scenario shown is frequently one in which the cuckold and his wife are white while the second man is black. As such, the insult manages to be simultaneously racist, sexist and homophobic, setting up a distinction between unambiguously straight, powerful, white men who would never consider allowing ‘their’ women to have sex with anyone else, let alone a man of another race, and weak, whipped men so pathetic and grovelling that they let black men have sex with their wives, and who even enjoy it, or pretend to. Importantly, it is a racist, sexist, homophobic insult leveled consciously at straight white men; they are not being accused of being homosexual, they are accused of possessing a hopelessly compromised heterosexuality. They are not accused of being like women, exactly, but rather of embodying such feeble masculinity that they cannot even control a woman, let alone stave off another man. They are not accused of being non-white, either; instead their whiteness is linked to their masculinity in such a way that the purported frailty of the latter is made to undermine the authenticity or purity of the former. The term constitutes a precise reflection of the far right’s preoccupation with “the twin threats of miscegenation and emasculation” (Berlet 2004, 30). As a metaphor, it is applied generously to opponents of the alt-right, implying that they are letting themselves or their country be symbolically cuckolded by Jews and people of colour – as is reflected in the alt-right’s term of choice for the mainstream right, ‘cuckservative’.<sup>29</sup> The slang word ‘based’ (an adjective meaning cool, strong, independent) is often used as a kind of opposite of ‘cuck’.

Reactionary masculinists argue that women are naturally attracted to powerful, aggressive males because they evolved to be that way. In a male-supremacist tract called *The Misandry*

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<sup>29</sup> The alt-right’s fictional/meme country of Kekistan is often depicted as being at war with ‘Cuckistan’.



*Bubble*, listed as ‘required reading’ on the sidebar of the reactionary masculinist PUA Reddit.com forum The Red Pill (TRP), the author imagines a “pre-civilized norm of alpha men monopolizing 3 or more young women each, replacing aging ones with new ones, while the masses of beta men fight over a tiny supply of surplus/aging women” (Khan 2010). This scenario echoes neo-Nazi David Lane's imagined “primitive and natural society” in which “the strongest or otherwise most successful male captures the most females and the most desirable females” (Dobratz and Shanks-Meile 2004, 126). Both visions seem to be based on the dominance hierarchies of gorillas and dismiss the staggering variety of sexual, relational, and kinship models practiced by humans across the globe and through time, all of which, like all human institutions, are “mediated by cultural understandings” (McKinnon and Silverman 2005, 113).

Not all men can be equally powerful and aggressive, so there are ‘alphas’ who embody these natural masculine traits most perfectly, and ‘betas’ and ‘omegas’ who cannot. In such a vision, women are assumed to be voraciously sexually attracted to alphas, flinging themselves at large, strong, square-jawed men who display the most evidence of domination and power; they “pursue wealthy and attractive male partners in what is considered to be an epiphenomenal expression of their material genetic imperatives” (Van Valkenbergh 2018, 6). Women are by contrast are only mildly attracted to betas, mostly for their stability and status as walking wallets, and to omegas not at all. Estimates by reactionary masculinists of women’s own understanding of this dynamic range from their being quite oblivious to it to their consciously hiding it from men as part of what amounts to a conspiratorial ‘sexual strategy’ disguised by feminism (Van Valkenburg 2018).

This understanding of heterosexual relations is shared with pick-up artists by other masculinist and male-supremacist tendencies such as Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) and

the separate but related ‘incel’ phenomenon. The difference between these tendencies lies in large part in the solutions they propose for the problems they perceive in heterosexual relations. Posts on the main MGTOW forum, [goingyourownway.com](http://goingyourownway.com), reveal that due to what users perceive to be the fundamentally parasitic nature of women, their predilection for cuckolding their partners, their universal indifference toward regular beta men, and the general state of runaway matriarchy prevailing in the modern world, users think the best solution is to avoid women altogether. By contrast, one of the main incel forums, [reddit.com/r/braincels](https://www.reddit.com/r/braincels), shows that incels believe that they are ‘omegas’, not really through any actions or behaviours of their own but rather through purely physical and immutable characteristics such as weak jaws or thin wrists, as opposed to what they call ‘Chads’ (alphas) and ‘normies’ (betas). They do not believe there is any way out of this situation and blame women as a class for incels’ lack of success in dating, seeing it as evidence of cruel and selfish shallowness on women’s part. Mainwhile, pick-up artist ideology, particularly in the form taken by The Red Pill, hinges largely on the idea that men who are ‘naturally’ beta males (and even omegas in certain circumstances) can attract women by fooling them into thinking that they are alphas (Van Valkenbergh 2018). They believe that this can be accomplished through methods usually classified by outsiders as tactics of grooming and abuse, such as purposeful physical boundary-crossing, insults and other displays of dominance, and the repeated extension and retraction of affection designed to confuse a woman and keep her emotionally off-balance.

Alt-right adherents frequently use the alpha/beta terminology and employ understandings of gender drawn directly from the positions I have outlined above. The putative primeval distinction between alphas and betas is assumed to continue into the present day, and the traits which are thought to attract or repel women are assumed to continue to correlate broadly with success or mediocrity in contemporary society. As such, even though the categories involved are

usually figured in terms of women's attention, they remain basically homosocial, in that women are not actually understood by reactionary masculinists to be social agents in the same way that men are.

In the alt-right, alphas are seen as natural leaders, but their status is relative to other men and the place of women in the equation is essentially as a sort of natural 'points system' with which their superiority can be measured. Betas are 'regular guys' who can either hack the gender system through 'taking the red pill', and enjoy sexual success, or wallow in their brainwashed blue-pill cuckoldry. Omegas are men who have essentially failed at masculinity; men who, in Kimmel's understanding, have been unmasked and revealed to be incapable of embodying their manhood successfully, as measured by the attention (or lack thereof) of desirable women. The term 'omega' is routinely levelled as a kind of total dismissal disqualifying someone from participation in the affairs of real men: a pitiful wretch. Some alt-right writers employ even more elaborate classifications, such as popular author 'Vox Day', real name Theodore Beale, who advocates a similar system but with seven categories instead, running all the way to lambda<sup>30</sup> (Vox Day 2011).

These systems of classification have been criticized from within the alt-right. As a far-right movement, the alt-right generally considers rigid, naturalized social hierarchies to be a good in and of themselves, so the notion of categorizing men in such a manner is not itself typically attacked. However, the heterosocial connotations of the alpha/beta pick-up artist social categorization system have been criticized as being not masculinist or homosocial enough. James

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30 The definition for his 'sigma' category, incidentally, is amusingly indicative of how many pick-up artists would presumably like to see themselves: "Sigma: The outsider who doesn't play the social game and manage [sic] to win at it anyhow. The sigma is hated by alphas because sigmas are the only men who don't accept or at least acknowledge, however grudgingly, their social dominance. (NB: Alphas absolutely hate to be laughed at and a sigma can often enrage an alpha by doing nothing more than smiling at him.) Everyone else is vaguely confused by them. In a social situation, the sigma is the man who stops in briefly to say hello to a few friends accompanied by a Tier 1 girl that no one has ever seen before. Sigmas like women, but tend to be contemptuous of them. They are usually considered to be strange. Gammas often like to think they are sigmas, failing to understand that sigmas are not social rejects, they are at the top of the social hierarchy despite their refusal to play by its rules."

Lawrence, another popular alt-right author, writes that both the original alpha/beta system and Beale’s extended version “rely too heavily on female approval of men as a criterion” (2018).

	<b>Top tier: effortlessly masculine, very attractive to women</b>	<b>Middle tier: average masculinity, not unattractive</b>	<b>Low tier: unsuccessful masculinity, actively unattractive</b>
<b>Red Pill</b>	Alpha	Beta	Omega, etc
<b>Incel</b>	Chad	Normie	Incel

*Figure 3. Various versions of the alpha/beta hierarchy. Note that to be intelligible, they all rely at least in part on a man’s relationship to women. Hypermasculinity often requires a tense combination of homosocial enactment and enforced heterosexuality.*

### **Signaling Theory and ‘White Sharia’**

In another one of his articles, James Lawrence (2017), mentioned above, discusses a second theoretical ground employed by the alt-right to understand social hierarchies: signaling theory. I mentioned this term on page 62, when Joe told me that the PUAs on The Red Pill no longer ‘countersignaled’ the alt-right much. Connelly et al. (2011) explain that signaling theory has been most extensively theorized in economics, where signaling is understood as a method of reducing information asymmetry between economic actors. For example, if two firms of differing quality have access to information about their own quality, but prospective investors do not, there is a difference in the respective access to information enjoyed by the investors and the representatives

of the firms. The two firms can then use various tangible symbols of quality, such as financial records, as *signals* to provide investors with information concerning something more intangible, their quality itself, with the goal of getting investors interested in putting money down. The higher-quality firm, having more convincing evidence, would be capable of sending a more convincing signal. Another example provided by Connelly et al. is that of a prospective employee signaling her 'quality' by providing an employer with proof that she has had an extensive higher education. Feltovitch, Harbaugh and To (2002) note that an important element in signaling is the cost of the signal; often an effective signal will be quite costly, as can be the case with higher education.

Since effective signals are costly, one might expect therefore that high-status, high-quality, or wealthy signalers would send the costliest signals, since they are most able to afford them. Feltovitch, Harbaugh and To argue that this is not the case. Instead, the highest-status signalers can rely on other information about themselves – their current job, background, reputation and so forth – being passively diffused into the signaling environment, effectively differentiating them from the lowest-status signalers pre-emptively. At that point, they can shift their focus toward differentiating themselves instead from the *medium*-status signalers. Since the medium-status actors cannot rely on background information as much, they are compelled to signal – and the highest-status actors can differentiate themselves by refusing to signal, which is called *countersignaling*. Feltovitch et al. (2002) give the examples of a bright student declining to answer the easy questions in class, considering them embarrassing, while mediocre students might jump at the opportunity; or a highly-respected person refusing to dignify slander with a response while the average person might angrily defend herself. This economic understanding of signaling theory is, broadly, the definition Lawrence uses in his article. He describes countersignaling as

‘the behavior where agents with the highest level of a given property invest less into proving it than individuals with a medium level of the same property’ [citing Wikipedia]. In other words, it means ‘showing off by refusing to show off’ – and thereby differentiating yourself from those who have to show off, in order to distinguish themselves from those who have nothing to show off. (2017)

Within the alt-right, accusations of countersignaling are widespread, and do not always conform to the standard definition, notes Lawrence (2017). I noticed this myself; once, Joe told me that a demonstration against refugees which had been organized with the attendance of all the major local far-right groups in mind had been ‘countersignaled’ by La Meute, had faltered as a result, and had eventually been canceled. Apparently La Meute had gotten wind of the fact that the optics of the demonstration could make them appear racist, and had pulled out in order to protect the non-racist image they attempt to cultivate. It is difficult to see how this would qualify as countersignaling according to the standard definition; in this case it seemed to be more about disavowing something because being associated with it would have been contrary to strategic goals. However, as Lawrence (2017) points out, the occasional misuse of the term does not mean there is not real countersignaling going on within the movement. Further, there is also a kind of sneaky mimicry of real countersignaling which can take place, wherein an agent of lower status might mimic a countersignal in order to *appear* like an agent of higher status. He gives the example of someone who might countersignal words like ‘cuck’, loudly refusing to use them, “not because they have a good reason why they are no longer useful, *but simply because they are becoming too widely used, like an obscure band that commits the sin of getting popular*” (2017, emphasis his). Or, he writes, someone might countersignal the alt-right as a whole, refusing to affiliate with it, not because they disagree but so that they can “look like deep original philosophers whose beliefs cannot be contained in any one political movement” (2017). This is a kind of false countersignaling which Lawrence believes can be dismissed as narcissistic posturing.

However, a more constructive form of true countersignaling can and should exist within the movement, Lawrence (2017) claims. The purpose of this type of countersignaling is two-fold; first, to conserve social capital instead of spending it gratuitously, just as an aristocrat might keep his money close and thus be able to leave it to his children, while a *nouveau-riche* might constantly feel the need to signal his status by laying piles of cash on the figurative table and end up broke. Second, by countersignaling aspects of alt-right messaging that are particularly attractive to low-status men, high-status men (among whom Lawrence, unsurprisingly, appears to count himself) could distinguish themselves, which for Lawrence constitutes a good in and of itself.

Lawrence (2017) gives the example of the ‘White Sharia’ meme<sup>31</sup> as an example of just such countersignal-worthy messaging. ‘White Sharia’, which is what attendees shouted at the only woman present at the meetup in order to stop her from talking, was described to me as “a joke, but not a joke”<sup>32</sup>. The meme is based on a misunderstanding of Islamic sharia law, a broad range of schools and practices which include progressive as well as conservative traditions. Sharia law is conflated in this meme with practices like purdah (a form of strict gender segregation traditional to the Persian world and northern India, including among some Hindu groups) and schools of thought such as Salafism and Deobandi, the puritanical revivalist sects of Sunni Islam from which Saudi and Taliban legal interpretations are drawn. Sharia in the alt-right formulation refers only to social and sexual control over women, not to any system of rules which would affect men. Originally developed by an alt-right blogger calling himself Sacco Vandal, the idea is that:

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31 I, like Lawrence, am using the term ‘meme’ to describe not only online image macros themselves but also the information or concepts that they successfully spread. In this case there are classic image macro-style internet memes about ‘white sharia’ but there is also the concept of white sharia itself, a joke/not-joke spread being spread by alt-right internet users.

<sup>32</sup> A good description, I have found, for a lot of alt-right content intended to shock.

calls for our people to adopt a *sharia*-like form of extreme patriarchy are an effective tactic because [...] it is the only living example of extreme patriarchy left in the world today [...] It is real, alive, and visible to everyone, glaring at us and taunting us for being alienated, atomized cosmopolitans. And let's be clear: our race and our people will disappear from the face of the Earth unless we implement a radical, rigid form of extreme, regimented patriarchy, even more extreme than what we in the West had in the past. Either we appropriate the successful tactics of those of our enemies who are winning against us due to their more patriarchal cultural forms, or we continue to lose the war. I don't like Muslims, but if they had invented the wheel, I would have no qualms about stealing it from them. (Vandal 2017)

According to Vandal, “extremely edgy and multi-layered irony” is the best way to reach American youth; the White Sharia meme is both “an extreme form of edgy and ironic humor [and] a distant beacon of the patriarchy we as a people need and will one day have. It is both a rallying cry for the disillusioned young men in our movement as well as their guiding light” (2017). The ‘humour’ derives from the unexpectedness of white supremacists advocating Islamic religious law and from the shocking images such a combination conjures. The phrase is also satirical insofar as it uses hyperbolic imagery to mock perceived contradictions in Western progressive ideologies, which are thought by adherents of the alt-right to simultaneously support feminism and, through tolerance for immigration, repressive foreign religious law (Lawrence 2017). By calling for sharia law to govern *white* women, those pushing the meme see themselves as humorously revealing the hypocrisy of progressives who, in their view, are happy to allow sharia law to flourish in Western countries. These progressives are seen as being too foolish, cowardly or hoodwinked to acknowledge that they are permitting the enslavement of ‘their’ women by foreign invaders (migrants). It may also be understood to be satirical in that it parodies the mindlessly evil Nazi archetype held by many people in the mainstream; ‘only an idiot would believe the joke, believe that we *really* want sharia law’.



Of course, as Vandal makes clear, this joke is not a joke. It is true that its originators may not want to copy Islamic law in a literal way, since they are not Muslims and see themselves in opposition to Islam. However, the disquieting images conjured when one is confronted with a neo-Nazi calling for ‘white sharia’ indeed reflect more or less what the pushers of the meme want, since, as with other white supremacists, they feel that the relative independence of women from men in the contemporary West threatens the racist project (Perry 2004). The policies underlying the ‘irony’ include repealing female suffrage, widely understood in the alt-right to have been disastrous for the West; ending no-fault divorce and removing women from the workplace, since the economic dependence of women on husbands and fathers is seen by the male-supremacist right to be a primary mechanism of control of which white men have been robbed by feminism; repealing any and all legislation motivated by an egalitarian spirit, since for these men, egalitarianism is a pernicious myth; and for some, literally reducing women as a class to sexual servitude enforced by a male-supremacist fascist state. The Southern Poverty Law Center reports that in a (now-deleted) blog post, Vandal explained that “we have to strip females of suffrage and most if not all political, legal, and economic power. [...] Our men need harems, and the members of those harems need to be baby factories” (Kelley 2017). This vision of harems for the foot-soldiers of the alt-right echoes both the ISIS policy of rewarding fighters with sex slaves and the misogynist dreams of older racist figures<sup>33</sup>.

Lawrence counsels ‘high-quality’ men to countersignal the ‘White Sharia’ meme, but is not the only alt-right thinker to have a problem with it. The dramatic disagreements about the meme on the far right played out in the comments below a video made by female YouTuber and

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<sup>33</sup> For example, David Lane, originator of the ‘14 words’, wrote a novel entitled *KD Rebel* in which racist revolutionaries seize control of parts of the US and kidnap white women for sexual use (Dobriatz and Shanks-Meile 2004).

white nationalist PhilosophiCat entitled ‘Watch Me Countersignal White Sharia’. Take the following comment thread [all sic]:

Kelley: The White Sharia meme is meant to expose the hypocrisy of liberal, White women, who to be blunt, are the albatross of Western Civilization. They are the single class of people who have turned their back on the very values & identity that have created them. No other group has ever done such a thing collectively. Women like you have their voices nullified because liberal women have no values, no principles, no dignity, etc They are the reason White race is endangered. And as far as I understand, White Sharia is meant to convey what a pathetic mess these women are by rubbing their noses in their own shit with this meme, which is reflecting their values back at them. It puts these women in a position to either accept it as a valid policy or admit that their entire world view is a concoction of Cultural Marxists.

PhilosophiCat: They are attacking white nationalist women, and the women who are the alleged targets of the meme don't even know about it. Yeah, so effective... not.

TRUECONSERVATIVEtm: They wouldn't be attacking you if you just accepted that Women should have their roles reverted to the pre-1960's.

Vandal FashKat: PhilosophiCat yea women who are willing to breed white babies and return to the home where they belong do their part of saving the white race will not be getting attacked, it's just the clueless feminist thots<sup>34</sup> who are refusing to breed and literally genociding us for the sake of having a career. true whit nationalist women are safe, its just bitches who don't know their place.

roksolana 1505: Kelley Thomas Take your "white sharia" and shove it straight up your ass! White women will NEVER "submit" to you.

salochin999: white sharia is a pro-Islam meme designed by anti-whites for divide and rule (PhilosophiCat, 2017)<sup>35</sup>

Clearly, the idea is not accepted by all within the alt-right. Some object to it on the grounds that it seems too pro-Islamic, others that it takes anti-feminism too far, into territory which divides the white race or disrespects white women. Some strongly believe that the whole thing is a counter-intelligence operation run by intelligence agencies and/or Jews. Its defenders typically retort that it is obviously a joke, but then, to the frustration of their colleagues in the movement and the confusion of everyone else, continue to act as though it is quite serious: one poster called

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34 ‘Thot’ stands for ‘That Hoe Over There’, and is a slur, synonymous with ‘slut’, which has been appropriated ‘ironically’ by the alt-right.

35 The video has since been removed by YouTube; in the bibliography I have included a link to an archived version of the page.

Starfighter\_Alpha\_88, in a comment under Vandal's (2017) article, writes, "Take one look into Nordic societies, and tell me with a straight face (I dare you!) that the women there don't need a very stern punishment, beginning with a period of forced burqa-fication." The way it was leveled at the woman present at the meet-up certainly suggested a solid degree of seriousness. Some agree that the meme is useful as a barbed joke, but also that the concept of white sharia isn't European enough; another comment under Vandal's article reads,

The only good thing about this meme is that it trolls alt-lite types who are anti-Islam only because it is anti-democratic, anti-feminist, anti-gay, etc. The problem with the Middle-Eastern invasion of Europe isn't an anti-liberal religious fundamentalism, it's that these people aren't us. That strength is also [the meme's] greatest weakness. These people aren't us, and Islamic brutality is fundamentally Semetic [sic] and anti-European.

James Lawrence takes a different tack. For him, one problem with the meme is aesthetic – the optics are bad. Another, apparently, is that it is misinformed – according to Lawrence, the gender system in Saudi Arabia actually privileges women, unlike what feminists would have you believe (2017). But most importantly, he argues, the sort of unmediated rage at women expressed by the meme and its pushers tends to attract the kind of men he does not want to be associated with. He explains,

what happens with ideological focal points that try to focus male anger squarely on women – as is the case with White Sharia, which provides an outlet for all sorts of violent and vengeful fantasies – is that they tend to fill up with males of objectively low human quality, who use them as therapeutic outlets for their unproductive whingeing and ranting. (No, this does *not* mean that everyone promoting the meme right now is a resentful omega male – only that such people will gradually cluster around the meme, and in time make it toxic to everyone else.) (Lawrence 2017)

These 'males of objectively low human quality' have a perfectly good point, Lawrence maintains. They are frustrated at the "the degraded behaviour of Western women, who have been liberated from any need for husbands and fathers by a managerial state that feeds them on the requisitioned

wealth of millions of men” (2017). The argument here, also a staple of the ‘incel’ phenomenon, is that since women are largely no longer dependant on husbands and other male family members, they can now participate in a sexual culture in which they exercise choice – or depending on who you ask, biological imperatives – in who they sleep with and who, or if, they marry. As a result, men who feel themselves to be unattractive to the majority of women (such as, perhaps, internet neo-Nazis) feel cheated out of sex. More specifically, they feel cheated out of what they perceive as the right to a wife whose sexuality and labour they can access, and the right to exercise authority over other female family members as well. Lawrence specifies that this anger deserves attention, writing, “I am not saying that we should be too ‘high-minded’ to give a voice to male social and sexual frustration, still less that we should follow sneering females and their bitch-boys in blaming all such frustration on the deficiencies of males themselves” (2017).

Thus, the problem with these ‘resentful omegas’ is not that they are resentful – it is that they focus all of their resentment on women, instead of competing with other men for *control* over women. For Lawrence, the whole issue of women’s ‘degraded behaviour’ (free choice in sex and marriage) can be sidestepped. According to the male-supremacist thought used in Red Pill/PUA culture, it is inevitable that women should behave in such a way, as they are scarcely more than genetic automatons, in thrall to their reproductive imperatives, and sexually insatiable – for certain kinds of ‘Alpha’ men, anyway – as a result. As one common Red Pill saying goes, AWALT – ‘All Women Are Like That’. Instead of being enraged at the perfectly normal behaviour of women, which for him makes as little sense as being enraged at the natural behaviour of an animal, Lawrence feels that men need to engage with the ‘real’ problem:

What men can do well, and very seriously, is to *fight other men for possession of women* – which is why the Alt-Right should, as I have suggested, focus instead on the male managerial elite that has made all the excesses of Western women possible by usurping the position of husbands and fathers, and channel male anger against this

elite into the general project of cutting our people loose from the Cosmopolitan managerial state. [...] One way to make use of the anti-managerialist view would be *to consciously allow it to become a focus of countersignaling*: by choosing to focus less on the evils of women, and focusing more on our struggle against the managerial elite that enables these evils, higher-quality men could differentiate themselves from the morass of sour grapes without backsliding into a pro-feminist point of view. [italics his] (2017)

Lawrence is arguing that disavowing (countersignaling) the White Sharia meme could serve a useful purpose: not to uphold the liberty and humanity of women, or female comrades in the struggle, or even one's sisters and mothers, but rather to distinguish oneself from deficient males who are simply motivated by jealous resentment. The basic premise of the white sharia meme is correct for Lawrence – white women should be stripped of basic rights and freedoms and forced into marriages enforced by an authoritarian state in order to give white men access to sex and facilitate a racially-motivated baby boom. The real issue with the meme is that losers have flocked to it. They do not understand that the real target should be the 'Cosmopolitan managerial state', not women themselves, who are presumably barely aware of what they are doing and anyway are property to be fought over by men, not really agents in their own right. These losers are giving the movement a bad name, but happily are able to provide the service of acting as a backdrop against which high-quality men like Lawrence can stand out.

Interestingly, if one adopts the lens of signaling theory, the whole 'White Sharia' phenomenon can itself be seen as an attempt at countersignaling in the first place. Men who are struggling to form fulfilling relationships with women – the “dregs of the sexual marketplace”, to quote Lawrence (2017) – are essentially removing themselves from that marketplace by denying that it should exist. In this sense they are like the office drone employee in the 1999 film *Office Space*, who, having been accidentally hypnotized into not caring about consequences anymore, wins over interviewers sent in to downsize the company by showing up in jeans and calmly telling them that he hates his job and does only a few hours of real work a week, leading to the downsizers

enthusiastically marking him as definite management material. These men are proclaiming themselves to be so masculine, so resistant to the soft, blue-pilled, feminized and feminist mainstream, that unlike all the other peacocks strutting around showing off their plumage to impress the females of the species, they are completely indifferent to the desires of women. In fact, not only do they not care about the desires of women, but they actively oppose those desires and declare them to be worthless at best and dangerous at worst. In *fact*, not only do they oppose the desires of women, but they just hate women in general – and make misogynist memes as “therapeutic outlets for their unproductive whingeing and ranting”, to quote Lawrence again (2017).

If these men are motivated in their misogyny primarily through failing at the aspect of mainstream masculinity which demands sexual prowess, they may have a strong fear of being named the faggot or the sissy. They would therefore have a strong incentive to overplay their hand with things like the white sharia meme. I say overplay because while the likelihood of a wave of ultra-reactionary revolutions resulting in a post-feminist new world order is up for debate, it does not take a social sciences degree to guess that in the current mainstream climate, the likelihood of “getting laid” or gaining respect by advocating for the enslavement of women is probably low.

However, in an ideologically boundaried homosocial environment like an alt-right meeting, taking a hard line – an exaggeratedly hard line in some cases – can win you status points. Lawrence points out that far-right activists with less-than-glowing pasts can “signal maximum anti-Semitism – you’ll gain some status as ‘the guy with the hardest line on the Jews’, even though your words about Jews on the internet are not worth a fraction of someone else’s functioning organisation” (2017). This goes some way to explaining my informant Derek’s comments about anti-Semitism being a sort of hook with which to reel in new recruits who may not be the most

intellectually sophisticated. Lawrence mentions that while becoming vocally anti-Jewish can be socially costly for people who want to appear respectable, “this step is taken much more easily in the case of a loser in life who has nothing left to lose, and this is reinforced by the fact that the Jewish Question is easily grasped by duller people while other aspects of the Alt-Right are not” (2017). Derek may have been trying to articulate something like this perspective. In any case, being able to credibly take a hard line can be useful for an individual attempting to bolster his social standing.

Lawrence’s critique reveals a further, more complicated dynamic: that individuals in a given signaling environment may struggle over the ‘right’ to signal or countersignal. Connelly et al. note that

if a signaler does not have the underlying quality associated with the signal but believes the benefits of signaling outweigh the costs of producing the signal, the signaler may be motivated to attempt false signaling. If this were to happen, misleading signals would proliferate until receivers learn to ignore them. Thus, to maintain their effectiveness, the costs of signals must be structured in such a way that dishonest signals do not pay. (2011, 45)

Low-status men pushing the white sharia meme are using false signaling, since they are overplaying their hands. It can be seen as a gambit used to accumulate social ‘points’, but one which ultimately rests on a false representation of one’s real ‘underlying quality’. This representation is false because a low-status man actually cannot ‘afford’ the signal he is countersignaling. To put it in terms of one of the examples given earlier, he is like a student refusing to answer a teacher’s questions not because he is too bright to bother but because he does not know the answers. A man who believes himself to be capable of attracting women regardless of what he says believes that he can ‘afford’ extreme misogyny as a countersignal, while a man who is motivated by resentment over his lack of sexual success knows that he is signaling falsely.

Over time, such false signaling could result in a degradation of overall credibility for all individuals engaged in that signal or countersignal. Other men in the alt-right, who are often acutely aware of their position in the hierarchy and see themselves as ‘high-quality’, wish to maintain the credibility of their own signals and countersignals, which is threatened by the false signaling and false countersignaling. Therefore, it makes sense for them to ensure that the cost of false signaling is high. One way to do this is related to the observation I made earlier in this chapter, that failed attempts to assert oneself in male homosocial environments can incur a heavy penalty; men can put each other down directly when they perceive their peers to be vulnerable to having their credibility questioned, just as was done to Andrei. This is equivalent to calling out false signaling. Another way is refuse to engage in a particular signal, just what Lawrence is arguing for in relation to the ‘white sharia’ meme – in effect, countersignaling the false countersignaling.

<b>Topic: Heterosexual Relations</b>	<b>Signal</b>	<b>Countersignal</b>
<b>True</b>	“I am attractive!” (Is mid-tier)	[Silence] (Is top-tier)
<b>False</b>	“I am attractive!” (Is low-tier)	“White sharia!” (Is bottom-tier)

*Figure 4. Lawrence’s vision of an alt-right signaling environment focused on the topic of heterosexual relations. Mid- and low-tier men both attempt to signal their attractiveness to women, but low-tier men are signaling falsely. Bottom-tier men falsely countersignal the whole topic via the ‘white sharia’ meme. Top-tier men, through their silence, legitimately countersignal not only the men trying to appear attractive (the mid- and low-tier men) but also the men trying to appear unconcerned with attracting women (the bottom-tier men).*



## High-Quality versus Low-Quality Men

A set of terms used frequently by my informants is high-quality versus low-quality men, as in Lawrence's article where he refers to "resentful omega males" as "males of objectively low human quality" (2017). Quality is one of the most direct and severe ways to differentiate between human beings. It is also, in its ambiguity, a versatile framework. One's 'quality' is often seen as something over which one has only a limited degree of control, so the term connotes insurmountable hierarchies in keeping with the far right's penchant for biological determinism. It therefore ties in neatly with eugenic discourses which rank human 'races' based on their inherent 'quality' and echoes the language often used by racists around IQ. (It is important to note however that I have not seen the term often leveled against non-white men or against women, who seem to not often be ranked on the same scale as white men, being seen as fundamentally incommensurate.)

At the same time, a strong streak of self-improvement rhetoric also runs through the alt-right. Adherents typically like to see themselves as people who have transcended hardship to arrive at a place of rightful status that was waiting for them all along. In this sense, calling someone low-quality can have simultaneous (or competing) connotations of inherent inferiority and insufficient will-power to become high-quality. In using the term, a sense of value-free neutrality can also be leveraged – we're not saying you're a bad person, we're just saying that you're low-quality; it's no one's fault. It is in this sense that the term is used in economics, such as in the examples concerning signaling theory given earlier in the chapter. A disproportionate number of the men I interviewed had ties to finance, banking and business, and I suspect that at least part of the term's popularity among them derives from this fact even if it is also used by alt-right men with no

discernible tie to economics. Different actors within the alt-right have different conceptions of what constitutes a ‘low-quality’ peer.

Out of all of my informants, Joe, an image-conscious man in his early 30s with a background in finance, uses the terms low- and high-quality most frequently. Though he described the Montreal alt-right group to me as a kind of social club, I never saw him acting in a particularly friendly manner toward anyone. He rarely smiled, and when he drank he became more impatient and bossy with his comrades rather than more laid-back or jovial. Blee (2003) notes that in racist groups activists often feel a sense of contradiction between their striving for an impossible Aryan purity and the more banal reality of their comrades, who sometimes are far from embodying these ideals. For Joe and many others within the movement, there is a constant tension between the attempts of more strategically-minded men to build up what they openly refer to as a ‘brand’ for their groups, and what they see as the frustratingly tone-deaf, crude, or divisive behaviour of many of their colleagues. The class divide within the group often makes itself felt along this axis of tension. Those with whom Joe disagrees are usually deemed low-quality, while he and his confidantes are considered high-quality. People whose displays of masculinity are questionable are also low-quality. He is critical of people he considers low-quality getting too close to positions of authority within the group. Anyone hoping to find comradeship and belonging in the alt-right group, thought by most scholars to be an incentive for joining far-right outfits (Blee 2003; Busher 2016; Caiani et al. 2012; Bjørgo 2009), would be unlikely to find them in Joe.

Joe seems to have little respect for most activists outside his immediate cadre. He told me about meeting the men running the then-popular Canadian alt-right podcast *This Hour Has 88*

*Minutes*<sup>36</sup>, telling me that they were “low-quality” and “short, fat nerds who won’t take any risks” and “have no balls”. His view of quality is often couched in classist language around appearance. He described members of the Traditionalist Workers Party (TWP), a now largely defunct US fascist organization, as low-quality as well: “The super fashy TWP stuff isn’t good optics. It doesn’t have a lot of resonance. They’re dirty and they’re tattooed and they’re waving swastikas around. Basically they’re LARPing<sup>37</sup>.” He described Québec City-based fascist group Atalante in similar, but slightly more sympathetic terms: “They have that skinhead thing going on, the skinhead styling. Which we don’t like. But the leader is very ideological so they have that. And for them the trashy thing is okay, because they’re a regional Québec group. Québécois people are trashy and have tattoos and everything.” He recounted that at a major regional alt-right conference he had attended, a neo-Nazi skinhead with many visible tattoos had shown up and been ejected due to his image. “Skinheads,” Joe told me, “are broken people with problems. Hanging out with skinheads means you lose the air of reasonableness.” Of the regional conference, “there were three high-quality guys there,” he told me, and then named himself and two of the leader figures in the Montreal group.

Joe’s distaste for ‘low-quality’ activists was not confined to people in other groups. He spoke approvingly of a new rule instituted for the alt-right meet-ups forbidding attendees from getting drunk (though he himself was drinking almost every time I saw him), saying that it was contributing to an atmosphere which was not serious enough. He said that in some other far-right groups, particularly ones associated with the Identitarian movement, which have a strong emphasis

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<sup>36</sup> ‘88’ being a common neo-Nazi code, wherein the number 8 stands for the 8<sup>th</sup> letter of the alphabet, therefore signifying ‘HH’ for ‘Heil Hitler’. The name is a play on *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, a popular Canadian news comedy show.

<sup>37</sup> LARP stands for Live-Action Role Play, a recreational activity in which participants don mock armour and weapons and enact elaborate fantasy battles. It is associated with nerd culture and is used as a pejorative meaning play-acting, not to be taken seriously, etc.

on optics, “they’d kick you out immediately if you got drunk and started *sieg heiling*.” He noted that some people he knew in the alt-right were ‘low-quality’ because they had done things like impregnate teenagers. Racist activists sometimes lose the ability to work due to repercussions and are drawn into poverty (Blee 2003, 9). Joe calls this “welfare activism”, the state of affairs arising when such a person decides to live on welfare and spend more time doing activism. His disdain for welfare recipients was tempered slightly in the case of fellow racist activists, “but only if they are healthy and fit.” At one meet-up, I saw him – and nearly everyone else – completely ignore one overweight man who showed up. This man was a classic stereotype of someone ‘from the internet’ – big, slouching, in an extra-large sweater and too-baggy jeans, with glasses, acne, greasy hair, and huge headphones hung around his neck. Virtually no one spoke to him and he lurked uncomfortably around the margins of the group, looking painfully awkward. Though the deep internet culture of 4chan, 8chan, Reddit and so on are an important part of the alt-right’s makeup, such an ‘omega’ masculinity was avoided as though it might be contagious, perhaps being seen as not looking serious or masculine enough.

There were also people like Bernard, who could get uncomfortably passionate about his beliefs. During my last interview with him, Joe told me that he had “put him [Bernard] in his place” for getting too preachy about religion – a lapse into low quality that threatened the status quo of the group. Bernard, a militantly Christian fascist, talked about quality in a different way, repeatedly using a race-based analogy to describe low-quality men. He also tended to equate low quality with degeneracy, an important frame used in far-right, especially fascist, discourse. Fascism stresses ‘palingenetic ultranationalism’, calling for national rebirth or cultural reversal from a state of having been brought low by evil forces (Griffin 2017). This low point is often thought of in terms of degeneracy: a decline in desirable faculties and properties, whether moral, physical, cultural or

otherwise, on the level of the civilization/race as a whole but also on the level of individuals. Some individuals are seen to be more degenerate than others, perhaps through no fault of their own necessarily, but certainly with consequences. Bernard likes to call such people ‘white niggers’, making clear his disdain for them through the use of the racial epithet.

He related to me his journey into the heavy metal scene and his eventual exit due to the degeneracy he perceived. He told me:

When I was 14 I got really into metal, and I learned guitar, and I would just even skip class and like practice all day, and I was very antisocial, in that sense, so like, I had a yearning, I had a transcendence, like this feeling, like it was this theme throughout my whole life essentially, a yearning for something more, you could call it a ‘will to power’<sup>38</sup>, right, that I was never able to satisfy. And I didn’t realize why this is the case, so I thought at first, “oh it’s metal!” This is the first thing that really hooked me right? And the thing is – metal is mostly white [laughing], right, it’s a mostly white culture.

A period of illness changed Bernard’s perceptions and made him question his allegiance to the metal subculture:

I started realizing, “okay, the metal scene, it’s a little bit degenerate, these people” – you know, I did it as well, I participated in the degenerate lifestyle, uh, different woman every single night, and the uh, get drunk every single night, go to a different city, do the exact same thing. I was touring and everything. I was very busy, full-time. And it was fun, yeah, but it was degenerate. And I started seeing, “but okay, these people don’t have the same will to power as I do”, you know, you could call them, like, in the alt-right [smiling] you would call them ‘white niggers’, right? [laughing] They’re like, white niggers. That’s how, uh, it was a traditional way that you know Americans used to call white trash, right.

Other groups for whom he reserved the term included skinheads and the KKK, as well as some people within the alt-right. He described white supremacist author Jared Taylor as the opposite of such a person, saying “Jared Taylor is not a KKK, low-IQ, white nigger. He’s an academic, you have to respect his work.” While explaining degeneracy to me, he said:

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38 A prominent concept in Nietzsche’s philosophy, popular with far-right activists.

Our civilization is degenerated in the sense that it's less of what it was. That's what it means to 'degenerate'. It's decomposed. And this gives a certain – low-class aspect to it. For example, skinheads... [pause] are seen as white niggers by the alt-right. Right? Because they're degenerate. Because they're low-IQ, they cause violence for no reason. It's not white culture to degenerate, that's what it means. In the right, there are also others who don't call themselves *alt-right* because they don't wanna be associated with the degeneracy.

The degeneracy he sees within the alt-right includes too strong an affiliation to the pick-up artist scene, groups who accept gay men, the acceptance of pagan or otherwise anti-Christian members, and an over-reliance on crass humour and memes, among other elements. He thinks about optics differently than Joe, being less interested in having everyone look suave and clean-cut, but like Joe reserves a great deal of disgust for fat people, as well as for visibly gay men:

The alt-right disavowed Milo, the *Daily Stormer* disavowed Milo, because Milo was not alt-right, why? Because he is homosexual and he doesn't renounce it. [pause] It's not that they're against reforming homosexuals. But, living in sin – you can't do that. Or if you're fat and obese you can't represent our movement. Even if you're a nice guy, even if you agree, because... you don't live it.

On the topic of gay men, Bernard renounces the idea of sexual orientations, taking a strict conservative Christian perspective in which “homosexual acts” are a choice which some men engage in and which they must renounce in order to be good Christians and good fascists. He believes that the urge to make those choices constitutes a fetish arising from childhood sexual abuse – but that in many ways, the worst part of ‘homosexuality’ is not the sexual acts themselves but an associated culture of effeminacy contrary to traditional masculinity:

No matter what happens to you as a kid, if it's sexual in nature it will give you a fetish that you will later on want to follow. And grow into, essentially. And homosexuality is kind of like a fetish. It's something which always existed in culture, especially white culture, Greeks and Romans: they engaged openly in pederasty [*sic – he means pederasty*] and homosexual sex, but, in restricted ways. Not even like what we have today. They wouldn't let fags walk around and, and *promote* [his voice fills with disgust] um, non-masculine ideals, and, and being *pussies* and fags and degenerating our culture. They wouldn't tolerate these things from fags, either. They'd say "stop being a faggot". It's a term – even Milo uses it in a certain way – it's like calling someone a nigger<sup>39</sup>, like – don't be a faggot, don't be a *feminist*. Live up to what you are. Right?

Like many far-right activists, Bernard feels that "racial purity cannot be sustained without strict adherence to rigid constructions of appropriate gender and sexual behaviour" (Perry 2004, 76).

Ben, another highly religious informant, was shocked when I told him that the group of which he was a member started out as a pick-up artist club.

Ben: Sexual immorality is a sign of a sick nation, a sick people that are about to be destroyed. And I'm not just against homosexuality. I'm also against one man going around having sex with multiple girls. I would put that guy in the same category as a gay man. Sexual immorality.

J: How do you feel about the pick-up artist roots of the group that you're in?

Ben: The pick-up artist roots? As in some of these guys are uh...

J: Before it was an alt-right group, it was a pick-up artist group.

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<sup>39</sup> He is referring here to his view that this word, when applied to white people, is a judgement that they are not living up to their true racial potential. He may also be alluding to the view held by some people that the word is only for 'bad' black people and therefore should not be considered an offensive racist term.

Ben: Are you serious? I actually didn't know that. Uh, well, I read a book on that. It was called *The Game*. Neill Strauss I think was the author. I read the book, thought it was interesting, and I actually went to a bar one night and tried the routine. And I was shocked, I saw it absolutely worked. And I thought it was one of the most disgusting, shallow, uh, it was a mind-game. These guys literally built a formula on how to get girls' numbers. [...] It's manipulative and uh, no actually I had no idea that my group started off as a pick-up artist group. That to me disgusts me. I'm very pro-marriage. One man, one woman, you know, love each other, sacrifice for each other, build a family, you're going to die one day, raise your family, raise your kids right, and leave this planet knowing you left it a better place. To me it's very degrading towards women to go into a bar, play a mind-game with them, just so you can get in their pants.

Ben went on to explain his belief that men were in part responsible for what he sees as the dangerous rise of feminism:

If men were just a little bit more grateful to their wives, most women would laugh at the idea of feminism. If most men weren't out picking up girls, using manipulative tactics, just to sleep with them for a night, women would have a different approach to the men in society. You know, women would laugh at feminism today. They would say why would I wanna work – I wanna be a mom, I wanna be there for my husband, I wanna support him. And this is the foundation of a healthy society. And because men have kind of failed to do their jobs... for instance, me, I find, I always pay for women. Doesn't matter if they're my girlfriend, or just a friend, or a stranger. I will always pay for a woman if they're in my presence. I feel like it's a man's job to do that. And my Québec woman friends never felt comfortable with this. And then I found out why. And it's super interesting. Because the mindset of the average Québec or Ontario guy is: if you pay for a woman, for dinner, the man's now expecting something. He's expecting sex. So the women would rather be independent and actually throw in her half to avoid this... you know... [pause]

J: ... like a power dynamic?



Ben: Right, this power dynamic, to disarm the man from actually having the right to say, “well now you owe me, I bought you dinner, I took you out, we went to the movies, what are you gonna gimme now.”

J: Right.

Ben: So uh, I understand women. I’m anti-feminism but I understand it. And I think men need to be more, you know — there’s no shame in, man look, I’ve raised kids, I’ve worked in a factory, um, I’ll come home from working the factory and tell my wife, “take three hours off, I got the kids.”

In a National Socialist society, he told me, feminism would make no sense, because the male fecklessness and sexual immorality driving it would not exist.

Out of all my informants, Ben is the most ardently enthused with Hitler and German, WWII-era Nazism. He is also, counter-intuitively, probably the informant with the position most sympathetic to women. He grew up in and out of shelters with his single mother, a troubled woman and a survivor of brutal intimate-partner violence at the hands of Ben’s father, and he refers to this fact often and makes sure to stress his respect for mothers and his distaste for crass overt misogyny. His interpretation of feminism is “trying to make women into men”, so it is unlikely that he would ever describe himself as a feminist. His views are very conservative, emphasizing women’s roles as mothers and caregivers and men’s as breadwinners and leaders. His stance on gender relations is ‘pro-feminist’ only relative to the extreme misogyny characterizing the views of many of his comrades. Nevertheless his position represents a dramatic departure from the ‘mainstream’ line within the alt-right generally and within the Montreal group. He was visibly uncomfortable with the un-Christian implications of the pick-up artist angle, and told me that as an old-school Nazi, his major point of difference with the alt-right proper was on its lack of commitment to proper Christian values, among which he placed respect for women.

For Ben, a high-quality comrade is one who is a committed practicing Christian, a follower of orthodox National Socialism, and one who intends to raise children within a committed heterosexual partnership. He has little patience for meme culture or edgy posturing. He, like Joe and Bernard, hates neo-Nazi skinheads. He also came to be uncomfortable with calling himself, or being called, a racist. In my final interview with him, he told me about some of these reservations, which were becoming more and more difficult for him to ignore. His comments are illuminating:

The most dangerous thing we have to the National Socialist movement are these “neo-Nazis”. These guys with [singsong cadence] shaved heads and dress like punks, and uh, giving *sieg heils* and covered in tattoos. Um, the typical Jewish Hollywood version of a neo-Nazi. Look, you wanna go back to Germany, lets define a Nazi. Nazis were married men with children and very hard-working. Kay? They were clean-cut, no tattoos, just your traditional European – I mean look at how the Nazis dressed. Look at their uniforms. Look at how clean and proper these men were. And the Germans are known for being the hardest-working people, the most organized people on the planet. There’s no one more organized, more logical, than Germans. So what you see, this image that they’ve projected through the media and through this neo-Nazi garbage, these plants, I would totally call them plants, *or* misguided people, um... Hardcore racist, you know, racist for no reason. Hitler was not a *racist*. Hitler wanted to see every race be the best that they could be and put their own people first. I mean you listen to his speeches. He never yelled at blacks, or... you know, or hated anybody. He hated uh, Jews, and he attached them to Bolshevism, and communism, right. Which I don’t blame him and it’s very true. Uh, so... these guys that are in the movement, these ‘neo-type’ Nazis, I fight with them all the time. I’m hardcore Christian with these Christian values. And these guys fight me tooth and nail. They wanna go back to some Pagan occultic [sic] Earth-worshipping ancient-European-style religion. So, serious clashes. What are they, are they alt-right, are they National Socialist? I’m finding there’s two different things here, the alt-right is one thing. Alt-right people are not necessarily National Socialists.

J: Mm-hm.

Ben: And I started realizing this after I talked to you, after the last time we talked. Uh, um, cuz me and Bernard, we don't fit in with some of the other guys.

J: Right. Yeah because you guys are like, really *fascists* right.

Ben: You know, we're hardcore fascists. But I don't hate anybody. Nobody. I treat everybody equal. Um, so, and this is what I'm gonna say, as a National Socialist: we don't hate anybody. Uh but we do want to defend our homeland. And defend our tribe and defend our people.

J: But I think you're in a minority of the people who call themselves 'National Socialists', man. I think most of those people are probably skinheads and so on.

Ben: [pause] Yeah. Yeah, it's not an easy battle, man. I'm... we are out-numbered and we're hated on both sides. We're hated from the communists, the Antifa groups; and then we're also, even within our own groups we are not uh, 100%. We're fighting people within our own group.

J: Mm-hm.

Ben: To uh, to not be so *ignorant*. Like, the ignorance that comes outta these people when talking about women and about other races and stuff, it's just *illogical*, you know, and then you can sympathize *for* the Antifa people, you can sympathize *for* the opposite side all of a sudden *when you see the ignorance*. This pure hatred – you just hate that guy because he's *black*. You know? I'm sorry, fuck you. You know? Um, look, I don't wanna move to a black neighborhood. I see what happens when blacks are together in their, in their, you know, culture, in there. And I don't want any part of that. But, I'm not gonna [laughs jovially] hate some guy, uh, because of the colour of his skin, and I find a lot of the guys in the alt-right will just hate someone. Or these neo-Nazis, they're just gonna hate someone for the colour of their skin. But there were Indian Nazis, there were African Nazis, and you can Google this... anyone from any part of the world could join the Waffen SS. It was a multicultural unit.

J: Hm.

Ben: So don't tell me the Nazis were racist, you know. The stereotypical Nazi, today, is nothing [pounds fist on table] like the traditional, [pound] Adolf Hitler, [pound] Nazi Germany Nazi. There's a whole world of difference. I bet you most of these skinheads aren't married, they don't have children, they don't have family values or family principles. Nobody loved women more than the Nazis. They praised their women, they said their women are the backbone of their country.

J: Right.

Ben: Y'know, and they *are*. And a lot of the guys in the group, they're anti-women. They don't just hate you because of the colour of your skin, but they also hate women.

Ben is certainly a white supremacist, in the sense that his goal is a racially-regimented Canada, legally, socially and economically dominated by whites, without 'Third World' immigration and with second-class citizenship or deportation for any remaining non-white residents. However, like many people, he equates the term 'racism' with an active and irrational hatred of others based on skin colour. He does not think of himself as someone who actively hates others, and distinguishes himself from what he sees as the banal mindlessness of skinhead culture. In this interview he is also distancing himself from the purposefully offensive and inflammatory content typical of major alt-right neo-Nazi website *The Daily Stormer*, which regularly uses slurs, calls for 'white sharia', foments race war and attempts to appear as racist as possible. He is also clearly a sexist who believes strongly in different, biologically and religiously ordained roles for women and men, but thinks of himself as someone who respects women a great deal and is strongly opposed to the casual hatred of women common in the alt-right. He presents himself as a reasonable, moderate,

regular working-class guy who isn't trying to hurt anyone, and who just happens to support National Socialism as a great model for Canada.

These three men have divergent ideas about a comrade's quality. All three of their conceptualizations, however, relate directly to masculinity. It may be true that this is because they can scarcely imagine a woman who they might treat as an equal political actor, but it is revealing nonetheless. Many struggles within the alt-right scene map onto a struggle over the correct kind of masculinity or posture toward masculinity. Joe aims at a relatively cultivated, secular, smooth, bourgeois white masculinity which can be leveraged for optics and branding to present the 'alternative right' as just what the name is calculated to suggest: a sophisticated, youthful alternative to conservatism, just as serious but with a fresh and exciting take on identity. Bernard is invested in what could be called a kind of modern "Crusader masculinity" (Holt 2013): zealously Christian, intense in affect, contemptuous of femininity, paternalistically populist, deeply invested in hierarchy as a principle, somewhat courtly in mannerism, and emphasizing values such as honour and valour. Ben values an idealized conservative-revolutionary, family-first, blue-collar, folksy (or *völkisch*) Christian masculinity seemingly taken straight from a WWII-era propaganda poster.

	<b>High Quality</b>	<b>Low Quality</b>	<b>Preferred masculinity</b>
<b>Joe</b>	Himself; strict Euro identitarian groups	Skinheads; LARPing; “short, fat nerds”; “dirty and [...] tattooed”; too religious	Secular bourgeois
<b>Bernard</b>	Jared Taylor; “will to power”; Christianity	“Degenerates”; “white niggers”; skinheads/KKK; low-IQ; obesity; homosexuality/ effeminacy	‘Crusader’
<b>Ben</b>	Christian values; marriage/family; classical Nazis; “clean-cut, no tattoos, just your traditional European”	“Sexual immorality”; “racist for no reason”; pagans; neo-Nazis/skinheads	Blue-collar Christian

*Figure 5. Informants’ understandings of high-quality and low-quality people, and their preferred mode of masculinity*

## Conclusion

Deep divisions run through the alt-right on a number of axes. Many of these divisions are played out on the terrain of masculinity. Masculinity, as it is enacted in the alt-right, is mostly a homosocial affair, with women in the movement being vanishingly rare and accorded little importance as actors. The competitive element of homosocially enacted masculinity is theorized by members of the alt-right group primarily through the frames of an evolutionary psychology-influenced dominance hierarchy using the terms alpha and beta; through an economics framework using the terms signaling and countersignaling; and through a spectrum of worth using high or low quality as indicators.

Alt-right adherents, as with other men, often competitively attempt to most successfully enact masculinity, and judge one another on these attempts. These attempts can be, and often are, understood through the framework of signaling by members of the alt-right. Men who perceive themselves as high-quality or high-status – who believe that they are enacting masculinity much more successfully than others – can contest the grounds upon which certain signals and countersignals of masculinity can be made, in an attempt to maintain an environment in which false signaling is costly. In doing so they are defending their ability to credibly countersignal so that they may maintain their perceived position within the social hierarchy of the group.

However, my ethnographic data suggests that the struggle over who can most successfully enact hegemonic masculinity is not the only struggle at play. What is also at stake is what *qualifies* as hegemonic masculinity, or more precisely, *which* masculinity is most correct for an alt-right adherent to enact. Coles (2017) writes that struggles around hegemonic masculinity are not only played out on a structural, society-wide field; rather, “various subfields exist [accounting] for the variety of dominant masculinities that may be present at any given time” (31). To successfully define *the* hegemonic masculinity through one’s actions is to devalue other versions of masculinity (Beynon 2002). Biological-determinist theories of gender notwithstanding, my informants have an intuitive understanding of the existence of a spectrum of different possible masculinities. These may be understood as gradations from purity to degeneracy, or from being a good Christian to sin and heathenism, or from being classy to being crass. One can be an alpha or a beta, based<sup>40</sup> or a cuck. These gradations amount to an array of possible masculinities over which alt-right adherents contend. When describing low-quality and high-quality masculinity, my informants do not describe identical characteristics, and indeed find themselves clashing significantly depending on

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A slang term appropriated by the alt-right, meaning solid, cool, independent, strong..

their own understandings of what makes a good fascist or a good Christian or a real man. Interestingly, one of the most hypermasculine archetypes available in white Western culture, the skinhead, is universally maintained by my informants to represent low quality, even though, as Joe told me, “We probably have the same basic values [as skinheads], but we have a different brand.”

With regard to high quality, opinions vary. All three of the masculinities I outlined – white bourgeois masculinity, ‘Crusader’ masculinity, and Nazi proletarian masculinity – contain within them the seeds of threateningly un-masculine elements. Bourgeois masculinity can be seen to be weak and effeminate, with its pretentious intellectualism, its emphasis on appearance, its chasing after women and its distance from manual labour and the land. An extremely religious masculinity like Bernard’s can be problematic in another way. One man in the group told me that he was planning to join the priesthood in a denomination which generally demands clerical celibacy. As in medieval Europe, where real Crusader masculinity was first developed theoretically by religious authors, the resolution of male celibacy with masculinity’s traditional focus on having sex with women is problematic (Holt 2013). Further, Bernard’s ardency and earnestness about his faith clash with the unflappable, cool-minded trope valued in many people’s idea of proper masculinity. Meanwhile, Ben’s repudiation of overt misogyny, his disapproval of casual sex, and his willingness to emphasize parenting as an appropriate activity for men contrasts starkly with the playboy masculinity cultivated by men involved in the alt-right’s pick-up artist roots. His view on the origins of feminism as being primarily the ‘fault’ of insufficiently grateful husbands also flies completely in the face of the logic of the Manosphere and marks him as profoundly ‘Blue Pill’ with regard to gender, rendering his masculinity potentially suspect in the eyes of many of his fellow far-right activists.



It is not appropriate to argue that one of these three men is most successfully enacting hegemonic norms of masculinity. All three appear relatively secure in their gender. All three enact a masculinity with ‘flaws’ in it, but these flaws only point to the impossibility of a single, perfect masculinity. There are major, often insurmountable contradictions involved if one is to be simultaneously a fatherly family man and a playboy pick-up artist, or to be a rich, powerful and sophisticated blue-collar regular Joe, or to be passionately religious and also cool-minded, utilitarian and ultra-rational at the same time. To extend this observation beyond these three examples, other types of masculinity exist in the group as well. Greg is about as much of a skinhead as is permitted in the group, while Émile is the stereotype of a neo-Nazi internet propagandist, pale and quiet, unshaven, wearing dark glasses even at dusk, with thousands of pages of obsessive extremist racist writing to his name. The masculine archetype of the lone intellectual sacrificing his time and energy to the tireless theorizing of a specific cause can coexist only uneasily with that of a strong, virile fighter who does his thinking out on the streets with his fists.

Alt-right men, like all men, run up against these contradictions and have to resolve them in various ways. One way is simply to present their own version as superior: Joe pulls no punches about considering markers of working-class or ‘alternative’ masculinities, such as tattoos, to be contemptible and beneath him. Another tactic I observed is the attempt by some of the men to simultaneously embody as many of the classically masculine traits as possible. This can lead to an incoherent mixture of positions and ideas, like when Bernard told me that Vikings were real men “in line with the natural order” because they “released their sexual desires all over the place, raped a whole bunch of women, [and] ran around freely”, but that this behaviour was nevertheless a sin that required absolution from a Christian priest – raising questions about Christianity’s relationship to his much-vaunted ‘natural order’. Interestingly, this embodiment of multiple apparently

contradictory masculine traits does not have to be concurrent. For many of my informants, an important part of their self-narrative is of overcoming a state of degeneracy, often associated with one type of masculinity, and arriving at a state of renewed purity, corresponding to another type of masculinity.

For example, Bernard's story about discovering that his heavy metal lifestyle was degenerate was echoed by another informant, Simon. Simon is a mild-mannered man in his early twenties, who is a self-styled 'Roman pagan' and valorizes ancient Rome as a political model. Simon recounted a childhood spent feeling like the world was against him, giving examples of injustices such as receiving harsher penalties on the playground than little girls who committed the same infractions. He told me that at a young age, he decided that democracy was nonsensical and became an authoritarian. At a certain point he too discovered and then abandoned metal, in a process he described to me as 'Faustian':

I'd try to find the most uh, [pause] I wouldn't even know how to describe it, uh, heavy? Dark? Almost devilish. Just the most rebellious music I could possibly find.

J: Like black metal<sup>41</sup>, stuff like that?

S: Oh, I went further than black metal, like...

J: Okay.

M: Well, black metal, sure. I wasn't really into that. I listened to the most brutal death metal you could find. [...] In CEGEP I transitioned from Satanic death metal to classical. [...] My grandmother left me a grand collection of vinyls. So I purchased a record player out of my own money and started listening to them. She was an opera singer.

J: And you just lost interest in metal?

S: And I started listening to the records. I lost interest – I think the reason for that is cuz uh, it's a bit of a Faustian concept. Philosophically it means that you're always trying to push to an extreme and go further and further and towards the infinite, towards infinity, but you never can reach infinity. So you start – in my case, for listening to the heaviest music, I was always kind of pushing boundaries, but. It came to the point where the whole purpose was just to push boundaries. Faust, in Goethe, he's already super intelligent, and his name literally translates to

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<sup>41</sup> Black metal is a genre of heavy metal music known for its emphasis on Satanism, paganism, and extreme hostility toward Christianity. It has an active racist subgenre, NSBM (National Socialist Black Metal)

Latin as ‘happy’<sup>42</sup>. He makes this deal with the Devil and he essentially ruins his entire life because he tries to push things to their limits. He meets the witch who gives him a potion, who makes his life expanded by giving him youth; he literally travels to Hell and meets, I think it’s Helena of Troy, who you know represents beauty in the classical world. There’s an entire story of how he’s pushing his entire life to extremes. Uh, much like Western civilization does. And, which is the whole point of the story, obviously, and along the way he learns lessons. And I was not aware of this at the time, but I did understand that, I just – I came to the comprehension that I was just pushing myself with my music tastes, to the point where it became absurd. It didn’t mean anything to me anymore. It probably never did? It meant very little. From there I just abandoned it, I said, what’s the point? There’s nothing intellectual, there’s nothing sophisticated. It’s just a bunch of anger, it’s not even top-tier music. [long pause] So I switched to classical.

Although Simon’s understanding of the Faust story is a little confused, he is making a three-part comparison between himself, Western civilization and Faust. Like the character, he and the West both started out with everything they needed – traditional white masculinity, for example – and both pushed themselves to “devilish” extremes in the pursuit of some other type of satisfaction. In Goethe’s version of the story, Faust eventually realizes the extent of his guilt and ultimately, his soul is freed from the Devil’s clutches and is admitted to heaven. Simon eventually realized that his heavy metal boundary-pushing was futile and did not reflect his true values of ultra-reactionary conservatism, represented by classical music; he hopes that the West will take a similar path, jettisoning the liberal politics that have taken it to degenerate extremes.

Stories somewhat similar in form were common among my informants. Men related a previous lifestyle which, though problematic from their current standpoint, embodied an alternative but also highly-valued mode of masculinity. Joe had been an avid PUA enthusiast, but when I met him, had a steady live-in girlfriend and claimed that he had moved on from that lifestyle, saying, “You get bored. Nobody wants to be 65 and clubbing. It’s sad. Guys who don’t grow out of PUA are pathetic.” He said he didn’t have a problem with men in the movement “going out and getting laid” but that he didn’t encourage the “degeneracy or gloating” that comes with the

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<sup>42</sup> *Faustus* in Latin translates to ‘lucky’.

PUA scene. Felix had a similar take on PUA, also having joined the group when it was devoted to the sub-culture.

Kathleen Blee (2003) writes that when her informants, racist women activists<sup>43</sup>, talked about their conversions to organized racism, the elements which they chose to bring up or dwell on were highly determined by their current beliefs. Events from their pasts which had not seemed racial to them at the time were retrospectively racialized, “recast as ordeals that clarified racial perception” (Blee 2003, 39). My informants also engaged in this to a degree, but less frequently and less explicitly than did Blee’s. However, my informants frequently cast their pasts in a light which emphasized a transformation from one kind of socially valorized masculinity to another. As with Blee’s women activists, my informants often described their former selves as directionless and naïve, in keeping with their narratives about movement outsiders, who are seen as either foolish, weak or treasonous (Blee 2003, 37). Unlike Blee’s informants, none of the members of the Montreal alt-right group that I interviewed described their former selves as being weak. Nor did they describe their former selves as non-masculine.

For Bernard and Simon, their former heavy metal lifestyles had been rewarding in terms of embodying masculinity in a subculture described by one researcher as a “haven of male homosocial interactions”, one in which masculine physicality and strength are emphasized (Riches 2014, 88). Bernard also described his time in the scene as one of non-stop drinking and casual sex, activities typically associated with a type of socially valorized masculinity. Joe and Felix happily explained that they had spent years conscientiously approaching hundreds, if not thousands, of women at clubs and bars, practicing a sexually-defined nightlife masculinity distilled to a pure form. Though these masculinities are ‘degenerate’ in their distance from ultra-conservative values,

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<sup>43</sup> The term ‘racist’ is emotionally loaded. Here, it is being used as a scholarly descriptor of an ideological position, not as a pejorative, and it is used as such by Blee in the work I cite.

they are degenerate in a successfully masculine way. None of my informants disclosed having been, for example, a friendless nerd, a desperate incel, having a marginalized sexual orientation, or similar. Greg may have been a “nice guy” before joining the alt-right, but he was a nice guy attending ‘anti-antifascist’ demonstrations, demonstrating his manly distance from hysterical blue-haired leftists. Other informants told me about having been liberals and therefore lost prior to joining the movement, while emphasizing the financial success associated with hegemonic masculinity that they had enjoyed at that time. Ben presented himself as having been somewhat directionless before finding Christianity and National Socialism but having always been tough, thoughtful and hardworking.

It is worth briefly noting the similarity between these alt-right masculinity ‘makeovers’ and the before-and-after narratives so popular in the neoliberal imaginary. The ubiquitous injunction of neoliberalism is to self-optimize endlessly. One must discipline one’s body not only on a corporeal level, that is, as a collection of limbs and organs and so forth, but also on a molecular level, ‘optimizing’ one’s brain chemistry with pharmaceuticals (Rose 2009). One must not only submit to governance; one must show that the “capacity for self-governance” (Rose 1999, 271) has been successfully instilled. As a worker-consumer one must perpetually be the ‘best’ version of one’s self. One must be productive, attractive, rational, acquisitive, healthy, and not suicidal. One must artfully navigate consumer choices. One must skillfully market one’s labour and become wealthy through merit. It is rather as though the idea of Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* – by which my informants are also certainly influenced – has been stripped of its anticapitalist connotations and yoked to the mechanisms of contemporary ruling-class cultural hegemony.

By presenting themselves as having transitioned from one form of relatively desirable masculinity to another, my informants are able to admit their former flaws as a ‘normie’ without

having to relinquish their claims to the successful enactment of manliness. They are also able to embody multiple contradictory masculinities , albeit consecutively rather than concurrently. It would be difficult for someone to dispute Bernard's manliness on the basis of his intense religiosity, for example, if they knew that he had spent years with "a different woman every night". As a movement with roots in the PUA scene, the majority of men in the alt-right tend to approve of male heterosexual promiscuity on some level (as Joe put it, "the guys can go out and fuck sluts. But no sluts in the movement") while in theory disapproving of the existence of the liberal social order which facilitates this behaviour. Boasting of having been formerly promiscuous is therefore a popular way for men to bolster their masculine credibility while they transition to a more straight-laced, Christian-influenced version of gender enactment. Before-and-after stories like these also allow the men access to a narrative in which they overcome or transcend the temptations of a debased liberal life – in which they nevertheless exercised their natural manly qualities successfully – and emerge, masculinity intact, into the brave new world of white supremacy and fascism.

## **5. Secular Male-Supremacism: PUA and the Red Pill as Conduits to the Alt-Right**

I sat in a downtown bistro across a table from Felix, a slight, friendly, nervous-seeming young immigrant man and one of the members of the alt-right group most enthusiastic about my research project. At one meet-up when it had become too dark to see clearly he had conscientiously held a flashlight over my shoulder as I wrote in my notebook. Today, he had brought with him a print-out of some alt-right material he wanted to discuss with me.

Felix had been one of the early members of the group, having joined when it was still devoted to PUA. He told me that he had started out as a moderate leftist, but had become disillusioned with the left due to “the identity politics and oppression Olympics”. Exploring the internet for new ideas, he had stumbled across the Red Pill forum on Reddit. He discovered that although its critics painted the Red Pill as a den of misogynists, “it wasn’t like that at all. It wasn’t a bunch of rapists. It’s testable. It makes sense.” Through the Red Pill, he explained, he had discovered Men’s Rights Activism (MRA) and the veil was lifted from his eyes. An epidemic of false rape allegations was sweeping the Western world, he had learned. “And who are the people pushing false rape claims?” he asked me triumphantly. It was a rhetorical question.

After immigrating to Canada, he met one of the leaders of the Montreal pick-up artist group at a speaking event this man had organized for a prominent American reactionary masculinist. Felix promptly joined up. As time went on, the group got more and more politicized. “Knowing

how to pick up girls is nice,” he said. “But what are the implications of this knowledge?” The pick-up group was created because it filled a need, he said. For Felix and other members like Joe, however, it was more of “a reaction to feminism” and ultimately became “a path to the political side”.

The majority position in the alt-right proposes the near-total dismantlement of women’s rights and feminist influence. This reactionism is informed by specific modern cultural forms and political tendencies. My research indicates that online male-supremacist platforms such as The Red Pill and Return of Kings have made significant contributions to the content, style, and membership of the alt-right. These platforms have introduced young men to reactionary politics and funneled some of them into white supremacy, while providing an intellectual, subcultural, and aesthetic milieu from which the alt-right has borrowed. Many of the alt-right’s points of divergence with older, better-known racist and fascist tendencies can be traced to this influence from online male-supremacist platforms.

## Taking the Red Pill

Today the term ‘Red Pill’ is a metaphor for a kind of reactionary ‘wokeness’, the process of becoming enlightened as to the degeneracy of the modern world and discovering deeper racist, sexist, and far-right truths. It comes from the movie *The Matrix*, in which the main character Neo is offered a choice between two pills, one of which will have him remain in ignorance, and the other which will awaken him to the horrible truth about the world. However, when I came across it in the early 2010’s, the term referred primarily to a forum, still in existence, on the social news and discussion platform [Reddit.com](https://www.reddit.com/). These forums on Reddit are called subreddits.



The Red Pill subreddit is both the product and producer of a particular intersection of masculinist orientations. The first of these orientations involves the trend known variously as the pick-up artist, game, or seduction community. This is a phenomenon, sometimes described as akin to a self-help regimen (Hendriks 2012), in which men trade tricks and tips on how to secure sexual access to young women through the deployment of scripted interactions or psychological manipulation. The second is a hardline secular type of antifeminism which describes women's empowerment in apocalyptic terms and does not generally use religious reasoning. Instead arguments for patriarchal rule and against feminism are borrowed from conservative (and often discredited) sociological, anthropological, philosophical and psychological sources. The third is a scientific biological essentialism. This outlook conflates sex and gender and constructs both in a set of rigid hierarchies based on the conjecture of 'evolutionary psychology' (Van Valkenbergh 2018) and borrowing freely from descriptions of the social structures of non-human animals. Combined, these orientations form a tendency I call secular male-supremacism.

Secular male-supremacism tends to make heavy use of scientism. Scientism refers to an excessive valorization of science and the scientific method, which can lead to a type of fallacy in which valid scientific claims are used to advance unfounded ethical, philosophical or metaphysical ones (Peterson 2003). It can also refer simply to the tactic of using scientific-*sounding* arguments in order to borrow some of the discursive authority accorded to science (Popper 2003). It is in this sense that secular male-supremacism employs scientism to promote the view that women are biologically programmed to be irrational, manipulative/parasitic, and animalistic, while men are rational, both competitive and cooperative, and more fully human. Women are born, according to this model, while men are made. Following the most conservative strains of evolutionary psychology, in this vision men and women are locked in an evolutionary arms race with one

another, wherein women attempt to procreate with strong exciting men while cuckolding stable providers, and men try to procreate with as many women as possible while not providing for the offspring of other men (Van Valkenbergh 2018). Feminism is seen as a catastrophic social ill propounded by a conspiratorial cabal. However, because this worldview has a strong tendency to biological reductionism, that is, reducing complex social phenomena to hormonal or genetic causes, feminism is also described on the Red Pill subreddit as a ‘female sexual strategy’, a social manifestation of the evolved natural propensity of women to manipulate and parasitize men. The ‘pick-up artist’ element of the Red Pill is thus envisioned as *men’s* sexual strategy, a counterpoint to feminism. The gendered social order is often described as a ‘gynocracy’, that is, rule by women, allowing men to take on victim roles when useful for rhetorical or emotional reasons (Ging 2017).

There are many similarities between Red Pill and white-supremacist ideological positions. Since I first began to study the Red Pill in 2013, I have noticed increasing drift from the Red Pill to the racist right as I have watched the alt-right coalesce on the internet. Even in 2013, I considered the Red Pill and the associated Manosphere sites, particularly the Return of Kings forums run by ‘pick-up artist’ Roosh V, to be serving as nurseries for far-right groups. Indeed, as mentioned, the alt-right group in Montreal which I studied grew directly out of a Red Pill-style pick-up artist group. I have already written about how the Red Pill’s categorization of men into alphas and betas has become a common way of speaking about men in the alt-right. In this section I explore some of the other ways in which aspects of the alt-right flow directly from secular male-supremacism, particularly the Red Pill and its associated complex of sites and forums.

The Red Pill and the alt-right share four key components. They share certain subcultural and philosophical roots; they share in large part their demographic; they share a set of enemies and scapegoats; and they share important aspects of their outlook or worldview. This is significant

because the mechanism by which men are funneled from the Red Pill to the alt-right functions within these areas of overlap. Susceptible men enter the Red Pill subculture and then find themselves situated within these areas of overlap, making it easier for them to join the alt-right. It is also significant because these areas of overlap, these roots in the Red Pill, are an important part of what gives the alt-right its character or its ‘genetic inheritance’. They also largely determine what the alt-right’s relationship to men and masculinities looks like. Further, this overlap has explanatory power with regard to boundary work being performed in the alt-right group to exclude certain types of white men and attract others. This boundary work is an important element in the formation of a group identity (Perry 2004).

## Neoreaction

In earlier work on the Red Pill (Marquis-Manicom 2013), I identified a political trend known variously as neoreaction, NRx, or the Dark Enlightenment<sup>44</sup> as being important in the development of what could be called the base of Red Pill philosophy. The Red Pill was unapologetically misogynist and pro-patriarchal, and could be seen as part of a trend of masculinists responding to the much-hyped ‘crisis of masculinity’. One response to this ‘crisis’ is to advocate for a return to an idealized past social mode in which people followed the natural roles set out for them by their biological sex and enjoyed “gender certainty” (Brittan 1989, 25) – a past which we are wont to view “through the foggy lens of nostalgia for a mostly mythical past” (Coontz 2016; see also Coontz 2016b). Neoreaction consists of several related schools of thought which also transcend conservatism by advocating a return to social models which last existed in

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<sup>44</sup> All three terms are used by neoreactionaries themselves. From here on I will use ‘neoreaction’ as my preferred term.

the West before living memory, or never existed at all, but are imagined as having existed in the past.

Neoreactionary writings include various mixtures of anti-modernism, religious and secular versions of theocracy, autocracy, ethno-nationalism and white supremacism, as well as monarchist elements. Neoreaction has been described as the radically authoritarian turn taken by right-libertarians who realized they would never win an election (MacDougald 2016); one proposal by neoreaction's *éminence grise*, Curtis Yarvin, is to privatize government by replacing it with more 'efficient' "joint-stock republics" (Moldbug 2015). As regards gender, the neoreactionaries support the male-supremacist view, arguing that the mainstream conservatives have become far too lenient with women. As one neoreactionary blogger put it, "The thesis that Game [PUA] works is logically equivalent to what used to be the right wing view of women, before the right became the left [...] Rightists used to believe that fertile age women were uncontrollably and self destructively lustful, and therefore needed male adult supervision" (Jim 2014, 597). While evolutionary psychology offers male-supremacists a scientific or evidentiary framework, however flawed, neoreactionary authors offered a sophisticated philosophical or doctrinal basis for the early Red Pill site. Instead of just being seen as an 'angry misogynist', a Red Pill adherent could point to this body of neoreactionary political theory and justify his political views with reference to it, particularly his views on feminism. Neoreaction also represented a divergence from the mainstream conservatism that Red Pill adherents saw as tainted by socially ambient feminism and 'gynocracy'.

The alt-right, like the Red Pill, is also a divergence from mainstream conservatism, and my informants tell me that neo-reactionary thinkers had a major influence on the early alt-right. Joe told me that the neo-reactionary thinkers are considered by some in the alt-right to be the

“intellectual elite” of the right, but that ultimately these thinkers have little direct sway anymore. “It’s the alt-right foot-soldiers who have the real sway,” he said. The alt-right has evolved away from neoreaction proper, preferring less intellectualism and more propaganda; in addition, one of the primary theorists of neoreaction, Curtis Yarvin, is half Jewish and largely rejects anti-Semitism (Moldbug 2007). For their part, the neoreactionaries, according to Joe, now “look down on the alt-right because some [alt-right members] aren’t so classy.” Hawley (2017) also notes that many neoreactionaries reject the alt-right “not because they believe racism is wrong but because white nationalism is too democratic” (46).

However, the influences of neoreaction are still visible. For one thing, neoreaction has always been highly elitist in all senses of the word. Apart from advocating rigid hierarchy up to and including monarchy as an ideal system of government, it uses frequently quite complicated writing to convey its ideas, rather than easily understandable propaganda (Hawley 2017). Neoreactionaries decline interviews with journalists, considering them to be part of a hostile establishment, and their writing “is explicitly and purposefully opaque, and has no interest in appealing to a wider audience” (Gray 2017). Neoreaction also tends to treat the popular masses with a great deal of contempt, advocating for a ‘meritocracy’ ruled by property-owners. The alt-right is certainly attempting to build a mass movement of a sort, and some adherents, such as Joe, describe it as “right-wing collectivism”. The alt-right has thus been disavowed by a number of neoreactionary thinkers as a dilution of the original elitist ideas. However, as elaborated in the previous section, in my research with the alt-right I found that a major element of its boundary work was an elitism, especially with regard to aesthetic but also extending to other markers, wherein the group excluded men who were seen as ‘low-quality’ or ‘degenerate’. These men included those with visible tattoos, those who were overweight, and those with dress styles which

were too subcultural, marginal, or just sloppy. Skinheads, as I have noted, were not permitted into the group.

Neoreaction has a decidedly theocratic (or theonomist – rule by Biblical law) bent (Land 2014). However, even the theocratic elements of neoreaction are in a way secular in the sense that they are not attached to any one particular religious denomination but rather they mostly advocate for religious law *in general* as a powerful way to maintain social order and cohesion. Indeed, neoreactionaries see religion as such a powerful force that they call their enemy, the cultural apparatus steered by ‘progressive elites’, the Cathedral. The Cathedral is described as a “progressive atheocracy” (Laliberte 2014, 222), a kind of atheist state religion bent on persecuting white Christian capitalists (Land 2014). Other segments of neoreaction are deeply atheist. This means that neoreaction could satisfy one of the Red Pill’s conditions, which is that it has remained a mostly secular phenomenon.

## Demographics

This secular outlook has to do with the Red Pill’s demographics: largely millennial men from the Anglophone world, disproportionately skewed towards tech and gamer scenes, and also self-selecting as men who don’t have a religious reason to refrain from the ‘pick-up artist’ ideal of lots of casual sex. The secular bent is shared by large segments of the alt-right, partially as a result of the influence of the largely secular *Nouvelle Droite* (Hawley 2017). Even though there is a significant pro-Christian presence in the alt-right, religion is, as with neoreaction, construed by many of my informants as a kind of necessary civilizational infrastructure around which authority and tradition can be maintained, rather than as an actual metaphysical truth or code of life. Joe

describes himself as culturally Christian, but says that anyone who puts religion before race should be excluded from the alt-right. There are exceptions to this secularism, and – as I have already shown – some men in the alt-right are sincerely religious. But the second area of overlap between the alt-right and the Red Pill is that they share a demographic of mostly young, functionally secular straight white antifeminist North American men.

Joe believes that “any straight white man who isn’t in deep with the feminists is on our side”. For him, the alt-right “gives people a reason not to be ashamed of who they are. It’s the next best thing since the Church. You don’t have to be a cog anymore, sitting around playing videogames. You can be proud of yourself.” Likewise, the Red Pill subreddit bills itself as a place for the “discussion of sexual strategy in a culture increasingly lacking a positive identity for men”. White men who feel that they are being excluded or left behind by modern cultural developments, or who experience feminism and antiracism as persecution, have reason to gravitate to movements like the alt-right and the Red Pill, which offer them a place of pride, authority, and scientifically bolstered righteousness.

## Enemies

The third area of overlap between the alt-right and the Red Pill has to do with their respective enemies and scapegoats. Antifeminism is the central component of Red Pill (and other secular male-supremacist) ideology. That said, antifeminism was so completely normalized in the alt-right group I studied that they had more or less stopped talking about it when I was working with them, which was a strange experience because I had expected it to be much more prominent in their discourse. However, it seemed to have reached a place of such uncontroversial acceptance

that there was no longer much need for members to discuss it except when I asked them questions about it directly. In any case, the alt-right largely identifies the same enemies as the Red Pill: progressives, socialists, what they call 'liberals' (US Democrats, the federal Liberal Party, the centre and centre-left), so-called 'cultural Marxists', feminists, and an establishment which they imagine to be firmly committed to destroying the 'natural order' of genetically predestined patriarchy. Of course, the alt-right makes a significant addition to this list, Jews, and thereby opens up a whole new ideological dimension, by including anti-Semitism and white supremacism among its tenets. Interestingly, one of the most common explanation for why Jews are running the world, in alt-right circles, is a racist version of the 'feminism as evolved sexual strategy' trope; it is an anti-Semitic theory developed by Kevin MacDonald called 'Jewish group evolutionary strategy', which I discuss more in the next chapter.

## Outlooks

The fourth area of overlap is in terms of outlook. There are three key elements here. First is a rigid hierarchical dualism, dividing people into alphas and betas, quality versus degenerate, virtuous men and manipulative women, and so on. Second is their reliance on biological determinism as the basis for these views and their conviction that differences in power and wealth and so forth are largely natural, inevitable and just, or would be if the world were not controlled by Jews, the Cathedral, or the gynocracy. Third, the Red Pill and the alt-right share a relationship to the wider society characterized by a sense of victimhood at the hands of elites and a desire not to end the rule of elites but to replace them with allies. The fact that 'Red Pill' has become a verb used by the alt-right to describe their conversion experiences is telling in itself. In the case of both



the alt-right and the Red Pill, a comparatively powerful and privileged demographic is 'waking up' to the 'fact' that they are not only losing some of their privilege, but that actually there is a huge range of powerful forces arrayed directly against them. Further, there is a feeling of being part of the chosen few, the enlightened ones – 'The One', to take it back to *The Matrix*. Only they can see what has been hidden. Other people disagree because they *do not* see, either through fear or complacency or weakness or brainwashing by the 'elites'. There is an enemy which causes all this to happen, and that enemy goes against nature, since nature requires patriarchy and white supremacy. In this view, the enemy is trying to emasculate and annihilate men in general and, in many cases, white men in particular.

## Red Pill to White Genocide

Through these areas of overlap, the Red Pill acts as an antecedent, a filter and a funnel for the alt-right. It was around before the alt-right really coalesced during Donald Trump's presidential campaign. Since the Red Pill promotes what Berlet (2004) calls "a hyperbolic version of preexisting masculine norms" (34), many men who come across the Red Pill are already primed for entry through their ordinary socialization. If they are white, they are upon entry already part of the alt-right's key demographic. Once involved with the Red Pill, they encounter a set of enemies and scapegoats that is already virtually the same as those of the alt-right, but without an obvious anti-Semitic angle. If they cannot handle this or decide it is not for them, they leave and are filtered out. In the meantime, those who stay are potentially having more sex or at least feeling better about themselves. I am not aware of any peer-reviewed scholarly research about the efficacy of pick-up

artist strategy<sup>45</sup>, and it would probably be unethical to carry it out, but it is easy to see how a lot of PUA strategies would work: at its most basic level, the PUA scene encourages men to work out a lot, approach women relentlessly, and not take no for an answer, things which are likely to increase their chances of having sex. Even if one is not successful in having more sex, one is working out and so may feel more confident or at least more healthy. There might thus be some kind of a physical reward, as well as a sense of belonging to an elite group and a sense of intellectual superiority, not to mention a rush from beating the enemy's system.

Blee has written that many people who join racist groups initially join not because they are unusually racist or far-right, but rather because they are lonely, or they want protection, or they are searching for identity, or some other reason (Blee 2003). It is only once they join that they are indoctrinated into the ideological component of racism, going beyond just prejudice and getting into the genetic arguments, reading *Mein Kampf*, learning about conspiracy theories and so on. In my work with the alt-right, I noticed that everybody I talked to had joined because they were already invested in far-right politics, which seems to contradict Blee's findings.

This can be explained at least in part because the process of indoctrination, for many of these men, took place first in the Red Pill milieu. They joined the PUA scene because they wanted to have sex, and probably did not hold views that were very much more sexist than an average person. After all, biological determinism, support for normative gender roles, a belief in the power of science, and casual sexism are not rare in the general population. Once there, they begin to be exposed to more and more content originating in neoreactionary and far-right thought. Over time, they come to understand themselves as having 'taken the Red Pill'; and this means to reject the received orthodoxy of their society, within a frame of reference which sees this received orthodoxy

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<sup>45</sup> King (2018) discusses PUA strategy, but is unfamiliar with basic feminist scholarship and uncritically accepts the claims of pick-up artists on a number of topics, reducing the extent to which his work can be seen as credible.

as being matriarchal, broadly Marxist, and run by traitor elites who hate men. As Joe put it, “If you’re already ready to go against feminism, which means going against the whole establishment, then becoming a ‘racist’ is not a big deal.” In the Red Pill, however, men are not just rejecting the more contentious theoreticians of hardline second-wave feminism; they end up rejecting the basic elements of women’s formal legal equality that most people, including very conservative people, tend to accept as settled common sense. Arguments against women having the vote are common on the Red Pill and Return of Kings as well as on incel forums. Roosh V from Return of Kings is notorious for 'satirically' arguing for the legalization of rape and suggesting that women should not be educated. Dramatic dehumanization of women is commonplace in these scenes.

Once this shift has taken place for Red Pill men -- that is, when they are able to completely reject some of the most uncontroversial elements of social equality -- another round of filtering has taken place. Men who find the pill hard to swallow are gone at this point. What is left are men who have demonstrated that they are intellectually and emotionally capable of going down that road, and who have already been exposed to months or years of ideas originating in these authoritarian, hierarchist, anti-modern philosophies. At that point, extending one’s analysis to race and joining the alt-right is just one of the logical extensions of what one already believes, and one requires little further indoctrination once one has joined the alt-right.

## 6. The Dialogics of the Alt-Right

### A Meeting in the Rain

Bernard is standing barefoot in front of a group of men, eyes glinting, preaching. “I’ve noticed something in the alt-right,” he tells them. As usual, he enunciates all the letters when he speaks, so that ‘alt-right’ comes out as ‘all trite’. “A more degenerate side to things. It doesn’t mean that the alt-right is necessarily degenerate! But it’s there. And it’s because people are inherently sinful.” A certain amount of eye-rolling greets this pronouncement, but some of the men are looking interested. “Us, though, we’re different because we work on ourselves,” continues Bernard. “And we work together. We’re diverse, yes. But we’re united on the 14 Words.” The 14 Words are a slogan coined by the late racist terrorist and neo-Pagan ideologue David Lane. The slogan reads, ‘we must secure the existence of our people and a future for White children.’ As part of the cipher 14/88 – with 8 standing for H, the 8<sup>th</sup> letter of the alphabet, and thus 88 for Heil Hitler – the 14 Words persistently turn up in racist contexts. Most recently, ‘#14’ was painted on the gun of the Christchurch racist terrorist, along with the name of Alexandre Bissonnette, the far-right attacker who murdered 6 Muslims in a mosque in Québec City in 2017.

Even though the group has mostly been good at working together, Bernard says, there has still been unfortunate in-fighting in the movement. Pagans, atheists and Christians have been at each other’s throats, contending for dominance in the group and in the movement at large. It’s fine

to be an atheist, he says, and maybe even a Pagan, as long as you acknowledge the central place of Christianity in European history. Further than that, Bernard says, a good fascist needs to acknowledge the privileged relationship Christianity has to the ‘natural order’, the source of all political legitimacy. “As Christians we follow the natural order,” he says, “and that’s what makes us fascists. It’s okay to be interested in different ideas, but we need to follow the natural order. We need to follow *logos*, the Word. Jesus Christ. We have to be in line with that and take it seriously. And humour is okay! We have humour in the alt-right. But if we let that take us over, or if we forget about the natural order, we become degenerate.” In any case, he says, less fighting is what’s needed. “If you are fascists or National Socialists, you don’t want pagans and Christians fighting. We need to focus on what unites us. And what unites us is that we *strive*. We have the will to *strive*.” He ends his speech with a recommendation to engage in more “theological arguments” as opposed to flat-out in-fighting – calmly discussing the philosophical details of Christian doctrine as they relate to racism and fascism, rather than attacking one another.

A few minutes later Joe is also addressing the group. Joe, who is not religious in any meaningful sense, echoes the sentiment about not fighting. He also subtly puts Bernard’s enthusiastic religiosity down, saying “We don’t want dogmatic pagans *or* dogmatic Christians in the group. They divide the right, they don’t unite the right.” It’s dangerous to get too dogmatic, he admonishes the group. “Don’t get involved in the purity spiral”, he tells them; don’t find yourselves trying to outdo one another proving your commitment to the cause, getting more and more narrow in your views and more and more disconnected from the mainstream. “We need to be a very inclusive movement if we want to succeed at all,” he says. “Well, to an extent. I mean, not like Milo.” Milo Yiannopoulos, a ‘provocative’ right-wing commentator who was associated with the alt-right by much of the media in 2016 as the movement grew in notoriety – while rejected

by most within the movement itself – is gay. “But we can accept people who don’t like Hitler.” Laughter ensues.

Shortly thereafter, Andrei is loudly asserting his extreme uniqueness. “Everyone here is Red Pill,” he says, referring to the use of the term as a *Matrix*-inspired metaphor for converts to the ‘hard truths’ of reactionary right-wing thought. “I’m the only one here who considers himself Black Pill!” I am reminded of conversations in leftist spaces where a long conversation hammers out some kind of rough consensus about an issue, only for someone to come along and insist on the immediate armed overthrow of the bourgeois state as the only possible solution to any given social problem. The Black Pill is a term first coined in 2011 on the incel blog OmegaVirginRevolt to refer to a more nihilist, more cynical and more strenuously misogynistic alternative to the Red Pill. Where the Red Pill had some hope in the immediate future for mankind – and I use the term mankind advisedly – and in particular some hope for successfully having sex through the use of PUA tactics, the Black Pill as elaborated on the blog did not. According to the author of the blog, the Black Pill represented the realization that “there is no personal solution to systemic problems, and feminism/women is a systemic problem,” and that systemic problems “can only resolve over evolutionary time” (The Man In The Orbital Castle 2011). In contemporary incel spaces such as r/braincel, memes and ideas which promote extreme despondency and purport to convincingly demonstrate the bleak hopelessness of reality are called ‘blackpills’. In an alt-right context, the term tends to denote a more-radical-than-thou position which completely denies the possibility of reform and views the world in the most negative possible light (at least, the most negative possible light for people in the alt-right). It is related to what Blee calls “the politics of despair” (2003, 50), a deep defeatism as regards meaningful change held by some on the far right. Those of this persuasion sometimes advocate accelerationism, the idea that the dominant liberal order is hurtling

toward its own demise anyway, so the best thing to do is help it along in various ways and be ready to take power when society collapses. This is exactly what Andrei is telling anyone who would listen. “Just let it collapse, and start over!” he exclaims.

His listeners push back. Someone proposes building a system of communes in which racists could live together. “Make your own communities,” he argues. “We could buy a compound.” They debate over what the Black Pill really means. Andrei is trying to make it sound impressive. “Let it die,” he tells them. “There’s nothing to save. Let it all die.”

Joe isn’t having it. “Alright,” he says. “Yes, things are very bad. But what are we doing here if we’re just going to give up? We have goals. We want to affect culture and policy. That’s why we’re here. We need to be smart, not just edgy. We have a brand. We need to use it.” He is clearly irritated by the previous speakers. I know that Joe wants the alt-right to be seen as a serious political force and Bernard’s Nazi mysticism and Andrei’s posturing are pushing his buttons.

Bernard exclaims, “Multiple fronts! Diversity is our strength!” This joke is getting tired, but many of them still seem pleased with it. Bernard argues that the movement should involve above-board groups more or less playing by the rules as well as more revolutionarily-minded cells. There was room in the alt-right’s big tent for people of many political persuasions, he tells them – but he also reminds them again that Christianity should remain central to the alt-right project. The men discuss how ‘Black Pill’ accelerationist propaganda can be good for recruitment if nothing else. They touch on survivalist training; one man says he and some others had participated in a training with a militia member in the US, and had enjoyed it. Unfortunately, he said disapprovingly, the militia member had been “okay with blacks and women. Some of those guys are on our side but not all of them.” Another man suggests trying to gain political and economic power as a secret group, and using that power to pursue their goals. “Help each other out,” he says.

“Make our own companies and hire each other. Get into politics. Get to the highest level possible so we can out-Jew the Jews.”

It begins to rain quite heavily. The attendees stand around soggily, arguing over what to do. Some suggest going to a bar. A few do not seem pleased about this idea, as the new no drinking rule has just been announced (“as an unenforced ideal, to get away from the drinking club kind of thing” says Joe). Others guess that the rain might stop soon. The discussion drags on for an uncomfortably long time. Everyone seems to be waiting for one of the leaders to make a decision for them, but none seems forthcoming. I’m getting soaked and starting to worry about my little notebook getting ruined.

There are two men present who are visiting from out of town and we share a baffled look, mystified by the group’s inability to make a simple decision. I mosey over and we compare notes. Frankly, they tell me, they are unimpressed. The group seems seriously divided among different factions to them. They point out that any group that has to spend almost the entirety of a meeting arguing about not arguing is not doing very well. I reflect that the brand-conscious politician types in the movement must be getting more and more frustrated with edgy Black Pill rhetoric and die-hard neo-Nazis. This is clearly not a unified political tendency. Eventually, as the men continue to mill about in the rain, I make my excuses, say goodbye and leave.

## The Character of Tensions Within the Alt-Right

I have struggled with how to characterize the tensions within the alt-right. As a big-tent movement, it encompasses a constellation of right-wing perspectives, many of which are odds with each other, some in quite fundamental ways. The only things that really seem to hold true for all



of these perspectives are their commitment to racism and sexism. Many of these different alt-right positions can be connected to another alt-right position by a thread of tension, resulting in a network of binary oppositions. For example, a position which emphasizes respectability and pragmatism is in tension with a position which emphasizes edginess and shock value. They cannot easily be reconciled nor is there really much of an attempt within the alt-right to do so. By looking at these threads of tension, it is possible to say what the alt-right is concerned with, what conflicts occupy it, and what is dynamic within it. Looking at the tension just mentioned, I can say that the alt-right is concerned with effective strategies of outreach and public relations.

By drawing connections between the poles of different sets of oppositions, it is also possible to identify broad, unstable categories or camps within the alt-right. Those activists who desire to appear 'respectable' in the public eye, I have found, often identify more strongly with bourgeois values, which is in opposition to another class position within the alt-right which yearns for non- or pre-capitalist class relations. In turn, this latter position is associated with the fascists within the movement, while the former is more popular with individuals more invested in liberalism as a political order. All these connections, when drawn out, result in two major camps emerging, which are usually in considerable ideological, strategic and aesthetic disagreement. These camps represent idealized meta-positions which often do not map perfectly onto real-life informants. This is because my informants often hold a mixture of beliefs, drawing primarily from one camp but borrowing freely from the other to form meta-positions of their own.

Opposing positions within the alt-right may not necessarily be the subjects of explicit attempts to reconcile them (though sometimes they are), but that does not mean that they are isolated from one another. They exist within the same pool of ideas and are constantly influenced by one another via the dialogue of the actors holding them. Not only do different individuals hold

a mixture of positions, but different positions actually can end up borrowing elements from one another, forming semi-hybridized positions which nevertheless remain in tension with their opposing position. Several of my informants who identified themselves openly as fascists told me that ‘freedom of speech’ was an important principle to them, even though individual rights of this sort stem firmly from liberal thought (and were treated with contempt by figures like Hitler, who wrote of the need for the State to totally control the media and avoid being “misled by the boast of a so-called ‘freedom of the press’” (Hitler 1941, 330).) Having been influenced by liberal rhetoric for their whole lives, and being exposed to more liberal elements within the alt-right, these informants now hold a fascist position modified to include a putative interest in this individual right.

In these cases, rather than attaining a synthesis, the different positions remain opposed but modified by one another. A fascist who expresses a concern about free speech has not attained a middle ground between liberalism and fascism. Rather, the way he thinks about fascist propaganda and street politics has been influenced by liberalism in such a way that in conversation, he frames them in terms of individual rights, the right to free expression and free assembly. One of my informants told me -- just seconds after expressing how much he values free speech -- that pornographers should be jailed because such material is degenerate. Another was upset that the Unite the Right rally had not gone as planned; he felt that the right of American citizens to freedom of assembly had not been respected by the city and the police. This man identified himself a fascist and told me that what happened at Charlottesville, with the rally’s permit being revoked, was a “real civil rights issue”. The inverse also exists; informants on the more liberal side incorporate ideas originating in more revolutionary settings, also without necessarily attaining some sort of synthesis of the two stances. One informant repeatedly referred to himself as a classical liberal, yet

also told me that a fascist coup could be useful as a tool to be used to safeguard the racial makeup of the nation, seeming to believe that the coup leaders would then set up a liberal democracy again.

<b>Camp A</b>	<b>Concern</b>	<b>Camp B</b>
Racist Liberalism	Relationship to current political order	Fascism
Respectability Politics	Relationship to the public	Edginess
Pragmatism	Relationship to compromise	Purity
Rationalism/scientism	Relationship to materialism	Esotericism/spiritualism
Reformism & Entryism	Relationship to current power structure	Revolutionism & Accelerationism
Bourgeois	Relationship to class	Aristocratic/non-capitalist
Non-violent	Relationship to force	Violent
Capitalist	Relationship to capitalism	Anti-/non-capitalist
Crypto/covert	Relationship to exposure	Overt

*Figure 6. The various tensions within the alt-right, sorted into camps and organized by specific concern.*

To recap, the opposing positions within the alt-right are in both tension and dialogue with one another; they rarely attain a synthesis but sometimes modify one another. Further, the two wings these positions make up are unstable and porous, with individual adherents often borrowing ideas from both camps. These caveats established, I argue that the alt-right comprises two wings, which are arranged around a central split between liberalism and fascism. Camp A, the liberal wing, is much more focused on maintaining a reputable aura for the alt-right, imagining that a pragmatic approach to politics requires the respect of ‘ordinary’, middle-class whites and even potentially some people of colour. This position is hopeful about the possibility of incremental

reform through electoral means, focusing on such issues as ending immigration from non-white countries. Camp A is relatively covert about the true extent of the racism and sexism of its positions, preferring to present a 'moderate' front. The class identification of Camp A is with the bourgeoisie and while extensive lip service is paid to Christian values, the spiritual outlook of Camp A is decidedly secular and materialist. By contrast, Camp B is dominated by fascist ideas and is more interested in maintaining ideological purity than political respectability. Camp B is associated more with the use of slurs and with sometimes violent rhetoric and imagery. It is unenthusiastic about the possibility of change through democratic means and indeed is relatively contemptuous of democracy as a concept, though often tolerant or supportive of Donald Trump. There is a strong revolutionist and accelerationist streak in Camp B, corresponding to a conviction that only chaotic or even apocalyptic circumstances will allow white supremacists to achieve their goals. Correspondingly Camp B is open about its goals and beliefs to the point of exaggeration. The class position of Camp B tends to be a confused amalgamation of non-Marxist populism and an identification with the pre-capitalist aristocracy. Camp B tends to be more invested in sincere religiosity and spiritualism, including Christian, pagan and mystical elements.

Given these tensions, is the alt-right best understood as a 'public sphere' (Habermas 2015) where citizens engage in lively debate and eventually exert influence on the state? Or is it more a counterpublic, "defined by [its] tension with a larger public" (Warner 2014, 56)? Or again, is it best thought of as a white-supremacist liberal public containing its own smaller fascist counterpublic? Is it indeed a site of struggle between two main forces? Between clusters of opposing views? Can it be defined by its tensions, and if so, can the whole be understood as a dialectic?

In her book *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church 1880-1920*, the historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (2003) grapples with similar questions. Though it is certainly odd and even on some level disturbing to apply the work of a scholar of women in African-American social movements to the inner workings of a white- and male-supremacist group, the alt-right is also a social movement, and like the Black church at the turn of the last century, is rooted in racial and gender consciousness. Like the alt-right, the church's Civil Rights activists included several disparate camps which nevertheless shared common political goals. The interactions of these camps were played out as particular type of dynamic.

Higginbotham understands the tensions within the Black Baptist church of that era as being “dialogic”, rather than dialectical, and imbued with “‘dynamic tension’ in a multiplicity of protean and concurrent meanings and intentions more so than in a series of discrete polarities” (Higginbotham 2003, 16). A dialogic tension is one in which opposing elements are continually in reference to one another, thus modifying and conditioning one another without necessarily ever constituting a synthesis. Dialectical procedures can be distinguished from dialogical ones as “two ways of practising a conversation, the one by a play of contraries leading to agreement, the other by bouncing off views and experiences in an open-ended way” (Sennett 2012, 24). It is less a relation of polarity than one of multiplicity, for Higginbotham. In the Black church, she writes, “such multiplicity transcends polarity – thus tending to blur the spiritual and secular, the eschatological and political, and the private and public” (Higginbotham 2003, 16).

In the alt-right, two main camps can be observed, taking the form of clusters of positions. The relation of these clusters to one another is also a dialogic one. This is why lines are continually being blurred without a unifying synthesis emerging. The movement, ideologically, is given form by the tensions it encompasses; its various sub-positions all exist with reference to one another,

influenced by one another, opposing one another, but always connected to one another. This is why my informant Roman can in one breath describe himself as a classical liberal and in the next describe fascism as a “sword that you take out when it’s needed, use, and put back in the sheath again”. It is why Joe can call himself a radical accelerationist<sup>46</sup> while participating in talks to form a liberal-seeming front group which encourages women to join and positions itself as a moderate advocacy group for European-Canadians. Quite different opposing viewpoints can contain the seeds of each other within themselves.

Tensions like these have been observed in other far-right groups. Blee (2003) notes a similar split between more moderate and more radical wings within the modern KKK. Busher’s (2016) ethnography of the English Defense League (EDL) argues that like other social movements, far-right movements “develop and negotiate cognitive frames” with which to interpret the world (8). This negotiation between alternative frames does not have to lead to synthesis and instead may lead to uncomfortable blurred lines, ongoing tensions, and ruptures and schisms. In the case of the EDL, a rift began to develop between a more cautious, above-board and liberally-minded faction, well-represented in the leadership, and a rowdier group, drawn from skinhead and soccer hooligan subcultures, figuring more heavily among the rank-and-file. The former group supported building links with similar organizations in other countries and tried to strictly forbid overt biological racism, while the latter wanted to pursue a more nationalist path, ramp up the xenophobia, and relax on the non-racism. Eventually, things came to a point where the two factions were engaged in extensive arguments on EDL Facebook pages and were routinely calling each other ‘PC’ and ‘Nazis’, respectively. Things were exacerbated when the EDL began to pursue tactics beyond

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<sup>46</sup> Joe told me, “La Meute hates female genital mutilation. We want more of it, because it shows how alien these people are. We support all kinds of nationalism, like Black nationalism for example, and ISIS and all that shit, because we’re accelerationists. We’re happy to see things crumble.”

street protests, such as attending city council meetings. Being forced to articulate clear policy proposals in settings like these exposed internal disagreements all the more clearly. Previously, the major paradox within the movement had been its stance on violence. A great deal of tension existed between espousing anti-violence as a way to appeal to the mainstream, and violence or the threat of violence as a major organizing symbol for the EDL. Insightfully, Busher (2016) also notes the tension between the strategic rewards of legal, peaceful protest versus the emotional rewards of brawling.

## Cryptos and Stormers: Strategic Struggles Within the Alt-Right

Strategically, there is a clash between the position which advocates for the open and uncompromising dissemination of the alt-right's actual views and the position which counsels restraint and obfuscation as tactics for flying below the radar and remaining undetected. Both of these positions have, I think, come to inflect the public's understanding of the alt-right and have contributed to significant confusion surrounding the movement's real goals. People think of crisp, respectable-looking, relatively well-spoken figureheads like Richard Spencer. At the same time, they think of swastika-ridden neo-Nazi propaganda of the most strikingly direct nature, such as the leaflets which alt-right hacker Weev (real name Arnold Auernheimer) caused to be automatically printed out of thousands of university printers in the United States. These leaflets read, "White man are you sick and tired of the Jews destroying your country through mass immigration and degeneracy? Join us in the struggle for global white supremacy at *The Daily Stormer*" (SPLC 2019).

Shortly after the now infamous alt-right ‘Unite the Right’ rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017, a post appeared on the message board site 4Chan, one of the main alt-right online discussion spaces. The post, which was immediately screen-captured (see Figure 7) and disseminated by anti-fascist activists, is a tactical analysis of the state of the alt-right. The author, anonymous as most 4chan posters are, admonishes the movement for falling into an “echo chamber where you can no longer relate to normies”. Contending that the effect of the murder of Heather Heyer at the Unite the Right rally was to “massively push the average white person away”, the author suggests that a concerted shift toward an unthreatening posture is necessary to undo this damage. The author makes a series of recommendations for moving forward.

**Fixing the Alt Right Anonymous** ID:Dg1jQZvs Sun 13 Aug 2017 13:44:29 No.137278655 🇺🇸

Don't get trapped in an echo chamber where you can no longer relate to normies.

Pretending that Charlottesville didn't massively push the average white person away is really stupid. We have a chance to actually make changes now that Trump has shifted the Overton window to the right, but we need to be smart and make the movement appealing to the AVERAGE white person:

> Disavow all Nazi/KKK edgelord LARPer. There is no way to lose public support quicker than going around making Nazi salutes and holding Wiki torches while chanting "Jews will not replace us". This instantly makes the average person hate you.

> Build a populist movement with realistic, incremental overt goals. Repealing the 1965 Immigration Act and replacing it with something that both limits total immigration and prioritizes white immigration is an actual tangible political goal.

> Keep the long-term goals covert, and don't ever reveal your power level. Talking openly about an white ethnostate only leads to failure and the average public turning against you, so disavow anyone who reveals his power level. Leftists will recognize dog whistles and know we're crypto, but normies won't listen to them.

> Start first by focusing on multiculturalism, because it lot easier for people to see how non-white countries produce culture that is at odds with our values. People like Peter Thiel should be the voice of the alt-right, not cringelords like Richard Spencer.

> Hold actual speeches (with the media invited) by intelligent and well spoken speakers that can tailor their speech to the average person who has been brainwashed by egalitarianism their entire life.

> Get pro-white people into media and educational positions. Examine and copy the successful tactics of cultural marxists. Liberal morality is deeply embedded in modern society, and it's going to take a long time to change that.

If you actually want to gain mainstream appeal, the movement has to change to be positive and not just LARPing as KKK/Nazis.

Figure 7. A screen-capture of the 4chan post on alt-right strategy.



The first recommendation is to “disavow all KKK/Nazi edgelord LARPer”. Here the author is essentially advising alt-right activists to coalesce around Camp A and move away from overt extremism. An edgelord is someone who is obsessed with shock value, and whose beliefs, or at least desire for real change, accordingly may not be very sincere. Alternatively, an edgelord could hold sincere beliefs but be strategically compromised due to a preoccupation with holding more and more extreme positions. The white supremacist terrorist Harrison Tarrant, who killed dozens of people in a massacre in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019, is considered by many in the alt-right to have been disastrous for their cause, and Camp A types are frantically trying to distance themselves from him, with many even suggesting that it was a false-flag attack meant to initiate a crackdown on their movement. Others disagree, but blame his actions on ‘edgelords’. A user called barosa, a moderator on the Canadian alt-right Reddit forum r/MetaCanada, wrote of the terrorist, “the shooting wasn’t a false flag. He was a sociopath, and the edgelords on the chans<sup>47</sup> encouraged him” (barosa 2019).

Meanwhile, LARPing, or Live Action Role Playing, is a recreational activity strongly associated with a fantasy nerd, Dungeons and Dragons-type subculture, in which participants gear up with elaborate handmade mock weapons and armour and stage large-scale live battles, undertaken according to complicated rules and guidelines. The term is used as a stigmatizing synonym for playing or pretending and has a connotation of being out of touch with reality – LARPer are not to be taken seriously. An ‘edgelord LARPer’, then, can be seen as someone whose lack of credibility is threatening to the successful claim-making of other actors in the signaling environment. The gist of this recommendation is to purge the movement of the kind of young men who might embarrass the alt-right and prevent it from garnering respect as a serious political force.

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<sup>47</sup> 4chan and 8chan, two popular havens for alt-right internet culture. Tarrant was known to be a heavy user of 8chan.

The implication is that anyone who would show up to an important, well-publicized rally brandishing a Swastika flag or shouting about gassing Jews is just trying to be shocking or is enjoying playing dress-up, and is not a serious or trustworthy activist. He might even be a cop.

The next recommendation is to limit the movement to “realistic, incremental overt goals” such as repealing and replacing immigration legislation. Any goals shared openly, in other words, should be not only achievable in the current political climate but also palatable to people who are not avowed racist activists. Racist discourse should be replaced, in public, with discourse critical of multiculturalism; this makes it easier to explain to ordinary people “how non-white countries produce culture that is at odds with our values”, the author explains. Other recommendations include trying to get respectable-looking, well-spoken alt-right figures in front of crowds and cameras as often as possible, as well as infiltrating “media and educational positions” in order to influence cultural narratives covertly.

The recommendation I am most interested in, however, is as follows:

Keep the long-term goals covert and don't ever reveal your power level. Talking openly about [the] white ethnostate only leads to failure and the average public turning against you, so disavow anyone who reveals his power level. Leftists will recognize dog whistles and know we're crypto, but normies won't listen to them.

This passage requires some more lexical unpacking. The phrase ‘don’t reveal your power level’ originates in the 1984-1995 Japanese manga *Dragon Ball* and was popularized as a meme on 4chan. In the *Dragon Ball* universe, the villain’s soldiers have devices which can detect the ‘power level’ of combatants and can thus be used to track down and exterminate particularly powerful, dangerous enemies. Some fighters, however, such as the protagonist, are able to consciously lower their power level temporarily to evade detection. The concept was picked up as an analogy by

4chan users (4chan originally was devoted to Japanese anime). As an analogy, the phrase meant publicly pretending to have fewer ‘nerdy’ skills or interests than one really does, in order to avoid being outed as someone obsessed with anime or internet culture. As time went on, the phrase came to simply mean concealing your true motives, skills, beliefs or identity in order to avoid negative exposure. Dog whistles are phrases or discourses which can be defended as neutral, respectable statements, but which other racists will understand to be racist code, such as using ‘cosmopolitan’ to mean Jewish or ‘urban’ to mean Black. Crypto is short for crypto-fascist or crypto-racist, which is simply someone who supports fascism or racism but publicly denies this fact or keeps it a secret. In short: always deny that you’re a racist, distance yourself from open racists, only speak publicly about racist ideology in code – and even if the leftists see through your disguise, liberals will be fooled.

The other extreme of this spectrum of strategies is epitomized in the style guide used by *the Daily Stormer*, one of the most popular alt-right websites. This guide, written by *Daily Stormer* editor Andrew Anglin, was recently leaked by the Huffington Post (see Feinberg 2017). The rhetorical style used by the *Daily Stormer* is self-consciously extreme, shocking, virulently racist and counter to basic rules of ‘respectable’ discourse. There are three main goals involved in this style: to desensitize readers to extreme content, to push the Overton window<sup>48</sup> as far to the right as possible, and to act as a sort of camouflage; since the content is so over the top, readers unfamiliar with the alt-right (such as mainstream journalists doing shallow investigations of the topic) may be unable to discern whether or not it is parody. It is not.

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<sup>48</sup> The Overton window is the ideological ‘window of tolerance’ in a given political environment, the range of political positions which are considered acceptable within that environment. To push it to the right is to make it possible for mainstream politicians or commentators to openly promote far-right ideas.

As I am writing this, the top story on the *Daily Stormer*'s US news section is commentary on a *Daily Mail* article. The original article is about a study showing that a higher proportion of young African-American males in US inner cities have sex before the age of 13 than do males in the general population. Around half of these African-American boys who had had sex before 13 said that they either had mixed feelings about the encounter or had not wanted it to happen. The *Daily Mail* article quotes the researchers as calling for more sex education, more education around consent, and more public health initiatives in inner cities. The *Daily Stormer* piece, by contrast, fixates on the 'threat' posed to white girls – not even that they may be raped, which is a common racist trope, but that they may be encouraged to be 'promiscuous' through proximity to black boys. I reproduce the text of the article here in full to give the reader an understanding of the rhetorical style used by the site. In the original text, paragraphs are one or two sentences long, and there are images interspersed generously between them:

You should care about what blacks do with their dicks because chances are they'll use those on white women. There's no apartheid. These creatures are near people's daughters on a daily basis.

[Quotes from the *Daily Mail* article]

Just being near a black boy puts white girls at imminent risk of mudsharking<sup>49</sup>. It doesn't matter if blacks have their first sexual encounter with another black. The fact that these young niggers are no longer virgins already puts them ahead of the white competition, and puts white girls at a vulnerable position. Being around 12-year-old black kids who already engage in sexual acts is guaranteed to increase promiscuity in similarly-aged white girls. It also makes it likely that the first sexual experience of white girls will be directly or indirectly linked to black males. The first sexual experiences of women are known to leave a significant impression in them that influences their

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<sup>49</sup> A slur referring to a white woman sleeping with a black man.

future sexual conducts. You know the consequences of that. They're already visible. Add to that the fact that these young niggers are the ones giving young women STDs, and you have a recipe for disaster.

[Quotes from the US Centre for Disease Control about rates of sexually transmitted infections by race]

Blacks not only have a monopoly on violent crime, but they also have a monopoly on STDs and they want our people to pay them "reparations" for slavery even though it's thanks to slavery that they're in the best country in the world. They should be paying reparations to us for all the trouble they cause, but they won't because they can't — blacks are incapable of generating wealth. The promiscuity of young niggers is just the cherry on top. If blacks want to have sex before 13 or even kick their promiscuity up another notch, they're welcome to do so in the jungle. America is no place for these niggers and their nigger dicks. (Quixote 2019)

Much of the style guide (Anglin 2017) leaked by the Huffington Post is innocuous, recommending that writers for the site follow grammatical and formatting rules similar to those used by the Associated Press. It stipulates an article formula perfected by "successful liberal blogs such as Gawker", which have "produced a great method to appeal to the same age demographic" as the one to which the alt-right wants to appeal. It recommends writing at an 8<sup>th</sup> grade level to appeal to "the common man". Text quoted from mainstream news sites should never be altered, it warns its writers, so that the *Daily Stormer* cannot be accused of being fake news. Frenetic oversaturation with visual media is recommended, to "look exciting and appeal to the ADHD culture. This can't really be overdone."

The style guide goes on to specify which racial slurs should and should not be used. Slurs which make reference to faeces are to be avoided, as well as the term 'mud'<sup>50</sup>, which the author of

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<sup>50</sup> A racist term for a person of colour.

the style guide, Andrew Anglin, writes reminds him too much of “SF<sup>51</sup> boomer talk”. On the other hand most other offensive racial epithets are listed as “allowed and advisable”. The style guide also informs writers that

Women can be called the following:

- Slut
- Whore
- Bitch
- Harlot
- Trollop
- Slag
- Skag

Whenever writing about women make sure to follow the prime directive and blame Jew feminism for their behaviour.

In a section titled ‘Morals and Dogma’, Anglin explains that the purpose of the site is to “spread the message of nationalism and anti-Semitism to the masses”. The ultimate goal, he continues,

is to continually repeat the same points, over and over and over and over again. The reader is at first drawn in by curiosity or the naughty humor, and is slowly awakened to reality by repeatedly reading the same points. We are able to keep these points fresh by applying them to current events. The basic propaganda doctrine of the site is based on Hitler’s doctrine of war propaganda outlined in Mein Kampf, Volume I, Chapter VI.

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<sup>51</sup> SF stands for Stormfront, which up until the rise of the alt-right was the major English-language racist website.

In *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler (1941) writes that propaganda is a means, not an end, and should always be judged by its outcomes. For this reason, anything which furthers the goal of swift victory, no matter how seemingly cruel or ugly, is actually humane and beautiful. Propaganda should be emotional in focus, rather than rational, and should always be addressed to the least sophisticated members of its audience. Enemies should be vilified and dehumanized more than mocked, to avoid the possibility of someone meeting an enemy and finding them not ridiculous but threatening and therefore beginning to doubt the propaganda. Propaganda should always be entirely subjective and devoid of nuance:

The great mass of a people is not composed of diplomats [...] nor even of purely reasonable individuals who are able to pass judgment [...] The people, in an overwhelming majority, are so feminine in their nature and attitude that their activities and thoughts are motivated less by sober consideration than by feeling and sentiment. This sentiment, however, is not complicated but very simple and complete. There are not many differentiations, but rather a positive and a negative; love or hate, right or wrong, truth or lie; but never half this and half that, or partially, etc. (Hitler 1941, 236-237)

Enemies must never be given the benefit of the doubt and must be presented in the most hostile and one-dimensional terms possible. Most importantly, writes Hitler, successful propaganda cannot get too complicated; it “has to confine itself to little, and repeat this eternally” (Hitler 1941, 238).

Anglin, an enthusiastic student of Hitler’s thoughts on propaganda, continues:

Prime Directive: Always Blame the Jews for Everything

As Hitler says, people will become confused and disheartened if they feel there are multiple enemies. As such, all enemies should be combined into one enemy, which is the Jews. This is pretty much objectively true anyway, but we want to leave out any and all nuance. [...] The Jews should always be the beginning and the end of every problem, from poverty to poor family dynamics to war to the destruction of the rainforest.

[...]

#### 100% Black and White

Just as we mustn't present multiple enemies, we mustn't leave any room for nuance in any other area. To the extent that it is possible, everything should be painted in completely black and white terms. The basic idea is that everyone on our side is 100% good and everyone who isn't on or [sic] side is 100% evil. [...] The melodramatic nature of it also increases entertainment value. This isn't being dishonest. It is just acknowledging the practical reality that people cannot, as a rule, handle having doubt in their minds. [...] [Jews] must always be considered purely biologically evil.

[...]

#### Dehumanization

There should be a conscious agenda to dehumanize the enemy, to the point where people are ready to laugh at their deaths. So it isn't clear that we are doing this – as that would be a turnoff to most normal people – we rely on lulz<sup>52</sup>. Again, if the article is entirely serious, it should not contain dehumanizing language. Dehumanization is extremely important, but it must be done within the confines of lulz.

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<sup>52</sup> Humour.



*The Daily Stormer*, one of the flagship websites of the alt-right, explicitly sees itself as a Nazi propaganda outlet. Its extreme style, which makes no pretensions to civility or respectability, is crafted in the image of Adolf Hitler's propaganda machine. Jews are to be blamed for every conceivable problem; nuance and a commitment to any sort of objective stance is to be completely extinguished; and enemies of the alt-right are to be rhetorically brutalized in the most bellicose manner possible. This posture is related to the fact that, as Blee argues, "having a well-defined enemy is crucial" to racist movements because the sense of defending oneself from a terrible opponent offsets the fact that there are relatively few benefits to belonging to such movements for most members (2003, 106). An obsessive focus on Jewish conspiracy is also useful for hand-waving away the logical gaps in racist thinking, as well as for converting socio-economic anxieties into a racially defined schema with explanatory power vis à vis both history and current events (Blee, 2003). It also allows some far-right activists to "support capitalism as a system while decrying the actions of [Jewish] capitalists and their corporations" (Ferber and Kimmel, 2004). Conspiracy theories in general are particularly useful for such purposes because they are largely immune to correction; their very marginalization by mainstream institutions functions to bolster their credibility (Barkun 2016). Anglin goes on to tell his writers to hugely exaggerate all victories, no matter how spurious. *The Daily Stormer* is attempting to counteract what Blee calls a "politics of despair", a defeatist and defensive attitude within the broader racist right which holds that success in its goals is unlikely (2003, 50).

Violence is central to white supremacist culture, writes Blee (2003). Even groups which publicly disavow violence struggle with its value as a symbolic identifier (Blee 2003; Busher 2016). Anglin takes care to be as supportive of racist violence as feasible without, for legal reasons, technically advocating violence. He writes,

It's illegal to promote violence on the internet. At the same time, it's totally important to normalize the acceptance of violence as an eventuality/inevitability. I'm extremely careful about never suggesting violence. [...] However, whenever someone does something violent, it should be made light of, laughed at. For example, Anders Breivik<sup>53</sup> should be forever referred to as a heroic freedom fighter. This is great because people think you must be joking. But there is a part of their brain that doesn't think that.

The style guide elaborates the site's tactical repertoire. One section deals with mass trolling<sup>54</sup>, encouraging writers to link to the social media accounts of targeted individuals so that readers can attack them online. In another section, Anglin outlines a ruse used repeatedly by the alt-right: convincing mainstream media journalists of made-up alt-right beliefs and using their incredulous coverage as free advertising. In one such scheme, the *Daily Stormer* successfully convinced major media that the alt-right believed that pop singer Taylor Swift was a secret Nazi, leading to extensive coverage. Anglin reminds his writers that

the people working in the media themselves have been indoctrinated with stereotypes about racists being inbred hillbilly retards, so you can make them believe that you believe things that you do not actually believe very easily, and they will promote it to try to make fun of you.

In the same vein of trying to fool the uninitiated, Anglin recommends rhetoric so over the top that it cannot be easily differentiated from parody:

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<sup>53</sup> A Norwegian far-right terrorist who murdered 77 people in 2011.

<sup>54</sup> Broadly, 'trolling' is to act in bad faith online. There is a connotation of doing so in humorous way, as with a prank or trick.

The unindoctrinated should not be able to tell if we are joking or not. There should also be a conscious awareness of mocking stereotypes of hateful racists. I usually think of this as self-deprecating humor – I am a racist making fun of stereotype [sic] of racists, because I don't take myself super-seriously. This is obviously a ploy and I actually do want to gas kikes. But that's neither here nor there.

These two strategic approaches – crypto-racism and respectability politics versus exceptionally overt, 'edgy' Nazi propaganda – are in many ways incommensurate. The same group would struggle to simultaneously carry out both strategies effectively, although this would be possible using multiple front groups. The two strategies reflect different understandings of how best to influence the political landscape. The former relies on the trappings of formal institutional power to try to carve out a space within mainstream discourse. The latter attempts to normalize extreme racism so as to de facto broaden the scope of what can be considered mainstream to include neo-Nazi ideas.

## Concealing Your Power Level: Philippe on Identitarianism and Respectability Politics

'Respectability politics' was first developed as a concept by Higginbotham (2003) to describe a mode of relating to the white mainstream practiced by segments of the Black community in the United States around the turn of the last century. She writes that relatively elite, educated women in the Black Baptist community at that time "felt certain that 'respectable' behavior in public would earn their people a measure of esteem from white America" and tried to instill "temperance, industriousness, thrift, refined manners, and Victorian sexual mores" among Black

workers (2003, 14). Their efforts to reform the Black masses in the image of a Christian middle class constituted a “politics of respectability that equated public behavior with individual self-respect and with the advancement of African-Americans as a group” (2003, 14). Within the burgeoning arena of Black struggle, this approach was in conflict with more confrontational notions of anti-racist organizing. Higginbotham notes that while those within the Black church dedicated to respectability politics, with the goal of ‘uplifting’ African-Americans to equality, may seem to have been submissively catering to the demands of white America, they were also subversively refusing to acknowledge the limits which white America wanted to place on African-Americans. They played the game they felt they had to play, and even supported it to some degree in the sense that they saw middle-class values as a good thing in and of themselves, but quietly aspired to much more than to be nominally accommodated by the racist white state.

In a similar though inverted manner, those in the alt-right who support respectability politics may appear to accept many democratic norms and rhetorical niceties, but quietly reject some of the main premises of modern liberalism, particularly the notion of equal rights for women and racial minorities. They too hold up many of the values of the white middle class as inherently better, as methods of bettering ‘their people’, and also as tools with which to attain their political goals. They disapprove of visible tattoos, ‘trashy’ styles, people collecting welfare, and uncouth behaviour. They will happily wear nice suits, speak in a reasonable tone, refrain from slurs in public, and distance themselves from the cartoonish image of wild-eyed racists frothing at the mouth at the sight of a person of colour. Nevertheless, as alt-right adherents their ultimate goals are unequivocally white- and male-supremacist and their positions are in constant dialogic relation with the cluster of unambiguously illiberal, fascist, genocidal, apocalyptic race-war-mongering positions also contained within the alt-right and the far-right more generally. As the 4chan post on

strategy shows, respectability politics can for far-right groups be a veneer engineered to conceal more radical goals. This is because, as Blee (2003) argues, when racists' goals are made clear, it is more difficult for them to recruit from the mainstream.

In the Montreal group, this wing of alt-right thought is represented most fully in Philippe, who, in his late thirties, is the oldest member. Philippe is in a position of considerable authority in the group, and is one of its main intellectuals, although he is quiet and low-profile at meetings. He told me that he is a member of a prominent US-based white nationalist think-tank. He appears to be relatively wealthy, or at least has expensive taste in drinks, and is well-spoken and well-dressed. Philippe is smooth – almost unctuous – and projects a sense of ease and self-assuredness, carefully avoiding slurs and offensive phrasing when he speaks. He presents himself as a moderate who, as the mature elder statesman of the group, is tolerantly amused at the antics of the younger and more genocidally-inclined members.

Philippe tells me that the “most modern argument” for ending or slowing immigration to Canada is an economic one. As workers from different countries are brought in, he says, a permanent surplus of labour forms, driving down wages and serving the interests of large corporations. This is an argument crafted to appeal to the left-of-centre; it says nothing about race (he spoke to me about “immigrants from anywhere – millions of Swedes, for example”) and centres the economic needs of the Canadian middle class. It also relies on the listener's ability to make a Marxian analysis of power and understand that immigration to Canada does serve the interests of powerful factions within the ruling class, or else it would not exist; maintaining a permanent pool of unemployed workers and a constantly expanding labour force benefits capitalists, and this is facilitated by having a relatively high immigration rate if the birthrate is low.

A larger population, and thus a larger economy, and thus a larger GDP, is also understood by many in the ruling class to constitute a good in and of itself. Philippe told me about a project called the Century Initiative, a think-tank run by Dominic Barton, former head of management consulting firm McKinsey & Company and chair of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's economic advisory board. The goal of the Century Initiative, he told me, is to facilitate the tripling of Canada's population by 2100, so that the population reaches 100 million in that year. As birthrates of Canadians are not projected to rise, this explosive growth is to be accomplished almost completely through immigration. I suspected that this would turn out to be a far-right conspiracy theory, but Philippe's claims about the Century Initiative turned out to be almost entirely accurate. At home, I fact-checked his statements and discovered that the organization really exists, and that its stated goals are as Philippe outlined to me.

The Century Initiative story is another line calculated to appeal to people in the political mainstream. Even for those who are deeply pro-immigration, the kinds of demographic shifts entailed by a tripling of the population can seem troubling. An anti-immigration activist can point to such a project and exclaim that while multiculturalism may be all well and good, there has to be a limit somewhere. Philippe did exactly this, telling me, "It's like, 'you like diversity, let's agree we're diverse, cool, I got it, you know, we're diverse. Okay. We're diverse! You won! Like how diverse do you wanna get?' But at some point we have to stabilize our population." According to Philippe, the massive growth of Canada's population needs to be slowed, and certainly cannot be allowed to reach anything like the levels called for by the Century Initiative. Many people, upon being presented with these propositions, would agree. I was certainly incredulous about the Century Initiative upon hearing about it. Yet Philippe, while not lying to me directly, was relying on my unfamiliarity with population statistics to make his point. The Century Initiative wants to

triple the population in the next 80 years or so. While this seems like a lot, in 1940, around 80 years ago today, the population of Canada was 11,382,000 – less than a third of today’s population (Statistics Canada 2015). The first census in 1867 listed the population at 3,463,000, again less than a third of the 1940 population. Canada’s population has been growing at such a rate since Confederation. Further, since 1940, the proportion of Canadians who are foreign-born has not changed appreciably, hovering between 15% and 20% for almost all of that time period and actually peaking in 1931 at 22.2% (Statistics Canada 2016). Canada’s current rate of population growth is ranked 141<sup>st</sup> in the world, at 0.73% growth per year (CIA 2019). There is a case to be made that such growth is unsustainable ecologically in the long run, but neither the growth rate nor the proportion of Canadian residents who are immigrants are unprecedented or even unusually high. What is unprecedented is the number of Canadians who are part of the group the government classifies as ‘visible minorities’.

Philippe believes that Africans and people with African ancestry are naturally criminal and antisocial and cannot successfully assimilate into Canadian society. He told me about an article he had read written by Jared Taylor in the white supremacist publication *American Renaissance*. In the article, about the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, Taylor writes, “Blacks and whites are different. When blacks are left entirely to their own devices, Western Civilization—any kind of civilization—disappears. And in a crisis, it disappears overnight” (Taylor 2005). The issues the city faced during that emergency were almost entirely down to the racial inferiority of its large black population, for Taylor. Philippe told me that the article had made an important impact on him:

I just couldn’t wrap my head around it. You’re in a time of crisis, you’re supposed to pull together, and just help out however you can, it’s just... in times of chaos, that’s when the community should come together and just show

what they're made of. [...] [The article] really cemented for me that, damn, like, if during the Ice Storm<sup>55</sup> we were like 70% Black, things would have been a lot different, you know? And I just started noticing, not individual behaviours specifically, but more just the trends, like, the population of Canada's changing, you have the highest rate of uh, racial change in the Western World; in a hundred years, whites will be a minority in this country, according to Statistics Canada. [...] So, I started being concerned with these questions, you know? The demographic makeup of our country and what that means for the future. And I think it's not in itself an evil thing to wonder, you know.

In keeping with the 4chan post advocating a more covert approach for the alt-right, Philippe stresses what he sees as the paradoxes of multiculturalism, and tends not to make arguments overtly based on biological racism:

In the end it comes down to – it's a complicated question obviously – there's the nature versus nurture debate – but a lot of people think that you can become acclimatized to every environment. So, if you bring in, you know, Somalis, to any place, they'll become Swedish or they'll become Norwegian [laughs] or they'll become Canadian. They think that if you bring a segment of population to a different segment of population, those people will somehow absorb society around them and become exactly the same. Which is counter to another tenet of multiculturalism where we have to be different. But... we want them to be different but also to be the same... so it's one of those paradoxes that exist in the multicultural worldview. We want people to come here to adapt, but we also want them to stay different, in a certain way, so that they can be different, and being different is good, but also you want them to become liberal, and to like gay marriage, and to want to recycle, and like farmer's markets, and you know... It's just this weird paradox.

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<sup>55</sup> In 1998 heavy rain followed by an extremely rapid temperature drop coated much of Ontario, Québec and New Brunswick in a thick layer of ice, downing trees and power lines and effectively shutting down the province of Québec for weeks. Millions of people were without electricity in the middle of winter and thousands of troops were deployed to assist with reconstruction. It is now known to many as just 'the Ice Storm'.



When I spoke to him, Philippe was involved in organizing with another group, one which would be based on the model provided by the Identitarian movement in Europe. Best-represented by the French group *Génération Identitaire* (Generation Identity), the Identitarian movement is influenced by the French *Nouvelle Droite* (New Right) and like some other segments of the far right has dropped overt biological racism in favour of the ‘ethnopluralism’ frame (Gattinara 2018). Ethnopluralism is a doctrine which states

that in order to preserve the unique national characters of different peoples, they have to be kept separated. Mixing of different ethnicities only leads to cultural extinction [...] Contrary to the traditional conception of racism, the doctrine of ethnopluralism is not hierarchical: different ethnicities are not necessarily superior or inferior, only different and incompatible. By adopting the doctrine of ethnopluralism (even though its non-hierarchical elements were often disregarded by ERP [extreme right-wing populist] parties in practice), ERP parties were able to mobilize on xenophobic and racist public opinions without being stigmatized as racists. (Rydgren 2005)

Unlike the protest-based street activism of groups like the English Defense League or La Meute, and like alt-right propaganda outlets such as the *Daily Stormer*, identitarians tend to “dismiss both revolutionary and parliamentary tactics to achieve change, and privilege a highly mediatised form of intellectual activism aimed at shaping ideas through media, expressive culture, and online propaganda” (Gattinara 2018, 6). This stance has been described as ‘metapolitical’ (Griffin 2017, Hawley 2017). If a political group has access to peaceful means of achieving its goals, it is likely to do so, whereas if such means are closed off to it, violent action becomes more likely (Caiani et al. 2012); the turn to propaganda may signify an understanding that neither violent nor electoral action is likely to gain them power in the near term. Unlike the editors of the *Daily Stormer*, identitarians are often careful to avoid obviously racist language. Philippe told me that the

identitarian group he was getting involved with in Canada would focus less on attacking others than on drawing attention to the interests of European-Canadians and asking questions about the future of European-Canadian identity. The group would cultivate a more classically liberal position in many areas and would allow gay members “as long as they don’t hit on normal people,” he told me. The group would also try to get women involved; the presence of women can make far-right activism appear less threatening to many people (Blee 2003). It would refrain from disruptive protest marches. “The people that I’m comfortable associating with don’t want to go marching in the streets,” Philippe said. “We want to be low-risk. Anyways, why would you want to piss people off? The Tamils blocked a road not long ago and it just made people angry. It was rude. Somebody might be late for work.” Nobody he is organizing with in the new group “is keen on going out and causing trouble. We’re not aggressive like the alt-left<sup>56</sup>.” As for fellow alt-right activists, Philippe tells me that there is a split between those who are serious about change and those who “just want to stay online and complain.” He maintains contacts with other groups but says he has “outgrown” many of them, and his new group accepts only the most “sociable and realistic”.

Alone among my informants, Philippe told me that he does not believe that a totally white ‘ethnstate’ is realistic, at least for now. Killing a quarter of the population would be neither morally sound nor politically feasible, he told me, and at least for now, forcing all people of colour to ‘repatriate’ is “not sellable”, while paying them to do it would cost too much for the taxpayer. “People are here now,” he said, “and we need to deal with them now.” His medium-term goals, therefore, are to get media to cover the new identitarian angle, and to push for a significant slowdown in immigration to Canada. He did not tell me what ‘dealing with’ Canada’s non-white population would actually look like in his mind.

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<sup>56</sup> Some right-wing activists refer to their antifascist and antiracist opponents as the ‘alt-left’. No left-wing movements refer to themselves as such as far as I am aware.

These positions – criticizing multiculturalism rather than espousing overt racism, drawing attention to demographic shifts rather than promoting fascism, positioning the movement as moderate, aiming for pragmatic goals such as restricting immigration, and trying for positive or at least neutral media coverage – resonate with the anonymous tactical analysis on 4chan described above. The widely accepted taboo on openly fascist programmes and Nazi symbology makes it relatively simple for opponents to discredit far-right activists who use such messaging; often simply exposing someone’s connections to a neo-Nazi organization is enough to cost them their job and many relationships, and the credibility of openly racist organizations is usually severely limited in the mainstream. It is more difficult to argue with activists who deny being motivated by biological racism and are able to frame their arguments in terms palatable to centrists and even leftists, such as economics and identity politics. As the 4chan post notes, leftists may be able to decipher these tactics and identify the underlying racism, but many in the mainstream will not. Further, by engaging in respectability politics, alt-right activists adopting the identitarian line are able to play into mainstream ideas of credibility. Carefully curating groups to include only those who are able to maintain middle- and ruling-class personas, mannerisms, and styling avoids the problem of being associated with skinheads, the KKK, and ‘redneck’ racism. A major element in the lack of mainstream credibility for these latter three groupings is their association with the working class, whether urban or rural (Blee 2003).

## A Diversity of Tactics: Charity, Terrorism and the Limits of the Big Tent

The approach taken by the *Daily Stormer* – extreme edginess, overt biological racism, a purposefully simplistic reduction of all problems to Jewish conspiracy, and so on – was common within the group but was not embraced fully by any of the men I interviewed. Men like Derek and Andrei are keen on pushing the envelope and presenting themselves as extremists. The group member who shouted ‘white sharia’ was referencing a term that has been loudly promoted by the *Daily Stormer*. Derek’s comments to me about anti-Semitism being a hook for less intellectually inclined recruits also appear to stem at least in part from the ideology promoted by the publication. This position holds that outreach should be primarily online, using memes and articles that they find irreverent and humorous and which they hope will appeal to young white men. For this segment of the group, more or less any publicity is good publicity. Since their beliefs, at least in their extremist forms, are already stigmatized in the mainstream, they are not trying to appeal to centrists and moderates. Rather, they want to reach people who are already like-minded but who are unaffiliated with any movement or group. For this goal, positive media coverage is more or less irrelevant.

Some members have mixed positions. Bernard, a fascist, wants to accomplish outreach through charity and public works projects, similar to programmes undertaken by groups like Golden Dawn in Greece or even the Soldiers of Odin in Canada. Soldiers of Odin has been called a far-right racist group by mainstream media, though like many such groups, its Canadian chapters

typically deny being racist or anti-immigrant and bill themselves as simply being opposed to Islamic extremism. Groups engage in ‘street patrols’ and several have organized fundraisers and engaged in community work, with one group publicly cleaning up used needles in alleyways in Sault St. Marie and another fundraising to send children to summer camp (Klassen 2016). Similarly, Golden Dawn -- a Greek fascist party -- organizes charity food handouts for Greeks only (AP 2013). Outreach of this sort is distinct from the identitarians’ privileging of media and intellectual activism, as well as from protest-based movements like La Meute or the English Defence League. In this way, it is similar to outreach performed by church groups, harking back to Higginbotham’s conception of respectability politics and meshing well with Bernard’s religiosity. Unlike church groups, on the other hand, far-right groups engaged in such outreach typically have a threatening or intimidating posture. The Soldiers of Odin wear black uniforms emblazoned with a logo featuring the head of a Viking warrior and a Canadian flag, arranged on jackets in a manner reminiscent of motorcycle gangs. They also have the word ‘Soldiers’ in their name, of course, as well as the name Odin – a Norse god who is the focus of neo-Pagan racist groups calling themselves Odinists (Gardell 2003). This is a hybrid form of respectability politics, which looks for media validation through charitable public actions which are difficult to repudiate, but retains a muscular posture. This posture is in keeping with the far right’s emphasis on masculine-coded strength and its sense of being under ‘attack’ from non-white migrants (Blee 2003).

Other members of the group maintain stances in keeping with Camp A’s emphasis on respectability, pragmatism, and rationalism while flirting with much edgier corners of the alt-right. Roman, who described himself to me as a classical liberal and is invested in maintaining a respectable appearance, also told me that he has written articles published by the *Daily Stormer*.

He expresses appreciation for fascism, while arguing that Nazism was a “personality cult of Hitler”, that “some democracy” is needed for a healthy society, and that a regulated free market is the ideal economy. Joe also holds views which borrow elements from different strategic toolkits. He told me that he was at heart an accelerationist who supported ISIS and Black Lives Matter<sup>57</sup> because he believed that these groups would help usher in a crisis which could be exploited by the far right to gain power. He also told me that he was getting involved with the same identitarian group as Philippe, believing it to be the most realistic way to influence policy. Others did not support being totally covert or overt about their beliefs, but adopted a style, common in both the alt-right and the far right generally, which refers “obliquely” to racist agendas, a style “meant to provoke reactions that mix fear with confusion, creating incidents that create unease with little likelihood of drawing physical retaliation” (Blee 2003, 168-169). Examples of this style are severely parted undercuts (the ‘fashy’ hairstyle), MAGA hats, and in-joke memes more ambiguous than the internet content put out by *The Daily Stormer*.

Even the *Daily Stormer*, one of the more extreme alt-right publications, engages in a certain form of respectability politics; the carefully delineated editorial rules contained in the leaked style guide stipulate careful attention to spelling, grammar, layout, citation and hyperlinking. The editors of the publication want to imitate the formatting used by credible mainstream publications. Their strategy of writing things so extreme that they cannot easily be differentiated from parody is also a nod at the more covert posture adopted by many of their colleagues in the movement.

The two poles of this debate over strategy and outreach are not cut off from one another, nor are they forming a coherent synthesis within the alt-right. Rather, individuals and groups pick and choose elements from each to privilege, as the two poles remain in constant dialogue on the

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<sup>57</sup> Many far-right activists see Black Lives Matter, a protest movement against police brutality toward African-Americans, as a ‘domestic terrorist organization’ or similar.

alt-right internet and in alt-right meetups across North America. As a movement, the alt-right is able to encompass both poles and use multiple strategies in a ‘diversity of tactics’ approach similar to that used by leftist groups. As with the left, this diversity is not without controversy. Indeed, on the left, some activists have begun to “question the ‘diversity of tactics’ approach and to demand a serious discussion of which tactics are in fact most productive in building popular support for the movement” (Panitch 2002, 43). This is also the case in the alt-right and the rest of the far right. Blee (2003) notes that engaging in acts of violence can make recruitment more difficult, and that social movements can most easily recruit new members when their stance overlaps significantly with mainstream positions. On the other hand, violence is used by racist groups to “affirm people’s understanding of their collective interests as racial activists” (2003, 175). Blee distinguishes between narrative and strategic violence, with the former being random and routine, and used to solidify group identity, and the latter being tactical and taking the form of terrorism and other targeted attacks. Insofar as rhetoric can be considered violent, publications like *The Daily Stormer* are vociferous promoters of narrative violence, building up what Blee calls a “habitus of violence” (2003, 177). The recent string of terrorist attacks carried out by alt-right adherents are, of course, strategic (whether or not terrorism is an effective strategy is beside the point). Both forms of racist violence are a “spectacle” (Blee 2003, 186), meant to be witnessed by others and interpreted symbolically. This point was rammed home spectacularly in the 2019 Christchurch attack, which the shooter livestreamed on Facebook as he carried them out.

While individuals may mix and match strategic stances in a kind of tactical bricolage, and well-organized groups might temporarily create front organizations in order to carry out a diversity of tactics, the pull of the two strategic poles is dividing the alt-right. Activists engaging in respectability politics have a certain tolerance for what they see as the humorous takes of pages

like *The Daily Stormer* or the edgy content on forums like 4chan, but as this rhetorical narrative violence gives way to terrorist attacks it becomes more and more imperative for them to distance themselves from overt extremism. Yet the harder they try to present themselves as moderate, the more they will come to resemble the mainstream social conservatives the alt-right opposes. As they attempt to carve out space within the mainstream of political discourse, they will be less able to confine themselves to anti-system propaganda and will be pushed to articulate concrete policy positions. When this happens they will have to contend with the “fundamental impotence of visions which survive solely because their essential utopianism is never exposed by the acid test of attempted implementation” (Griffin 2017, 22). Philippe’s walking back of the ‘ethnostate’ idea could be a sign that some in the alt-right are realizing that its creation would likely be a process so hideously violent that in the current political climate, mobilizing significant numbers of people around it as an overt policy would be almost impossible. Likely, people like Philippe will abandon this goal, at least publicly, and limit themselves to right-wing populist positions which are proving electorally successful throughout Europe (Carter 2017, Griffin 2017) and elsewhere, heavily inflected with crypto-racism articulated in differentialist terms which stress incommensurability over biological inferiority (Betz and Johnson 2017).

Like Philippe, the more pragmatic ‘respectable’ activists in Camp A will maintain contacts within the die-hard neo-Nazi factions, while privately sneering at them and, more and more, publicly disavowing them. Camp B fascists will increasingly see the putative moderates as traitors or liberal sellouts, and calls for unity will not be enough to heal the rift. They will be pushed in the opposite direction from the Camp A liberals on the ‘ethnostate’ question, as they will realize that even if it were possible, the project has no *inherent* capacity to solve any of the spiritual and philosophical problems they identify with late modernity, unless a massive anti-liberal sea change



is accomplished throughout the whole white population. This is because a white liberal state is still a liberal state, culturally dominated by individualism and materialism and will, in their eyes, still be subject to the same degenerative processes from which the West's main problems stem in the first place. They will increasingly retreat into defeatism, mysticism, or both, and terrorist attacks will continue to be carried out by men from among their number, deeply alienating them from the majority of people and leading to increased state repression. Conservative and nationalist factions within the ruling class will see the value in supporting some right-wing populist movements, as with the Coalition Avenir Québec party adopting policies overlapping with La Meute's demands, but will continue to consider overt fascist groups to be an unacceptable threat to market stability. The 'big tent' of the alt-right will, I believe, be unable to accommodate these divisions.

# 7. Class, Race and Capitalism Within the Alt-Right

White supremacy, even in its earliest manifestations, has always been associated with anti-communism. Perhaps the first instance of formal racial oppression within a colonial context was in Ireland, where English governments built a system which placed all English colonists above all Irish natives in the legal hierarchy (Allen 2012). As part of the English colonization project, native Irish collectivism was legally replaced with English propertarianism (Allen 2012). Centuries later, after Irish tribalism had been completely destroyed by colonization, the same pattern was repeating itself in the Americas. As Indigenous tribal land use was broken up by colonial governments,

the destruction of tribal relations was polemically associated with the threat of socialism and communism. In the year the Second Socialist International was formed, [US Government] Indian Commissioner T. J. Morgan showed, more than most socialists did, an instinctual grasp of the vital link between white supremacy and anti-socialism. “The Indians,” Morgan said, “must conform to ‘the white man’s ways,’ peaceably if they will, forcibly if they must. The tribal relations should be broken up, socialism destroyed and the family and the autonomy of the individual substituted.” The year before, Commissioner Oberly had pointed out the great moral gulf fixed between the two societies. He condemned “the degrading communism” of Indian tribal ownership (Allen 2012, 38)

Later, the fascists took up the cause of anti-communism most fervently, though the liberal capitalist states were also terrified of Marx's 'spectre haunting Europe'. Hitler railed against communism as a tool with which Jews meant to "enslave" the world (Hitler 1941, 875). Mussolini wrote that fascism was "the complete opposite of [...] Marxian Socialism" (Mussolini 1932). Today, although some groups espouse economics with some socialist characteristics, almost all far-right groups are bitterly opposed to communist ideas, with the debateable exception of so-called 'National Bolshevik' groups, which seek to reconcile far-right and far-left ideas, especially in Russia (Rogatchevski and Steinholt 2015).

There has also been a noted tendency toward a type of anti-capitalism within the far right. By no means all groups are anti-capitalist (Carter 2017), but fascism's traditional ambivalence toward finance and free markets, propensity for economic interventionism, and hostility towards liberal conceptions of individualism have led some people to posit a 'horse-shoe theory' of politics in which the two 'extremes', on left and right, are almost 'touching'. Partly as a result of this theory, and partly as a result of the notion popular in the United States that the deciding characteristic of the left is 'big government', it is now not uncommon to find people saying that fascism is or was primarily a left-wing ideology (Busher 2016; also see for example Jossey 2018). No one I spoke to in my research considered themselves left-wing. A commitment to liberal capitalism is not a prerequisite for belonging to the right. Rather, the right is characterized by a commitment to hierarchy (Bobbio 1996; Carter 2017; Caiani et al. 2012), a value which my informants stress.

The far right is usually clear about what it is *against* but is often incoherent or ambiguous about its stance on economics (Caiani et al. 2012). Paxton (2004) remarks that it is a mistake to suppose that classical fascism "pursued any rational economic goal whatever" (210). Different

contemporary far-right strands have various attitudes toward capitalism as a system of economic production. These can range from a kind of “right-wing socialism” (Caiani et al. 2012), to Third Positionism, which sees itself as opposing both communism and capitalism in a manner similar to Baathism (Griffin 2017, Caiani et al. 2012), to neoliberal positions (Carter 2017), to calls for a “fair market economy” (Caiani et al. 2012) not particularly different from classically liberal capitalist economies.

There are similarities between some varieties of leftism and some tendencies within the far right. This is because both Marxism and fascism are opposed to *liberal capitalism*. How they articulate this opposition varies greatly, as do their final goals, but by a process akin to convergent evolution, some of the rhetoric directed toward the ruling powers by the two can at times sound similar. Claims of ‘the fascist government’ or ‘the Marxists in power’ aside, in reality both groupings must contend with a powerful liberal state, controlled by powerful liberal elites which consider anti-capitalism – from the left or the right -- to be unacceptable. Left-wing and right-wing anti-capitalisms must both contend with ‘market fundamentalism’ (Bockman 2013), the blend of magical thinking and ruling-class ideology that has come to characterize the neoliberal economic policies of governments around the world. Marxists and fascists must also struggle with similar questions: outreach versus armed revolution, the readiness of the masses for a new world, who can be trusted, who is to blame, who is a serious comrade and who is not. They must both struggle to keep their movements from being influenced by the mighty gravitational pull of the dominant liberal paradigm, with more radical activists in both milieux finding themselves confronted with forms of identity politics which are essentially liberal in character. The tension between a pro-capitalist stance and one more critical of capitalism is a significant one within the alt-right.

## The Incompatibility of Fascism and Liberal Capitalism

For too long those who have profited most from the importation of cheap labour have gone unpunished. The economic elites who line their pockets with the profit received from our own ethnic replacement. These greed filled bastards expect to replace our people with a race of low intellect, low agency, muddled, muddled masses just so their own wealth and power can increase. [...] KILL YOUR LOCAL ANTI-WHITE CEO [...] Understand here and now, there is no democratic solution, any attempt to vote your way out of Ethnic replacement will be met with at first with derision, then contempt and finally by force. Democracy is mob rule and the mob itself is ruled by our own enemies. The global and corporate ran press controls them, the education system(long since fallen to the long march through the institutions committed by the marxists)controls them, the state(long since heavily lost to its corporate backers)controls them and the anti-white media machine controls them. Do not suffer under the delusion of a Democratic victory, prepare for war, prepare for violence and prepare for risk, loss and struggle, as it is the only path to Victory. VOTING IS MOB RULE AND MOB RULE IS MEDIA RULE AND MEDIA RULE IS CORPORATE RULE. [All sic.]

-- From the manifesto of the alt-right Christchurch terrorist (Tarrant 2019).

Within the alt-right, different attitudes toward liberal capitalism are in tension. The movement encompasses factions within Camp A, typically more liberal in orientation, which are friendly to some form of liberal capitalism and factions within Camp B, typically more fascist in orientation, which are hostile to it. These stances tend to correspond with two different orientations toward class, with the former identifying with bourgeois class values and the latter, in keeping with its opposition to liberal capitalism and modernity more generally, with pre- or non-capitalist class relations. As part of its anti-modernism (Caiani et al. 2012), the fascist camp has a marked predilection for mysticism and religiosity, while the liberal camp privileges scientism and rationalism. These stances have a number of important incompatibilities with regard to each other.

Within the group I studied, the two most common positions were for a regulated liberal capitalist economy or, for fascists within the group, for a vaguely defined non-liberal economy which would perhaps retain elements of the capitalist economic structure but would differ from a liberal capitalist economy in key ways. Like many far-right activists, the informants who espoused

this stance are interested not so much in “altering socio-economic relations, but [in] returning to traditional values to oppose liberalism, democracy, and capitalism”, at least capitalism as in an unfettered free market (Caiani et al. 2012, 132). This stance is in keeping with common fascist positions which oppose, specifically, liberal capitalism as an economic-political order. Here I am defining liberal capitalism as an order which includes representative democracy, a system of rights and freedoms, a relatively ‘free’ market economy, and state protection for capitalist property rights. Individualism, materialism, consumerism, and secularism are associated with liberal capitalism. Fascism is largely incompatible with liberal capitalism on both political and economic grounds. The fascist claim to legitimacy differs greatly from the liberal one, and liberal ideas about property rights are incompatible with fascist priorities.

Liberalism is, at least putatively, representative, electoral, and to some extent universalist; fascism is by contrast symbolic, authoritarian and particularist. Liberal democracy claims legitimacy through the notion that politicians, as members of councils, congresses, parliaments and so forth, represent the population in the sense of speaking and acting on their behalf – at their request, as it were – in the halls of government. Through having won an election, a political representative in a liberal democracy is assumed to be able to represent any different combination of groups that might exist in a given voting constituency<sup>58</sup>. In the fascist imaginary on the other hand, the leader represents the populace in the sense of standing for it, of actually symbolizing it in his (and it is always a ‘his’) very being. In liberal democracy, political conflicts between groups are supposed to be more or less resolvable through a vote, and the process of the election is supposed to determine which person is best qualified or suited to be the representative of that

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<sup>58</sup> Of course, all liberal democracies exclude some people, and thus some groups, from the voting process.

constituency. Liberalism's claim to universality rests on this theoretical capacity to represent any combination of voters.

By contrast, fascism typically makes no such claim to universality; quite the opposite. Instead it is focused on the state's identification with the particularity of a specific populace, one which is not a constituency composed of disparate individuals but an organic, indivisible entity in the form of the nation. The fascist state, in effect, is the nation – one might say that it is a state-nation rather than a nation-state. Therefore it could not, as with a liberal state, claim to essentially be able to represent any given population with only minor adjustments. The connection between the state and the nation is in the fascist imaginary so imbued with this national particularity and this organicity that the will of the leader is automatically the will of the nation, obviating the need for elections and representatives.

The second major incompatibility between fascism and liberal capitalism lies in the systems of property rights always found in liberal capitalism. The class which came to dominate under capitalism, the bourgeoisie, developed out of those segments of medieval European society, whether farmers, craftsmen, or shopkeepers, most engaged in what little market commerce existed during that period (Graeber 2007). The mores and worldviews of this class accordingly also came to dominate; and since this class was the most actively caught up in the world of commercial property relations, these types of relations spread throughout society as well, and with them, laws, rules and regulations conducive to the successful accumulation of capital by individual property-owners (Graeber 2007). This property-oriented social order, which C. B. Macpherson (2011) calls 'possessive individualism', is the basis of liberal conceptions of rights and freedoms. The right to accumulate capital in a relatively unfettered manner – liberally, in other words – is the cardinal freedom under liberal capitalism and is the cardinal good as well. As such, the state is expected to

exist mainly in order to protect capitalist property relations and make the world safe for accumulation.

Fascists are typically not interested in doing away with property. However, liberal capitalist property relations are – at least to a degree – incompatible with the archetypical fascist program. In the fascist program, nothing can be held to be more important than the needs of the fascist program – certainly not something as base as money. The economy should only ever serve the needs of the state-nation, never the other way around. As Hitler wrote, “for myself and all true National Socialists there is only one doctrine: people and country. [...] Every thought and every idea, every doctrine and all knowledge, have to serve this purpose” (Hitler 1941, 288-289). The needs or desires of individual persons cannot supersede the will of the ruling clique and their interpretation of the national interest. If a needed resource is owned by an uncooperative capitalist, for example, it must be seized. The state – and the economic infrastructure of the country such as banks and strategic industries – cannot be permitted to remain in the hands of unpatriotic private capitalists (historically, and still, with an emphasis on Jews). The state is not opposed to the accumulation of capital in and of itself; trade may occur, but it occurs at the pleasure of the rulers, not as a revered right. Paxton writes that in Nazi Germany, the Party and the capitalists “made practicable bedfellows (though not inevitable ones, nor always comfortable ones)” (Paxton 2004, 208).

If these tenets, such as they are, of fascist political economy are reminiscent of pre-capitalist feudal relations, it is not a coincidence. The third area of disjuncture between fascist and liberal worldviews is in the class relations they propound, and in this area, fascism displays some decidedly pre-modern and anti-modern predilections. While liberalism is class rule by the bourgeoisie, fascism is an anti-bourgeois ideology (Paxton 2004; Smith 1998; Stackelberg 2009)



– not against individual members of that class themselves necessarily but against bourgeois class rule and the bourgeois class relations per se which dominate under liberal capitalism. In the liberal order, as informed by the ideologies and interests of the class which came to dominate it, everything is mediated by money (of which that class has the most). Relations between individuals are essentially property relations: who owns what, and who is owed how much by whom, as determined by the market and recognized by the state (Macpherson 2011). Public interactions are really interactions between the competing interests of different stocks of capital and labour-power, since both individuals and corporate persons can be seen as being essentially made up by their property or their relation to capital. Since everything is mediated by money, more or less everything is for sale; and since everything is for sale, everything can be converted into money and thereby made equivalent to anything else which can also be converted into money (Graeber 2007).

The logical conclusion of this situation is that there comes to be basically no difference between two equally productive factories on opposite sides of the country, or in different countries altogether. By the same token, the main difference between individuals comes to lie in their differential access to capital. From the perspective of capital, one worker is interchangeable with another who may come from an entirely different country, as long as both can perform the same tasks. A worker can also, in theory, through obsessive asceticism save enough to become a capitalist and hire others, so the worker and the capitalist are also potentially equivalent: “The less you eat, drink and buy books; the less you go to the theater, the dance hall, the public house; the less you think, love, theorize, sing, paint, fence, etc., the more you save– the greater becomes your treasure which neither moths nor rust will devour – your capital” (Marx 1959, 51). Further, under liberal capitalism a bourgeois politician is thought to be able to adequately represent both the

worker and the capitalist. Fascist ideology, however, is fundamentally opposed to these principles, as it “combats the whole complex system of democratic ideology [and] affirms the immutable, beneficial, and fruitful inequality of mankind, which can never be permanently leveled through the mere operation of a mechanical process such as universal suffrage” (Mussolini 1932). Fascism requires that the differences between people be a matter of *substance*, mediated by strength, that these differences be mostly immutable, and that they be protected and upheld by the state. In this, the social relations upheld by fascists more closely mirror feudal relations than liberal capitalist ones.

In Western European medieval society, divided between an aristocracy and a peasantry, there could be no potential equivalence between members of the two classes. A peasant could not simply accumulate a given amount of honour, prestige, or grace through diligence and hard work and become a member of the nobility. Nor could he buy the land his hovel stood upon; the number of relations mediated by money was limited, particularly because most people never had any of it as even if they received wages they tended not to be paid in currency (Spufford 1988). In fact, when economic conditions shifted enough that commoners could accumulate enough money to do things like buy up titles and began to challenge feudal power economically, it spelled the end of the feudal order. In the medieval conception of the world (at least from the perspectives of lords and literates, and at least as understood by the historians who later studied them) there was a difference in substance between the peasants and the aristocracy. The word aristocrat means ‘rule by the best’. Aristocrats ruled because they were inherently stronger, more refined, better-born. The differences between the two groups were held to be insurmountable, ordained by God, and part of the divine order of things via the divine right of the monarch, who granted titles (Mączak 2015) – a concept stretching back to “the earliest phases of medieval history” (Burgess 1992, 841).

Conflict between the two groups was settled through force of arms, with the aristocracy seeing itself as a warrior class and possessing armies and castles, and the peasants not. Power was legitimized through right of conquest; nobles in England and France styled themselves the descendants of Norman or Frankish invaders respectively (Maćzak 2015). The state, insofar as such a thing could be said to properly exist in the medieval period, existed to maintain the dominance of the feudal nobility and the monarch.

I am, of course, generalizing for the purposes of illustration. The liberal order is heavily inflected by the various religious, ethnic, and mythical belief systems dominant in the societies in which it developed, not only by the mores of the medieval commercial classes. For example, though the ultimate logic of liberal capitalism might theoretically make all people potentially equivalent or allow for any combination of identities to be included in the representative system of government, in practice there have always been categories of people excluded from participation, both politically and economically (Griffin 2017, 23). As for feudalism, since at least the 1970s, historians have been questioning the validity of the term 'feudalism' as a model for describing European society in the early Middle Ages in the first place. Brown (1974) notes that various types of property holding and land use were practiced throughout Europe during the thousand years commonly referred to as the medieval period. In some times and places, vassal knights were paid in money, not fiefs; in some areas peasants had a great deal more autonomy than in others; commerce flourished in some regions and was almost non-existent in others. However, liberalism and feudalism are useful historiographical signposts for understanding not only different economic forms, if only broadly and as ideal types, but also for understanding the imaginaries from which people draw ideas and understandings about the world. Even if feudalism was never a

discrete and unified political order as early historians may have imagined, their understandings of feudalism have been important in shaping the way the past is imagined.

This last point is important because many fascists, both contemporary and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, display a decided class identification with the nobility, and specifically with the ‘warrior aristocracy’ of the medieval period – a class which does not exist now and did not exist in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Members of Atalante wrote,

we want to conserve nothing about this sick, decadent modern world. What we want is to create the new warrior aristocracy of tomorrow by encouraging our activists to practice martial arts, or to weightlift, and to read all types of literature. We don’t want to conserve this hierarchy with the richest at the top and the poorest at the bottom, but rather to bring about one based on merit, while extolling the original values of the West. By original values, we are in no way referring to those of the pre-decadent world of the recent past, but rather to the immemorial values of heroism, adventure, sacrifice, honour, and risk-taking, as well as many more. We avail ourselves of the work of Dominique Venner, Julius Evola, Nietzsche, Ernst Jünger, de Benoist, Duprat and many other authors. We take inspiration from whomever we like, because we do whatever we want. (Atalante 2018b, translation mine)

Scholars have noted a tendency for radical right-wing activists to identify themselves with a heroic élite upholding timeless values (Carter 2017, Caiani et al. 2012). This tendency, and the fascist identification specifically with the aristocracy, springs from the foundational position of the right, intensified on the far right, which is the promotion and justification of hierarchy and inequality (Bobbio 1996; Carter 2017; Caiani et al. 2012). It also shares direct roots with fascist thinking about race (Kale 2010; Arendt 1979; Benedict 1942; Allen 2012).

Brown (1974) writes that feudalism as a historiographical construct – with its warrior aristocracy and rule by force of arms – was, if not exactly invented, then codified in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries by antiquarians and historians keen to uncover order in the confusing welter of social

forms occurring during the long period between the fall of the Roman Empire and the Early Modern establishment of strong kingdoms in Western Europe. It was also during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries that race was developing as a concept in Europe (Allen 2012; Hirschman 2004). One of the main architects of what Hannah Arendt calls “race-thinking” was simultaneously “the first to elaborate definite class-thinking” in the form of his theories about the medieval nobility (Arendt 1979, 162). Henri de Boulainvilliers (1658-1722), a French count,

interpreted the history of France as the history of two different nations of which the [Franks], of Germanic origin, had conquered the older inhabitants, the “Gauls”, had imposed its laws upon them, had taken their lands, and had settled down as the ruling class, the “peerage” whose supreme rights rested on the “right of conquest” and “the necessity of obedience always due to the strongest”. [...] In order to regain uncontested primacy for the nobility, Boulainvilliers proposed that his fellow-noblemen deny a common origin with the French people, break up the unity of the nation, and claim an original and therefore eternal distinction. (Arendt 1979, 162)

Arendt introduces a near-contemporary of de Boulainvilliers, another French aristocrat named Louis-Gabriel du Buat-Nançay (1732-1787), who proposed an international organization for the promotion of the interests of the “aristocracy of barbarian [i.e., Germanic] origin” (Arendt 1979, 163) – an organization which apparently was eventually actually founded by aristocrats in exile from the French revolution, “in order to stave off the revolt of those they considered to be a foreign enslaved people” (Arendt 1979, 164). The idea that the French commoners were a mongrel race descended from slaves while their betters were a mighty race of conquerors was apparently relatively common among members of the French upper crust, and gave rise to the curious fact that “Frenchmen were to insist earlier than Germans or Englishmen on this *idée fixe* of Germanic superiority” (Arendt 1979, 165).

These notions were to culminate in the notorious work of yet another French count, Joseph de Gobineau (1816-1882), in the form of his masterwork *An Essay on the Inequality of Human Races* (Arendt 1979; Benedict 1942; Kale 2010). This book, while still proposing the innate superiority of the aristocratic master race, argued that the French nobility had embarked on a long, slow decline, beginning with the very first miscegenation between the conquering ‘Aryan’ nobility and the indigenous Gallo-Roman leadership class, and coming to a head in the democratic and nationalist revolutions of the early modern period (Kale, 2010). Kale cautions that the role of Gobineau in shaping later race-based thought is frequently overstated by scholars, as his aristocratic elitism and his pessimistic theories about the decline and decadence of France were not greeted enthusiastically by his contemporary compatriots. Nevertheless, he concludes that it was indeed Gobineau who was “the first to theorize that race was the deciding factor in history” (Kale 2010, 60). This idea, that history is primarily an epic struggle between different racial stocks and that this racial aspect is the key to understanding its unfolding, is of profound importance to contemporary organized racism, even if Gobineau’s specific ideas on the ethnic composition of the early modern French class hierarchy are no longer in vogue.

This aristocratic race-based anti-nationalism – which was at the time the conservative position, opposed to the revolutionary ideas of emerging French nationalism (Arendt 1979; Benedict 1942; Kale 2010) – is seemingly at odds with the putatively populist ultranationalism (Griffin 2017) espoused by modern fascists, while containing the seeds of many of their ideas. It illuminates a paradox in far-right thinking which activists must struggle to resolve: namely, how to reconcile nationalism with racism, and populism with elitism, all of which are key components of many far-right political programs.

## Esoteric Fascism: Julius Evola on Caste, Race, and the Spiritual Aristocracy

My informant Simon, a recent graduate from a business-oriented university program in his early twenties, was the person who first encouraged me to look into the work of Julius Evola (1898-1974), a favourite author and one of the influences cited in the *Atalante* tract above. In his work we find strong echoes of the pessimism and elitism of Gobineau as well as some of the origins of *Atalante*'s 'warrior aristocracy'. Evola, an Italian theorist and aristocrat interested in radical elitism, esoteric paganism, 'spiritual racism' and Roman revivalism, never joined the Fascist party and was not particularly influential in pre-War Italy (though he was apparently popular among the more right-wing and esoteric elements of the Nazi party). Nevertheless, "after the war he became the intellectual leader of the most extreme radical right" elements in Europe (Payne 1995, 503).

In what follows, I expand at length on Evola because his positions have greatly influenced not only some of my informants but also post-War far-right thought more generally. In his ideas I see great potential for analytical traction. By delineating a sort of ideal type of Evola-influenced far-right thought, it is possible to gain insight into the seemingly paradoxical far-right positions on nationalism, racism, populism and elitism and how they might be resolved or addressed. This allows me to further expand on the topic of fascist attitudes toward class. Evola also functions well

as a case study of the mystical, esoteric, and spiritualist trends within the far right as well as its anti-modernism and non-Marxist resistance to liberal capitalism.

Evola saw history as “totally cyclical” and believed that “the modern world was headed for ultimate crisis and extinction”, since political power had passed through the ages “from priests to warriors to merchants and finally to slaves”; the slaves’ “egalitarianism would result in catastrophe, but also an opportunity to restore true values” by means of a “ruthless elitism” (Payne 1995, 503). In other words, the warrior leaders of the feudal period had been supplanted by bourgeois capitalism, the decadence of which had given rise to communism, or rule by the race of slaves; what was needed to renew things was, as Atalante would put it, ‘the new warrior aristocracy of the future’. In his book *Pagan Imperialism*, Evola writes:

Are liberation and renewal still possible in this world in its twilight? [...] This is not a matter of compromises or adaptations. The power of a new Middle Ages is needed. A change, interior as well as exterior, of barbaric purity is required. Philosophy, “culture”, everyday politics: no more of all that. It is not a matter of shifting to the other side of this bed of agony. It is a matter of finally waking up, and standing on one’s feet. Here and there, men still exist, mindful of ancient nobility, who now, as individuals, notice the intolerable discomfort and feel driven to react, sometimes in one cultural domain, sometimes in another. Before it is too late, the way to the peaks must be brought back into the consciousness of these scattered men, beyond all the limits and private interests which currently wear away their strength. Unrelenting action must ensure that their purest strength manages to disclose itself, as something invisible, ready to shatter the foul crust of rhetoric, sentimentalism, moralism, and hypocritical religiosity with which the West has covered and humanised everything. (2017, 7)

This take, scarcely distinguishable from that of Atalante and myriad other skinhead gangs and neofascist organizations, has been enormously influential on the post-War far right. In it we get a



taste of how Evola, who was fascinated by Indian religious and mystical traditions, integrated the concept of caste into his thinking, a concept which was integral to his views on race.

Evola's views on race go some way to addressing the contradiction in far-right thinking which I mentioned above, that of the tensions between nationalism, racism, populism and elitism – though it must be said that Evola was no populist, and subsequent figures who integrated populism into Evola-influenced lines of thinking did so to some extent in spite of his work, not because of it. Evola accepts the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century pseudoscientific racial categories as relatively unproblematic (Furlong 2011), but for him, biological inheritance is only a component of race, and not even the most important component (Evola 1995). More important is the 'race of the spirit', also referred to as spiritual race. Further, race and caste are essentially two components of the same hierarchical (and spiritual) principle, with race properly denoting hierarchical differences between civilizations and caste denoting hierarchical differences within them (Furlong 2011, 117).

Furlong (2011) writes that for Evola, the decay of a civilization's race and of its caste structure are intertwined and interdependent. Degradation for both occurs when the leadership caste loses its spiritual connection to a higher plane of existence (2011, 118). For Evola, the lower castes of people (merchants and workers), even within a 'higher' race, did not in the past have direct access to this spiritual connection. Rather, echoing the doctrine of the divine right of kings, for them the "sacred authority" of their leaders allowed them to "participate in a limited way in the supernatural force of their community through the hierarchy that joined them to the elite, even though they did not have full understanding of the interior life that gave the elite form and direction" (Furlong 2011, 118). The member of the lower caste, "through his devotion and active subordination to a higher caste", could express "a faithfulness and a devotion [...] to a higher form of being that the inferior could not directly and organically live out as his own nature (*svadharma*)"

(Evola 1995, 98). Hierarchy affords spiritual wholeness and the correct expression of one's transcendental destiny. The ancients, according to Evola, understood that to be born into a particular caste and to embrace their place within it allowed them to attain "a condition that really corresponded to their own nature and to their deepest attitudes" (Evola 1995, 92). Once the proper hierarchy disintegrates and the spiritual connection is lost however, the eventual downfall of the race is ensured.

Here the question of biological inheritance arises; for Evola, the final collapse could be delayed, perhaps even for a long time, by protecting what is left of the blood of the master caste, for this blood "atavistically" still retains elements of its superiority (Furlong 2011, 199). This being said, Evola cautions that those who concentrate on the purely biological, hereditary, and therefore material aspects of 'race' lose sight of the more important spiritual component. It is worth quoting Evola at length here:

The unity and the purity of blood are believed by some to be the foundation of life and the strength of a civilization; therefore, the mixing and the ensuing 'poisoning' of the blood are considered the initial cause of a civilization's decline. This too is an illusion, which among other things, lowers the notion of civilization to a naturalistic and biological plane, since this is the plane on which race is thought of in our day and age. Race, blood, hereditary purity of blood: these are merely 'material' factors. A civilization in the true, traditional sense of the word arises only when a supernatural and nonhuman force of a higher order [...] acts upon these factors. [...] The adulteration and decline of civilizations is [also] caused by [a divine event], though it acts in the opposite, degenerative sense. When a race has lost contact with the only thing that has and can provide stability, namely, with the world of 'Being'; [and also loses] the inner race and the race of the spirit [...] then the collective organisms that a race has generated, no matter how great and powerful, are destined to descend into the world of contingency; they are at the mercy of what is irrational, becoming, and 'historical', and of what is shaped 'from below' and from the outside. (1995, 57)

To sum up this position, the differences between races, and the differences between social strata within races, are of the same *quality* and are characterized by hierarchy. Hierarchy is not only natural but desirable, and not only desirable but necessary on a deep spiritual level. Biological race is a reality on a material level, and racism is a proper expression of the natural hierarchy, but as a program of action, biological racism is hopelessly fettered without a correct understanding of the most important component of race and caste, the spiritual. The spiritual connection of the elite to the divine has been broken, which has disrupted the proper hierarchy; Europeans are therefore living in the twilight of their race. Interestingly Evola seems to argue not that the basis of Marxian historical materialism is nonexistent, but that it becomes a reality only once the divine connection is broken – and therefore it could be abolished through correct spiritual action. The only hope for salvation, if there is any hope at all, is through the disciplined actions of a spiritually fit vanguard who will reimpose ancient values and thereby re-establish the proper, timeless order of things.

If this is so, then a racist activist can begin to resolve some of the tensions between elitism and populism. He can hold up the superiority of the white race as a whole while also considering himself to be part of an even more superior elite, corresponding to the erstwhile warrior aristocracy, by virtue of his understanding of and adherence to the correct principles. In this vision, all whites are the heirs of a mighty civilization, membership of which confers greatness, or at least should; but most of those whites, who eschew correct principles, can be considered degenerates. This is in keeping with a noted tendency of the far right to “[identify] itself with the people [...], but, at the same time, within an elitist vision of society, [present] the people as rather ‘stupid’ and in need of a guide (explicitly indicated as the right itself)” (Caiani et al. 2012, 57). The white masses are technically members of the superior race but are so alienated from the divine that they

are scarcely better than potential whites. They are a caste in need of proper masters, aimlessly filling their meaningless lives with decadent consumption and depravity. However, this is not really their fault. They may be degenerates, but they are our degenerates. They are alienated because of the lack of proper hierarchy to give them structure and the lack of a spiritually fit leadership caste to give their lives spiritual worth. Their current masters, the bourgeois capitalists, who are totally disconnected from the divine and controlled by Semitic influences and greed, do not deserve their mastery. Whites require control by the true leadership caste, the warrior aristocracy, who will put them to their proper use in elevating the race as a whole and making their nations great again. As Caiani et al. put it, “If the corruption of the political class is the diagnosis, the prognosis is not to return the power to the people, but to reassign it to an exclusive (more or less heroic) elite” (2012, 203).

Along these lines, a policy to reverse the decline of the white race would protect the blood, yes. But perhaps even more importantly it would stamp out decadent behaviour; regain the correct spiritual footing; reimpose the ironclad hierarchy of the imagined past; and rally the lower strata behind their rightful leaders. Through hierarchy, the degenerates would once again have indirect access to the betterness of their betters, which is the thing they most lack, even if they do not know it. This would allow them to discover their true nature, which essentially is to be happily obedient. Such a policy would establish rule by the best, that is to say, aristocracy; and it would do away with the economic power of the merchant caste, that is, liberal capitalism – and, where applicable, the political power of the slave caste, that is, Marxism.

There is no doubt that Evola was a committed racist. However, at issue for Evola, and for others on the far right as well, is the question of whether one’s racism should primarily be based on materialist arguments drawn from the realm of IQ testing, classical racist anthropology, and

contemporary fields like evolutionary psychology and sociobiology; or, whether it should be primarily based on a spiritual or mystical understanding of organic community, ethnicity, and racial ecumenicity. Another question is whether racism is in itself enough to unite and sustain a movement and ultimately a new world order, or if it is only a necessary part of a wider holistic structure, each component of which must be ideologically consistent. My informants have a number of different positions on these questions.

## Christian Fascism: Bernard's Take on Satan, Jews, and Spiritual Elitism

Evola's positions are often echoed in the rhetoric of my fascist informants, and to a lesser degree sometimes in my more liberal informants. Bernard, a fascist and a science graduate in his mid-twenties, explained to me in our second interview why he had moved away from more 'identitarian' initiatives being spearheaded by the group's leadership, and in which Philippe and Joe were getting involved. He had moved toward a more spiritual understanding of racism informed by his newfound interest in ultra-conservative Christianity. When I met him, he was the most explicitly religious or mystical member of the group. In that sense, he is closest to Evola's views on race and spirituality. He told me,

Bernard: Yeah, I was involved [in that initiative], but uh, I quit early on.

Jay: You quit?

B: Yeah, it wasn't for me. But I think it's good, what they're doing.

J: Can you tell me why it wasn't for you?

B: Because they over-focus on identity, and they make everything about race. And the thing is, I agree with the identitarian arguments, because it is important, and identity is linked to race. But race alone is necessary but not sufficient to having a proper culture. So, we've had ethnostates in the past, and it doesn't solve it if you don't have other things in check as well.

J: Like what?

B: Like if you don't have a proper moral, political, theological structure basically. So you see this in places like Sweden for example. It was basically just an ethnostate until very recently. But they lost their traditions from the past. They lost their religion, which is traditionally Christian, and because of that they started allowing non-, like, these foreign ideas to come in, and it destroyed their society, basically. Now look where they are. They're almost on civil war because of this. So, ethnostates alone, it's like, that's my argument with [the identitarians]. I was arguing that we should be doing more, like, um... [long pause] Like, charity works, to show to the public, similar to kind of what Golden Dawn is doing in Greece, where no matter that every single media is against Golden Dawn, anyone who lives there actually knows that they're good people. Because for example they'll come and shovel your snow or something, or... they'll go to old ladies, shovel their snow, get their groceries, and basic stuff like this, and you know, hand stuff out.

J: Community work.

B: Community work, and helping the homeless and stuff, so. This is the stuff that I thought we should be focusing on, primarily, because it shows the public that, obviously we're not monsters, no matter what the media might say,

and people are gonna start using their own judgement and saying, 'oh, well, the media says the exact opposite from what I think,' so maybe that will introduce more distrust in the media, which is good; and, you can also at the same time focus on your community and bring that identitarian aspect which we're missing right now in the West. So it's good. We have uh, you have like three things at the same time which you're doing. But they wanna focus only on the ethnic aspect. They wanna focus only on the identitarian aspect. Putting up posters and doing signs and stuff like this, which I just thought was insufficient, and I don't disagree with them but I don't think that they're taking the best approach and I had to quit at a certain point, early on I quit. Like after like a month. [sigh] So.

For Bernard, racial consciousness and biological racism are not enough. A "proper moral, political, theological structure" is required in order for far-right activists to have any hope of achieving their goals. Even a society from which all non-whites and undesirables have been purged would find itself degenerating without a strong, ultra-traditionalist Christian state – that is, a spiritual elite operating according, to some extent, to pre-Enlightenment principles.

Of particular concern for Bernard is the influence of Satan on the affairs of whites. Without the help of Christ, they are likely to fall victim to his tricks. This is evocative of Evola's claim, quoted above, that races which become spiritually degenerate fall victim to the 'contingent' and the 'historical' (that is, become weakened, impacted by mundane material factors, and susceptible to collapse). Bernard tells me that he was an atheist for most of his life, until a series of realizations changed his mind. He explains his newfound faith with reference to the philosophical and theological term *logos*, a Greek word meaning among other things 'word', 'order', 'reason' and 'knowledge'. He tells me that

Logos-based societies are what Western civilization is built on. Even before Christ, we had logic, which was made by Aristotle. Formalized by Aristotle because that's the logos. In terms of pure deductive logic, there is a logic there and that is the logos. [...] And then I saw that logos-based religions were literally true. So, in following logic

and realizing that – you know, it’s this image of Satan, Jordan Peterson talks about this all the time; Satan is sophisticated. He’s not an idiot. So Satan, he’s always depicted in mythology as hyper-rational. He’s sophisticated, and he will play games with you to get what he wants. He’ll make deals with you, right? And so Satan is something which is like, you have the power to overcome it. Especially if you have Christ. Because Christ is the rejection of Satan. So you reject sin. And in doing that you align yourself with the natural order. And this is what fascism is, that’s why Christianity is essentially – traditional Christianity is essentially *[pause]* ... fascism. It’s the same thing applied in a political way.

Satan mocks *logos* – which is at once divine reason, the principle of order, and Christ himself – by interacting with people in what appears to be a hyper-rational way. However, if people have access to *logos* they can use faith and/or deductive reasoning to resist his tricks. Just as an individual needs Christ, a society needs Christian rulership, again in line with the medieval doctrine of the divine right of the Christian nobility to rule. Otherwise Satan will triumph, resulting in a society which may seem rational but actually goes entirely against reason, order, and the laws of God and nature.

For Bernard, Christianity is strongly identified with reason and order; and since fascism for Bernard means government according to the natural order, Christianity is fundamentally fascist. He continues,

That’s why the church and the state worked so well together for so long. And it’s not *against* – again, if you reject natural orders, and you think that all people are equal, you’re gonna say that “oh, well it’s oppression!” No. People are happier when they’re in their own milieu. When they can actually thrive in their own milieu. *[pause]* Right now they can’t. Because you have a bunch of low-IQ Africans trying to compete with high-IQ whites, Asians and Jews. [...] <sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Here Bernard goes on an extended tangent about skeletal and hormonal differences between ‘races’.



J: So, do you consider yourself a fascist?

B: Hundred percent.

J: Yeah.

B: Hundred percent. Yeah I'm a fascist in the best sense of the word. Like I'm a fascist in the sense that I want to thrive, I want all peoples to thrive. I don't like seeing blacks suffer. It makes me sad. Like, when I see a pack of gorillas raping... [pause] uh, like uh, chimpanzees for example rape each other. It's horrible. It's base desires. It's violence. I don't like to see that. Because Africa, in the past, has a rich tradition on its own. Before it was invaded by Islam, and by uh, foreign people coming in, Africa had thousands of years, even tens of thousands of years, of societies which functioned well for them. They didn't have crime. [...] Okay? So that's an accusation which I don't take. Because you can't just call me racist. You can't just *call* people racist. I want blacks to thrive. But, like I saw when I went to high school, races prefer to self-segregate. So don't force against that. That's Satanic, that's Jewish. That's towards chaos, not order. Because you're not aligning yourself with the natural order. So the life of a Christian, the whole life, is fundamentally trying to assess that natural order, as best as you can, trying to be honest, determine what that natural order is and how to better align yourself with it, and once you do that you start sorting yourself out. That's the whole Jordan Peterson meme. 'Clean your room.' That's why he got so popular.

In a manner somewhat similar to Evola and other mystical race theorists, Bernard employs scientific claims about race when it is suitable for his argument, but ultimately appeals to a higher authority: 'nature' and the divine. Bernard comes from a poor, rural background, and told me that he had barely encountered Jews or people of colour before moving to a large city for high school. His first exposure to multiracial populations was a setting in which different groups seemed to stick together in a way which to him appeared natural. For Bernard, differences and hierarchies between different kinds of people are self-evident and divinely ordained; enforcing them cannot

therefore be seen as oppression because it is simply an expression of the natural order, no more oppressive than recognizing the fact that some people are short and some tall. To be a good Christian, and a good fascist, is to identify these natural hierarchies and differences, identify one's place within their structure, and fall in line. To push back against them is not only futile, but *Satanic*.

Bernard wishes to distance himself from the stigmatizing connotations of the word 'racist', a desire shared by other right-wing activists (Busher 2016); even in the fascist wing of the alt-right, a movement which openly aims to establish a white supremacist state, this urge to appear "not-racist" (Busher 2016, 97) is in evidence. Busher, citing McCauley (2006), calls this a form of 'jujitsu politics', in which criticism is turned around and used as a way to attack the critic. Busher's EDL informants, like Bernard, argued that calling them racists is simply the lashing out of someone who has already lost the argument. Regardless, for Bernard, Satan has helpers, and more than anyone else, Jews are to be held responsible for the decline and degeneration of the white race and the perversion of the natural order.

Bernard believes that a "Jewish, Satanic, pedophilic" conspiracy runs the United States government and other governments around the world. He believes that top politicians such as the Clintons are in thrall to these corrupt forces and help operate Satanic child-abuse rings. In part, Jews run these wicked conspiracies because "Judaism rejects this culture, these Christian values. That's why so many porn producers are Jewish. That's why Jews invert Christ, and they admit it. If you go to Jewish sources, they admit it." Bernard tells me, "we have a Jewish-controlled media and culture. So, our culture right now is suppressed. I can barely have this conversation." As part of their plot, Jews created Marxism, and using it they have succeeded in instituting a draconian regime of hate-speech laws, both *de jure* and *de facto*, in order to repress any discussion of the

natural order and divinely ordained hierarchy. As an example, he tells me that if you are fired from your job for speaking up about the mental inferiority of women, it is because of Marxist Jewish influence, saying, “it’s the same threat of Marxism that you see throughout your whole life. That’s why Orwell wrote *1984*. When he saw all of this coming, Marxist Jewish infiltration, right. Can’t even *say* it. Or you get arrested for hate crimes, right.”

For Bernard, anti-Semitic populism provides a non-Marxist, racialized understanding of class relations and political power (Berlet and Lyons 2000). The machinations of an invisible and seemingly all-powerful ruling class can be explained with the simple expedient of assigning Satanic motives to an alien cabal united in its hatred of productive whites. Crucially, this fascist version of populism is anti-elitist only in the limited sense of being opposed to the *current* elite, and even then, is restricted in its understanding of the ruling elite by its insistence on understanding them simply as congenital evildoers – and Jews – rather than as an economic class with intelligible motives. As a Christian fascist, Bernard is of course not actually opposed to a society ruled by an ideologically and religiously united, racialized elite class which sees itself as self-evidently superior to the common citizen and ruthlessly crushes all attempts at escaping the resulting rigid hierarchy. He is just opposed to the one which he imagines currently rules the Western world.

Because of Bernard’s “distorted class/less analysis” (Berlet 2004, 34), typical of right-wing conspiracist theories of government, he has little overt identification with the working class from which he comes. In addition, extremely wealthy people in positions of great political power, such as Donald Trump, are not considered members of the targeted ‘elite’ so long as they are sufficiently nationalist or racist. Of Trump, Bernard told me that “thousands of pedophiles” had been arrested since he took office, pointing to his suitability for power. He continued,

B: When he was elected, I was 100% Trump, yeah.

J: Not anymore?

B: I think he's doing pretty good. I think he's doing okay.

J: Did you hear the news today?

B: What news?

J: He just fired [Steve] Bannon.

B: Yeah I saw that. But you see the thing is with Trump, it's not always him doing it. You know, there's a Deep State, and certain people want Bannon gone. And there's certain ways of achieving things, which is, even though he will fire people, or, [pause] it's you know, like with [Jeff] Sessions, and everything, it's almost like they're on a different level like, the 4-D Chess Theory, like... It's stupid, but... to a certain degree there is uh, a meta-game going on, and that's what international politics is, he's very good at playing it. [...] He got out of TPP, he made a million new jobs, still highest DOW in history, uh, all these companies are coming back, reducing immigration, he banned transgenders [sic] in the military, he's still working on border control and kicking out illegal immigrants and driving them out of the country, he's um, banning people from terrorist-prone countries, k, he's not doing anything crazy. He's doing normal stuff, but he needs to play, because the media is psychopathic. Because we have a Jewish-controlled media and culture.

This dynamic, of reckoning the existing 'elite' not in terms of an exploitative economically-defined class which enjoys hegemony over bourgeois states but in terms of a cabal alien to the holistic national community, is in keeping with the fascist ideal of a cross-class alliance between fascist workers and fascist employers, ruled over by a fascist elite, with the whole benefiting from the labour of disenfranchised labourers excluded from the national community. Hitler writes,

The National Socialist State knows no ‘classes’, but in political respect only citizens with fully equal rights and accordingly, also equal general duties, and on the other hand State subjects who, however, are completely without rights with regard to State politics. The trade union in the National Socialist sense has not the task of transforming, by integration, certain people within a national body into a class, in order to take up with it the fight against another similarly organized formation inside the national community. [...] The National Socialist worker must know that the flowering of national economy means his own material fortune. The National Socialist employer must know that the fortune and the satisfaction of his employees are the premise for the existence and the development of his own economic importance. [...] The great measure of personal freedom which is hereby granted to them in their activity [must prevent] the process of natural selection, which is to promote the most efficient, the most able, and the most industrious, from being cut short. For the National Socialist union, therefore, a strike is a measure which can and must be applied only as long as there exists no National Socialist folkish State. The latter, however, has to take over instead of the mass struggle of the two great groups – employers and employees [...] The economic chambers will have to entrusted with the obligation of keeping the national economy going [...] What today is fought out by a struggle of millions must one day find its settlement in estate chambers and in the central economic parliament. Thus the employers and workers will no longer rage against one another in [wage battles], but they will solve these problems in common in a higher instance which above all has forever to have before its eyes, in brilliant letters, the welfare of the national community and of the State. Here, too, as everywhere, the iron-like principle has to hold that the fatherland comes first (Hitler 1941, 874-876).

For Hitler, class struggle should be abolished in favour of national struggle against Jews, who were trying to use Marxism “for the smashing of the economic basis of the free, independent national states [...] and finally, for the enslavement of free nations in the service of the international world finance Judaism” (Hitler 1941, 874-875). Internal to the nation, the class power of both the workers and the bourgeoisie, which Evola would call the power of the slaves and of the merchants, should

be totally subordinated to the state, ruled by its fascist elite. This elite would rule by virtue of its “aristocratic” superiority:

The parliamentary principle of decision by majority, by denying the authority of the person and placing in its stead the number of the crowd in question, sins against the aristocratic basic idea of Nature, whose opinion of aristocracy, however, need in no way be represented by the present-day decadence of our Upper Ten Thousand. The reader of Jewish newspapers can hardly imagine the devastation which results from this institution of modern democratic parliamentary rule (Hitler 1941,103)

Of these modern parliamentarians, representatives of liberal capitalism, Hitler has, of course, nothing but contempt: “the representatives of the majority, that is, of stupidity, hate nothing more ardently than a superior mind” (Hitler 1941, 104).

## “Red-Pilled on the JQ”: Roman’s Bourgeois Liberal Racism

Although there are far-right movements which are not anti-Semitic (Carter 2017), anti-Semitism is very common on the far right. In the alt-right group, it is ubiquitous; all members I spoke with were anti-Semitic. Theories involving Jewish domination of media and government unite different branches of the group. However, this anti-Semitism, as well as the broader white supremacism which defines the group, takes a variety of forms and proceeds from several different assumptions about the world. Julius Evola’s views on race diverged from those of many of the mainstream fascists in the interwar period who saw things in more biological terms. Likewise, the racist views of different members of the alt-right group diverge.

My informant Roman's position on white supremacy is essentially the opposite of Bernard's in the sense that Roman presents himself as entirely rational, non-mystical, and pragmatic. He has no desire to be seen as a wild-eyed ideologue. He is uncomfortable with the label 'fascist' and describes himself in his own words as a "liberal democrat". In the 2016 US election, he says he supported Bernie Sanders until Hillary Clinton won the nomination, at which point he switched allegiance to Donald Trump. He is an avowed atheist and is significantly less socially conservative than other members of the group on many non-racial topics such as drug policy or tolerance of gay men.

Roman describes a turning point for his racism as "getting red-pilled on the JQ". To be red-pilled is the far-right version of getting 'woke'; it means to become aware of a hidden truth about society. The JQ is the Jewish Question, a term historically used to describe the 'question' of the place of Jews in North Atlantic society. At a certain point, Roman tells me, he was made aware of the 'truth' about Jewish influence on society, though he assures me that he is less "irrational" on the topic than many of his fellow group members.

For Roman, there is no Satanic conspiracy. Indeed there is not even really a conspiracy, at least not in the sense of a consciously carried-out plot to take over the world. Instead, Roman supports a position which he sees as more rational than conspiracy theories. He believes that Jews have become over-represented in the leadership positions of what he calls 'strategic industries', particularly media, through "group evolutionary strategy". This is a concept developed by retired psychology professor Kevin MacDonald, editor of the white supremacist magazine the *Occidental Observer*. MacDonald, who is influential on the North American far right, maintains that through selective pressure, Jews have evolved traits to help them maintain group cohesion and successfully compete for resources with gentiles (Crippen, 1997). According to this theory, the evolutionary

mechanism of ‘group selection’<sup>60</sup> has resulted in Jewish dominance by selecting for cunning, nepotism and commercial aptitude.<sup>61</sup>

Roman tells me, “I’ve always been pretty racist. [...] I’m racist on a strategic level. I’m not a hysterical racist.” He believes in the superiority of whites for straight-forward biological reasons, and there is no spiritual dimension to his white supremacism. He simply sees the world in terms of fairly discrete racial groupings and believes that for strategic geopolitical reasons whites must maintain racial supremacy in Europe and its settler colonies, which in turn will allow these countries to maintain their supremacy on a global level. For Roman, if the demography of these countries leads to the end of de facto white supremacy and the shift of cultural and institutional models away from the classically European, other ‘racial’ regions will be well positioned to exercise undue influence on Western countries both through international soft power and via their diasporas.

Roman became interested in demographic and ethnic issues through participation in ‘infidel’ forums, a set of internet sites whose users position themselves as enlightened atheists radically opposed to Islamic fundamentalism. The common thread tends to be that Muslim migrants are culturally incapable of integrating in Western societies due to the incommensurate natures of Islamic and Western values. He gives the example of his parents as successfully integrated migrants; they gave his younger sibling a common North American anglophone name. Muslim migrants, Roman says, typically do not give their children names from their host countries, indicating in his view an unwillingness to acculturate. Western chauvinism based in a desire to

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<sup>60</sup> A theoretical framework abandoned by most evolutionary scientists (Crippens, 1997; Coyne, 2011).

<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, Bernard, whose worldview is much more conspiratorial, also mentioned Kevin MacDonald to me, citing him as “an academic who’s done the work”. Racist academics like MacDonald occupy a privileged place on the far right as symbols of intellectual legitimacy.



defend liberal Enlightenment values was for Roman a natural response to the ‘threat’ of Muslim migrants. His path into organized white supremacy proceeded from this liberal Western chauvinist ideological position in conjunction with his pre-existing racism.

These positions on race – Roman’s and Bernard’s – occupy different terrain philosophically, spiritually, politically and even aesthetically. Bernard is fundamentally a mystic, as well as an overt fascist. He is animated by an apparently sincere religiosity which at times comes across as fervor. He has no difficulty giving credence to elaborate right-wing conspiracy theories, both anti-Semitic ones and the less overtly racist, Infowars variety such as PizzaGate<sup>62</sup>. He is not particularly concerned with the politics of respectability (though he values community work as a propaganda tool), and he derisively calls much of the mainstream alt-right “racist liberals”. He sees contemporary North America as a spiritually sick culture hopelessly out of touch with the timeless racial values which created it, poisoned by greed and decadence, a society in collapse which requires forceful religious fascism to reverse the fall.

Roman meanwhile is an avowed atheist who dismisses people like Bernard as “hysterical racists”. Unlike Bernard, Roman has had extensive experience with powerful, wealthy people because of his class background and cosmopolitan upbringing, and does not believe that they are controlled by Jewish Satanists. He is embarrassed by the term ‘fascist’ and openly calls himself a ‘racist liberal’. For Roman, the politics of respectability are critical; as he told me, “we can accomplish all of our goals with smart policy. Once you’ve started building ovens<sup>63</sup>, you’ve lost”. He advances an authoritarian and racially conscious form of liberal capitalism, which sees the existing world order as basically acceptable, if perhaps run by the wrong people. He holds some

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<sup>62</sup> ‘Pizzagate’ is the name given to a hoax popular among some right-leaning internet users, claiming to connect high-ranking Democratic Party officials to a child sex-trafficking ring alleged to have been run out of a Washington, D.C. pizzeria. One poll found that 9% of registered voters believed Hillary Clinton to be involved (CITE Salon)

<sup>63</sup> As in crematoria for disposing of the bodies of opponents.

more or less ‘progressive’ views on the rights of gay men and on drug policy. While he describes himself as “not pro-corporate”, he supports a regulated free market economy, capitalist property rights, representative democratic governance and other liberal staples. As a political liberal and a member of a wealthy transnational finance family, his class identification is with the bourgeoisie, and the positions he holds which coincide with the US Democrats reflect the Democrats’ status as the economically centrist wing of American pro-business interests.

Roman’s major differences with the traditional white supremacist scene – the KKK, various National Socialist parties, the Republican far right, skinheads and so forth – stem partly from the fact that some of his views are relatively centrist and partly from cosmetic concerns. He described the traditional right to me as “religious, old, bureaucratic and dusty”. He was drawn to the alt-right because of its overt racism, as racism is a major component of his worldview, but importantly because the alt-right is young, largely non-denominational, decentralized and brands itself as new and dynamic. His major point of consonance with the more fascist wing of the alt-right group is much less through agreement on issues such as economic systems, cultural concerns, or philosophical underpinnings and much more through his open white supremacism.

## 8. 'Leukocratic' Liberalism, Pathological Normalcy, and the Future of the Alt-Right

### Pathological Normalcy

Traditional scholarship about the far-right has seen it as a statistically uncommon, but always somewhat present, form of pathology, provoked by social crises (Mudde 2010). Mudde explains that in this view, economic stress or social breakdown push a small proportion of the otherwise reasonable population toward the abnormal and pathological 'politics of hate' or 'politics of fear'. The focus is on the 'demand-side' – modernity is confusing and crisis-prone, therefore there is a demand for easy solutions, therefore irrational far-right politics are taken up by people who cannot handle the modern world. This is called the 'normal pathology' model, in which far-right politics are pathological, but to be expected.

This is the model many of us are familiar with: organized racists are cast as stupid, crazy, or maladjusted, and organized racism as a kind of political disease which sometimes afflicts hard up white workers who are too dim to reskill -- or read Marx -- and so are locked into bitter, pointless hatred. Or else it may be written about as a sort of vice or obsession fallen into by the irredeemably antisocial. In this model, there is typically little more attempt to understand the motivations of racists than there is to understand the motivations of psychopaths. Organized racism is seen as so horrifying that it could only really stem from delusion and psychological torment. Consider the

following passage from an essay called ‘The Oppressor’s Pathology’, by Pedro Tabensky, a philosopher and ethicist at Rhodes University in South Africa:

Paradigmatically, racist subjects are guided by psychic forces that are largely out of their sights and out of their control, meaning that their agency is compromised. They are, for this reason, slaves of passions, guided largely by protective mechanisms that block them from being able properly to understand the distorting protective function of their racist beliefs. This shift in the nature of belief is what accounts for the uncanny sense that one gets when talking to a paradigmatic racist — similar to the feeling one gets when talking to religious fundamentalists or the paranoid delusional — that there is nobody there doing the talking. It is as if they were emitting sounds, gesturing — generally parroting rational behaviour — but not actually primarily communicating in the sphere of the rational where beliefs face the tribunal of evidence. (2010, 81)

In this passage, the ‘paradigmatic racist subject’ is explicitly pathologized: stripped of agency, enslaved by their racist vice, blank-minded, completely irrational, an uncanny puppet pretending to be a real person.

More recent scholarship has stressed that many radical right-wing orientations derive from racist, nativist, and authoritarian attitudes which, far from being alien to mainstream values, are actually widespread in the general population. Blee (2003) notes that racism is in many ways a mainstream rather than fringe phenomenon. Ferber (2004) likewise argues that “the white supremacist movement draws upon historically mainstream views about race and gender” (9), while Berlet (2004) claims that far-right groups exploit rather than cause bigotry. Perry (2004) notes that the masculinist politics of racist groups often do not differ substantially from attitudes held by people who are not involved with organized right-wing activity. For Mudde the presence of such politics is not a ‘normal pathology’ but instead evidence of a ‘pathological normalcy’ — the result of a mainstream political culture in which, for example, the majority of Western

Europeans *self-report* racism when asked in polls (Mudde 2010). Widely held mainstream values also include significant authoritarian elements, notes Mudde (2010), seen in the abundance of ‘law and order’ platforms, support for draconian ‘anti-terrorism’ legislation, and the fetishization of the military common in state and media discourses. Nativist and nationalist ideas, the acceptance of rigid social and economic hierarchies, belief in the necessity of punitive and undemocratic state structures, and so on, are all sentiments which are tacitly or explicitly promoted in the Western liberal democracies and enjoy widespread popular support. People who consider themselves perfectly regular democrats support the use of force by armed agents of the state to, for example, round up individuals too traumatized or simply too destitute to rent an apartment. ‘Progressive’ liberals cheerlead ‘humanitarian’ NATO adventures abroad. Every morning during high school, we were made to stand for the anthem played over the loudspeakers. For Mudde, the radical right-wing populist parties currently enjoying unprecedented success in Western Europe derive their politics *from these* popular sentiments, and not from some sort of dark zone of internal spiritual anguish.

It can certainly be comforting to think of racism as rare and deviant, but it minimizes the extent of racist sentiment in the general population and the existence of mainstream, systemic racism. Further, racist right-wing beliefs may be ‘pathological’, but if so, they are part of a ‘pathological normalcy’ (Mudde 2010) which is participated in by hundreds of millions of otherwise quite ordinary people. This normalcy also includes other political ideals that many would be uncomfortable categorizing as pathological, such as nationalism, statism, and hierarchism. My goal is not to argue that racism should be thought of as an ethically acceptable form of political thought; emphatically, it is not. Rather, I am suggesting that a view which sees it as fundamentally rare and a function of the maladjustment of individuals is at best short-sighted

and at worst obscurantist. Still less helpful is the view that most racists simply enjoy being evil. As Busher notes, “most people wish to see themselves as moral actors” (2016, 97) and my informants are, for the most part, no exception here.

This pathologizing approach to the radical right is unhelpful and inaccurate. It also dramatically downplays the capacity and the will of these groups to generate fairly compelling intellectual content with the goal of influencing power and politics. Consider the following quote taken from a piece called ‘Counter-Democracy’, by Pierre Rosanvallon, Chair of Political History at the Collège de France. Of right-wing populists, he writes:

In recent years these negative masses seem to have turned exclusively inward. No longer do they pour energy into some promised improvement or future paradise. No moral force spurs them to dignified resistance or purposeful action. To these silent masses – disillusioned, disoriented, and disgusted – populism fails even to supply a language. Yet it knows how to stoke anger and stir protest [...]. Populism [...] is a force radically bereft of ideas, incapable of active criticism, and reduced to the expression of resigned violence. (P. 271)

While this is all very lofty, pretending that far-right groups *do not have* real ideas is not a useful way to engage with the phenomenon. My ethnographic data indicates that the alt-right in North America can be thoughtful and strategic, and excels at packaging ideas for internet consumption. In Europe, right-wing populists are using ideas which appeal to millions of people to successfully contest elections, because they actively seek power, not just ‘resigned violence’.

Roger Griffin (2017) argues that these populist ideas have, in Europe, “contaminated [liberalism] from within”, leading to a hybrid form which “enthusiastically embraces the liberal system, but considers only one ethnic group full members of civil society” (23). Far-right activists understand that the realities of modern Europe mean that this format is the only one in which their

ideas are likely to achieve real power. As Joe put it, “fascism is not a realistic platform right now if you want to recruit people.” Liberalism enjoys such hegemony over the political landscape that fully illiberal, revolutionary stances such as classical fascism or Bolshevism have essentially no chance of challenging the status quo unless dramatic crisis conditions destabilize European states to their breaking points.

Hybrid formats, then, offer a way to propel broadly illiberal ideas into the ‘legitimate’ political arena. The hybrid format being used to great effect by populist parties in Western Europe accepts democracy to a fair degree, but, writes Griffin, “exploits the profound ambiguity of the term *demos*” (2017, 24), Greek for ‘people’ and the basis of the word ‘democracy’. The hybrid format proposes to extend the *demos* only to a narrow range of ethnically-defined citizens, excluding ethnic outsiders and undesirables. It borrows freely from the *Nouvelle Droite*’s playbook of differentialism and ethnopluralism, writes Griffin, lending it an air of sophistication often lacking in straight-ahead fascists. With regard to other policy issues, parties belonging to this trend often fall along conventional centrist lines: more or less pro-business or pro-worker, more or less pro-patriarchy or pro-women’s rights, but not differing significantly in these respects from the various Christian Democrat or Labour parties with which they compete. Griffin (2017) calls this hybrid ‘ethnocratic liberalism’. To remind the reader, ‘liberalism’ here, as throughout this thesis, is understood as referring to the political order associated with liberal capitalism, not to leftism, progressivism, or any Liberal party.

## Leukocratic Liberalism

As I sat one day in a Lebanese chain restaurant in Montreal, watching Joe eat a manakish, he told me about the new Montreal identitarian group which both him and Philippe as well as others in the alt-right group's Camp A were getting involved with. Both of them were hopeful about the prospects of the new group as a front with which to spread their ideas. In my interviews with Philippe, he had presented himself as being very much in line with the moderate thinking the new group would try to project. Joe made it clear to me that the air of moderation would be a ruse calculated to boost recruitment and provide an aura of respectability.

When the new group had been set up, it was as a chapter of a European parent organization, a large identitarian group. This parent organization is usually careful to frame its focus as being on ethnicity, not specifically race, and, as part of the European trend toward 'ethnocratic liberalism' among right-wing populists, exhibits some acceptance of gay and bisexual people and tends to pay lip service to a conservative form of feminism or gender egalitarianism. Attractive young women participating in demonstrations or speaking earnestly into the camera feature in their ad videos. They also avoid overt anti-Semitism and, like the alt-right, have dropped the aggressive skinhead look associated with the far right in favour of a more fashionable and palatable hipster aesthetic. Their ads avoid discussion of what exactly their ideal future state would look like, instead focusing heavily on their demonstrations and banner-drops – the classic activism of liberal democracies – and on questions of identity, ethnic self-determination, and national autonomy. Identitarian material uses occasionally aggressive language toward the 'treasonous' multicultural state, but identitarian groups are not revolutionary or terrorist organizations, at least publicly, as



Joe explained. Their talking points remain firmly within the realm of a classic liberal social movement.

In the case of the European parent group, it is unclear how much of this moderation is authentic and how much is intended to get around stringent European hate-speech laws or attract more moderate followers. The group includes many white supremacists, Joe told me, including in the leadership, but its activists frame their struggle in terms of national identity, ethnicity, and ‘European values’ rather than explicitly in terms of white racial supremacy. Meanwhile, the new identitarian group in Montreal was staffed almost entirely by members of the alt-right group, and the alt-right in North America has always been firmly committed to *white* nationalism, not to any particular ethnic identities. It is largely very homophobic and contemptuous of feminism. The ways in which the Montreal group has navigated these differences with the European identitarians are instructive.

Joe told me the new group would be coming out with a range of talking points designed to get women to join, a first for him. Women were almost entirely absent from the alt-right meetings I attended. As Joe put it, the new group was “not going to say ‘women belong in the household’ or anything like that, for optics. Having women in the group is good for optics. So it’s a soft goal to attract more women.” He told me the group was also debating the use of a don’t-ask-don’t-tell policy when it came to gay or bisexual members – sure to be controversial or even a deal-breaker for some, but supported by senior members as a method of appearing moderate. In addition, he said, the new identitarian group would relax the strident anti-Semitism which characterized the alt-right group. Montreal organizers had been told by the European leadership that anti-Semitism was bad for branding and should preferably be dropped. “No more gas chamber memes,” he said. Of course, he assured me, his own views, and those of senior leadership figures, would not change,

but would simply be down-played for the time being, for the ultimate goal of building up a hip Canadian response to the European identitarian youth movement. As he put it, “We want to be a young urbanite movement. [...] Fascism is not a realistic platform right now if you want to unite people. [...] So going forward, we’re going to look more refined.”

When it came to the issue of race versus ethnicity, though, there was a problem, he explained. The identitarians in Europe tried to have one chapter of their organization per European ethnonational grouping; but which ethnic grouping would the Canadian chapter be fighting for? The Europeans, he said, did not consider ‘Canadian’ to be, properly, a European ethnicity. Even though Montreal organizers had tried to explain to them that the Canadian chapter would be fighting for white Euro-Canadians, a group in their own right in Joe’s view, the European top brass was unconvinced. The French or the Germans, they said, were an ethnicity. The mongrel white population in Canada was not.

As a result, Joe told me, the Montreal identitarian group was to split with the European leadership, while maintaining the look, feel, and many of the talking points of the European identitarians. The main difference would be that instead of taking an approach based primarily in Griffin’s (2017) *ethnocratic* liberalism, their approach would be what I am calling leukocratic liberalism, from *leukos*, meaning ‘white’. In other words, instead of trying to build up a form of exclusionary liberal politics based on restricting the *demos* to a single *ethnic* group, their goal is to restrict it to single racial group, whites. This is in line with the alt-right’s stated goal of a ‘white ethnostate’ in North America, and reflects Camp A’s liberal version of this political platform rather than Camp B’s revolutionary or fascist one.

In some ways, the vision of leukocratic liberalism – a white supremacist, capitalist representative democracy – cannot really be considered revolutionary or radical. It is of course

extreme, and its implementation would involve violence on a horrific scale, but it does not really propose anything unprecedented. In fact, leukocratic, or white supremacist liberalism, underlies the founding mythos of Canada and of the British Empire's settler colonialism more generally. It is one of the traditional stances of Canadian politics: forging a new country from settlers of all nations, provided those nations were in Europe. Leukocratic liberalism is a deeply reactionary stance, intent on turning the clock back 50 or 100 years, but nevertheless it is a prototypically *Canadian* stance. Unlike European ethnocentric liberalism, which loathes immigration, the Canadian stance does not necessitate any opposition whatsoever to immigration *in and of itself*, because Canada as a colonial project is intimately tied to mass immigration. In addition, if the Canadian alt-right restricted its membership to those descended only from British and French settlers, it would exclude not only most of the country's population, but also some of its most fervent supporters and even leaders.

## Canada and Immigration

Ambrose and Mudde (2015) have claimed that the radical right has never been able to gain a strong foothold in Canada largely because Canadians, unlike Europeans, have bought into multiculturalism so thoroughly: polls show that Canadians are the least likely of any Western population to oppose large-scale immigration. All major Canadian federal political parties firmly support immigration and multiculturalism, though to different degrees, argue Ambrose and Mudde (2015). This is taken to mean that Canadians are the least racist population among rich countries, and Ambrose and Mudde propose a number of reasons for this, including effective government propaganda and repressive hate speech laws. I argue that by treating Canada as a country

essentially interchangeable politically with Western European states, this view leaves out Canada's particular history related to immigration. As well, or perhaps as a result, it is also curiously content to treat tolerance toward immigration as a measure for racism.

First, it must be noted that unlike with the significant rise in immigration levels seen by Western European countries since the 1980s, the era of large numbers of foreign-born people arriving in Canada to settle did not begin then, or with Liberal governments in the 60s and 70s which opened immigration up to non-European countries. In fact, the highest number of landed immigrants to Canada ever recorded (as a total number, not as a proportion of the population) was in 1913, when over 400,000 people immigrated legally to Canada (Statistics Canada 2016). The proportion of foreign-born Canadians has been between 15% and 20% for virtually all of Canada's history as a state (Statistics Canada 2016). Mass immigration from a significant number of overseas countries has always been integral to the Canadian project.

Second, and related, it is perfectly possible to support high levels of immigration while also being a dedicated white supremacist, and many would argue that this was precisely the position of the Canadian state for most of its history (Backhouse 1999; Ward 2005; Montgomery 2005; Stanley 2011; Stanley 2014; Coleman 2014; Maynard 2017). The racist right, therefore, has as one of its range of options a racist pro-immigration stance which embraces large population transfers into Canada but wishes to restrict the populations in question to those coming from 'white countries'.

If Mudde is right that racist right-wing movements are taking their ideological direction from existing mainstream sentiments, then we would expect to see their movements in various places exhibiting regionally-specific characteristics. And, indeed, this is precisely what we find in the Canadian situation. The mainstream conservative right -- when it was in power under Stephen

Harper -- supported immigration primarily from a neo-conservative economic standpoint, while also pandering to some immigrant electorates and expressing some of the Islamophobic sentiment common in the population. It could not oppose immigration *tout court* – a nonsensical position when campaigning to an electorate consisting mostly of immigrants and their descendants – and could not espouse open racism, which is currently a political taboo and which is not an integral part of an economy-oriented neo-conservative position. Such a position sees the advantages of having large supplies of cheap labour available for Canadian corporations and from which they can extract value. Betz and Johnson (2017) note that right-wing populists in New Zealand are not at all opposed to immigration from European countries but oppose immigration from Asia and Africa. As I have shown, the Canadian alt-right—like other ultra-reactionary movements--is often happy to break the taboos around open racism while at the same time including members with a racist pro-immigration stance.

At one meet-up I attended, I was introduced to people who had immigrated, or whose parents had immigrated, from Italy, Russia, Iran (“he did a DNA test and he’s mostly white”), Serbia, and a number of other countries in Latin America and Europe. In fact, of all the men I managed to interview, only two had no immigrants among their parents or grandparents. There were a number of settler-descended Canadians in the group, but most of the men I talked to had at least some immigrant background. Even one of the leaders of the group came here as a small child and still has a subtle accent. I was reminded of the first time I had seen most of these men; it was at an event at which an academic was speaking about his theories on the destruction of Canada through mass immigration. The speaker, Dr. Ricardo Duchesne of the University of New Brunswick, was born in Puerto Rico and has a thick Spanish accent.

The ideas of this group of men *cannot* rationally include pure anti-immigrant nativism because many, if not the majority, of them are not ‘native’ in any meaningful sense of the word. Nor could they include a narrow ethnic identity because they do not share one. For all this group’s opposition to multiculturalism, they are nevertheless a product of Canadian immigration and of Montreal’s cosmopolitan environment: people who come from a large number of different countries, with different mother tongues, almost all bilingual and many trilingual, performing a common identity. This common identity is based not on shared ethnicity, as with the European identitarian groups, or on the ‘colour-blind’ civic patriotism promoted by the modern Canadian state, but rather on the activists’ perceived shared *race*. Race, then, instead of rigidly defined ethnicity, *has to be* the central component of the Canadian alt-right – just as it was a central component of historical Canadian (and before that, British colonial) government and settlement.

## Dual Positions

An aspect of far-right racist thinking which can be confusing to outsiders is that many racist activists do not have just one position on a given topic. This is for the simple reason that, as racists who reject universalism, they do not believe that different groups of people should be subject to the same policies. Most Canadians support immigration and immigrants because most Canadians are descended from immigrants; but many Canadians harbor racist sentiments to a lesser or greater degree, and the Canadian state was founded on white supremacist ideals (Backhouse 1999; Ward 2005; Montgomery 2005; Stanley 2011; Stanley 2014; Coleman 2014; Maynard 2017). Though it is “important to disaggregate those groups and individuals [that were] white supremacist in a general sense – that is, that is, they accepted the views on race that were common at the time –

from those that treated race as their primary concern” (Hawley 2017, 23), these deep-seated cultural beliefs about race in Canada are the ideas from which the Canadian alt-right takes its direction. Their recent turn towards a form of identitarian-influenced leukocratic liberalism occurred for the same reasons that European right-wing populists have turned toward ethnocratic liberalism. Locating their politics within a continuum of liberal ideas allows them to echo the important, if now subdued, political tradition of overt racism in Canada, while retaining moderate non-racial political positions which enjoy overwhelming support in the population, and therefore maximize their chances of appealing to their target audiences. With this in view, I leave the reader with an excerpt from Griffin, well worth the length:

The fact that ethnocratic liberalism is a hybrid of ideological extremism and democratic constitutionalism, of radical right and centre (making the term ‘radical right populism’ misleading), and is a paradox rather than an oxymoron, also makes it more dangerous. It is perfectly attuned to a post-war world hostile to unadulterated fascism, one where the clerks now enthusiastically help man the ideological Maginot Line which has been constructed to stop an openly revolutionary brand of illiberalism ever again achieving credibility. It speaks a language of ‘rights’ – rights of ethnic peoples, rights to a culture – which addresses deep-seated and understandable fears about the erosion of identity and tradition by the globalizing (but only partially homogenizing) forces of high modernity. It is a discourse which has grown in sophistication thanks to the theorists of communitarianism,<sup>39</sup> ethnopluralism, and differentialism, and in legitimacy in the context of justified concerns over cultural globalization. The ground for its widespread acceptance as a familiar and genuine (if unwelcome) member of the liberal ideological family rather than the offspring of a highly fecund anti-liberal cuckoo, has been well prepared by liberalism’s long history of contamination by prejudices which have denied entire groups access to the rights it upholds as ‘sacred’: women, the poor, children, the handicapped, the nomad, the allophone, the aboriginal, the ‘primitive’. If the battle cry of liberalism in theory is Rousseau’s ‘All [human beings] are born equal and everywhere they live in chains’ then its slogan in practice has been Orwell’s ‘All men are equal but some are more equal than others’ (Griffin 2017, 62)

## 9. Motivations, Time Travel and the End of the World

“I want to show you something.”

“Sure.”

A meet-up attendee named Jake and I stand looking out at the city. Behind us, other members of the group are arrayed in small groups, chatting, smoking cigarettes and drinking beer and vodka. Jake gestures at the building on the corner.

“Look at that,” he says. “This is what it’s all about.” He is pointing at a seven- or eight-storey greyish cube that looms blankly over the street, housing the offices of some anonymous acronym. It is interchangeable with a hundred other uninspired buildings in the city, unremarkable except maybe for the fact that it is uglier than most. I frown and nod.

“That building,” Jake says, “is this country *now*.” The building is not just ugly, he explains, but a disaster. It is an imposition. It is rootless, without provenance, with no care put into it. It only looks that way because that is the cheapest way for it to look. To him it is emblematic, or maybe symptomatic, of the deep moral and spiritual malaise in which he finds his country.

“Hmm,” I reply, and nod vaguely again, a response which is quickly becoming my go-to reaction for most of the things people are saying to me tonight.



“Now look over here,” he says, directing my attention to another building we can make out in the dusk. It is imposing, over a hundred years old, built in a Palladian neo-classical style like many of Montreal’s Victorian buildings. High, sloped copper roofs top neat stonework and wrought iron. The narrow windows and many wings and courtyards give a castle-like impression. A couple of slowly oxidizing religious-looking statues perch among the eaves. “That’s what we used to be. We used to have a *culture*. That building is beautiful, man. Craftsmen made that, and you can tell. They wanted it to look beautiful.” He looks at me expectantly. He is pleased with this comparison.

It is not the first time tonight that I have been invited to consider a symbolic contrast writ large over the city. Earlier in the evening, a man had pointed to the huge illuminated cross glowing faintly on top of Mount Royal, before directing my attention to a mural of Leonard Cohen going up on a building elsewhere. That juxtaposition was supposed to require no explanation – Christian heritage in aging steel rivets on one side, shadowy Jewish influence rising over the neighbourhood on the other. I had dutifully scribbled down the interaction in my notebook, but otherwise had not considered it very important. This group of men exhibit the most strident anti-Semitism I have encountered, so it is unsurprising that they would have a problem with a gigantic painting of Montreal’s most famous Jew.

But Jake’s comparison is different. It hits me in an uncomfortable way. It is the first time in my fieldwork that I have had a moment of real empathy with one of my informants. The fact is that I bike past this street all the time, and I have often looked at this same pair of buildings and felt the same kind of disgust that I hear in Jake’s voice now. I am running up against one of the points of convergence with some of my informants that will at first sicken and confuse me, then provide me with valuable traction in my bid to understand this group of men. The fact is that no

matter what most of us might like to think, these are not primarily crazy, stupid, or otherwise particularly unusual people in most ways. At least some of them have motivations I can relate to, sometimes profoundly. Architecture might be an unusual thing to agree on with a neo-Nazi, but it is as good a place as any to start.

I have always had a strong emotional reaction to architecture. So much of it in North America fills me with a deep, dark aversion that on a bad day can be bordering on panic. When I think of those drab concrete cubes, I think of words like soulless; meaningless; bleak; brutal; desolate. The kinds of box stores and corporate campuses you find on the outskirts of cities are even worse. Those huge beige slabs littering the sides of the miles and miles of highways – spaces intervening violently between places, abstracting the land and remaking it in the image of a map – fill me with a visceral sense that something is very wrong. The feeling they evoke in me is like the feeling of being lost in the bitter cold with nowhere to go.

In fact, I remember one freezing night as a teenager, walking home on the side of the highway from a party in a different part of town, slowly realizing that we might literally die of exposure long before getting anywhere near where we lived. We found plastic bottles in garbage cans, filled them with hot water from a gas station bathroom, put them in our clothes, and huddled together in a bus stop until dawn. The gas station attendant wouldn't let us stay in the store. The emptiness of it all, at that moment, felt like an attack. All around was concrete, steel, parked cars, housing developments, lawns, fences, patches of trees planted to separate properties, all bought and built by people – but no people anywhere, no shelter, no transit, not a single building that could be said to be public, everything locked, cold, silent and empty. Total isolation, surrounded by the products of industrial capitalism.

Buildings and infrastructure are politically and spiritually evocative. They are huge, expensive, solid, long-lasting reflections of the goals and aspirations of the people and groups that have them built. They are physical extensions of the wills of these people and groups, which we as individuals must literally navigate in and around whether we want to or not. As such, they are a powerfully material manifestation of the systems of power and ideology which animate our culture, interventions into the world which we cannot avoid interacting with. The base interjecting into the superstructure, as Marx would have it.

Buildings say something to us. A dense network of three-floor walk-ups, taking up a whole neighbourhood, on narrow one-way streets, interspersed with parks, squares and pedestrian crossings – take the Plateau in Montreal, for example – says, ‘People live here. This is a place for people. We are people and you are a person, and this is a place for us.’ That kind of a place is person-sized. It is not really car-sized, because parking is a nightmare and the one-way streets make it infuriating to drive in. It is not corporation-sized, because you cannot smack a corporate campus down in the middle of the Plateau as there is nowhere for it to go. Commerce and retail do exist – and they are squeezed into the person-sized spaces available on the bottom floors of the low apartment buildings. There is graffiti everywhere and parking lots nowhere. The living, breathing human on foot is welcomed in such a place.

A palatial building like the one Jake pointed out to me speaks in a different way. It interpellates you, forcing you by its existence to be one half of an interaction with it and defining you through that interaction. You cannot ignore it and it is meant not to be ignored. The will of its builders reaches out through time and space and touches you, saying, ‘You are small. You make space for us; we do not make space for you. We are rich and we are strong; your agency is meaningless to us. What we have made is careful and beautiful and nothing you do on your own

will ever be as careful and beautiful as this.’ It is not person-sized. It is superior, authoritative, on a higher level. It channels the Church and the State and the King and the Owner and tries to make you into a subject of a bygone ideology.

Even a building like that, though, at least says something to you, and it really is invested in some sort of meaningful aesthetic. The other building Jake pointed out to me is silent. It does not even bother to call the passerby a peasant. It says nothing to you because you do not matter. It exists because of logics into which you do not even figure. The place it sits is as good a place as any other for it to sit and the way it looks is totally secondary to its function as productive capital. In navigating buildings like these, “we navigate a world of corporate agents that do not respond or act as people do” (Warner 2014, 69). A box store thrown up beside a highway interchange is an extension of a corporate will so mindlessly ravenous, so alien to person-sized human sentiments that it cannot communicate with you any more than you can communicate with a bug. You can be ignored or you can be crushed or you can exist tinily in the shadows of that gigantic will, but you cannot ever matter to it.

Or at least that is how I feel, and I think I am not alone. I am not trying, here, to elaborate a universal theory of the subject-forming potentials of different types of architecture. Nor am I under the illusion that all architecture before the 20<sup>th</sup> century was beautiful and careful and ‘cultural’ while somehow culture has been stripped from the buildings we build now. Probably given a few more decades the kind of corporate neo-brutalism I am disparaging will have a certain retro charm. Rather, I am trying to use architecture to articulate an emotional framework within which I experience things, and within which I believe many others experience things as well.

Many people – most people – who live in this country don’t necessarily consider office buildings or box stores to be the source of intolerable psychic pain. But these buildings and the

infrastructure around them are representative of a set of relations the effects of which many people find quietly unbearable. This is a set of relations in which individuals are disconnected completely from the product of their work; from their communities, in the sense of their physical neighbourhoods; from family, as the extended family gives way to the nuclear which gives way to the atomized working single parent; and from authentic-feeling practice, as all cultural material is gradually (or instantaneously as the case may be) subsumed by the market. This set of relations strips people's lives of sources of meaning and authenticity. I recently saw a statistic claiming that clinical depression is now 10 times more common than it was a century ago (Twenge 2014). One of the symptoms of depression can be a type of existential despair related to a sense of meaninglessness in one's life. For myself and many others, it is impossible to ignore the implication that alienation, in the Marxist sense of brutal estrangement from the essence of what it means to be human, is hurting people very much.

It is a trope, in the Millennial leftist circles I have spent time in, that to be well-adjusted to life under late capitalism is itself a sign of being mentally unwell. People in my generation have lived their whole lives with a new news story every week about the impending environmental collapse. At the same time the formal political process has remained abstruse and out of reach while the stranglehold of the dozen or so corporations which dominate the global economy has gotten tighter and tighter<sup>64</sup>, so we cannot even envision being able to do anything about it. As Gaillard-Starzmann puts it, “for the majority of voters the right and left govern identically, whilst admitting that in fact the world economy is governing, not them, and in these circumstances, to be in government can only mean serving oneself” (2006, 185). Wildlife populations have plummeted by more than half since 1970 (WWF 2018) and a million species are at risk of extermination within

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<sup>64</sup> The value of the top 10 corporations was \$285tn (£215tn), beating the \$280tn worth of the bottom 180 countries, which include Ireland, Indonesia, Israel, Colombia, Greece, South Africa, Iraq and Vietnam (Inman 2016).

decades (Watts 2019). People I know are organizing grief circles for the environment, in which they mourn together for the dying ecosystem they have inherited and try to come to terms with their sense of total powerlessness and their mangled ability to even react emotionally to disaster anymore. Every one of my friends with whom I have talked about the subject of having children has expressed that they are afraid of bringing a child into a world that may cease to meaningfully exist within that child's lifetime. Rent relentlessly claws its way ever higher, with housing crises in major cities locking young people into cycles of poverty, debt and overwork. Most of us my age cannot even imagine having enough money to own a house, even though the real GDP per capita has almost tripled since the year my parents were born (World Bank 2019). Stable jobs are rare, wages have lagged far behind inflation, and virtually all the gains made in the economy have gone to owners, not workers. Even many of the relatively privileged among us are in a state of constant economic precarity, in a world which we are continually reminded is teetering on the edge of ecological catastrophe anyway – in an economy on the verge of mass automation, an eventuality which no one in power seems to be planning for. It is a frightening and confusing time to be a young adult.

On top of the creeping immiseration and environmental disintegration being perpetrated around us, we live in a period during which the total triumph of market forces seems imminent. Commodification, the assignment of market value or prices to things that were previously seen as being outside the realm of the market (Constable, 2009), has penetrated seemingly every corner of existence. Virtually every item, service, experience or identity can be or has been commodified – including interpersonal relationships and reproductive labour (Constable, 2009), sexual labour (Bernstein, 2007), intimacy (Constable, 2009), care (Constable, 2009), culture and ethnicity (Shepherd, 2002), gender (Lindholm, 2008) and authenticity itself (Lindholm, 2008). The

authentic is an important “master schema for imagining a good life” for Westerners and others (Hyang, 2011, p. 279), and the production and consumption of ostensibly authentic content is a huge business globally. Yet in many people's minds, the very definition of something authentic is that it *cannot* be bought and sold, it cannot be mass-produced, and it cannot be a facsimile (Shepherd, 2002). People crave authenticity in a world they see as having been “rendered [...] artificial [by capitalism]” (Bernstein, 2007), yet find themselves with no access to authenticity except through the market.

The ugly office building Jake pointed out to me is inauthentic. It is a facsimile, it is mass-produced. The highway box-store is inauthentic. It is an artificial copy of a real human environment. Many of our identities seem inauthentic because they are based primarily on choices to consume or not consume specific culturally marked products, the quantity and variety of which have reached an apex under late capitalism (Lindholm, 2008). Our work is inauthentic, since we increasingly perform tasks that do not matter and are not productive (Graeber 2019), or tasks that could easily be performed by robots. Even entertainment has shifted from platforms which at least had a comforting (in retrospect?) physicality to them – VHSs, CDs, books – to fleeting online and digital modes which are so thoroughly copies that they do not even seem to have or need an original. All this generates tremendous anxiety.

Capitalism has so thoroughly dominated culture that even rebellion against capitalism is commodified. Within that fleeting digital Netflix mediascape we are even frequently sold *anti-capitalism* as a capitalist product (Fisher 2009; Graeber 2016). Fisher notes that ‘alternative’ styles, such as grunge in the 1990s, are easily and instantly appropriated by capitalism, commodified and repackaged as “settled [...] cultural zones, which endlessly repeat older gestures of rebellion and contestation as if for the first time” (2009, 9). Under this regime of commodification, “‘alternative’

and ‘independent’ don’t designate something outside mainstream culture; rather, they are styles, in fact *the* dominant styles, within the mainstream” (2009, 9).

In such a context, for many people a deep-seated, antidepressant-proof malaise is inescapable. We are on some level aware that there is something about the world that is crushing us relentlessly, but even if we are able to attribute this problem to the economic circumstances in which we exist, we find that they are entirely inescapable. Fisher (2009) calls this state of affairs ‘capitalist realism’, “the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it” (2). We are all transformed into “the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and relics” of an earlier time when meaning existed and we had access to the authentic (4).

Anthropologists need to be careful about giving too much credence to models which posit a general state of culturelessness or meaninglessness in the late capitalist West. On one level, it is impossible for anything that humans do to be truly stripped of culture, meaning or authenticity. In a very real way, by definition anything that people do is ‘cultural’, and sitting at home, alone, silently scrolling on a phone while eating re-heated packaged food is just as ‘cultural’ and just as marked with points of meaning as participating in a commensal feast, a potlatch, or a traditional field cookout featuring freshly hunted game. It is just that in the culture I am from, many things rare elsewhere in time and space are common, such as living alone, rarely preparing or sharing food, and doing almost nothing in one’s leisure time other than consuming visual media. Earlier I mentioned an ‘artificial copy of a real human environment’. In reality there is no such thing, as all environments inhabited by humans are real human environments.

On the other hand, there is something unique about the specific cultural forms of late capitalism that spring from the economic layout of states like Canada. This unique element is the



near-total dominance of the market and the state within the territory of the post-industrial capitalist core countries. Nowhere else and never before has so much of every person's life been mediated entirely through commercial and bureaucratic transactions.

There is a widespread sense that the contemporary world is one of rootlessness, where traditions are threatened, meaning is in collapse, and powerful forces are intent on undermining the things that make a good life possible. This springs from a profound form of alienation being perfected under late capitalism, and can crystalize emotionally around certain symbolic fields – I have been using architecture as an example. At the same time, economic precarity and environmental instability paired with political stagnation produce anxiety about the future and cynicism about the status quo. Taken all together, disillusionment with the dominant liberal order is a major component of the cultural landscape in which both my informants and I exist. I have been arguing this as part of an exploration of how it is that I found myself, at times, sharing outlooks or motivations with political activists who espouse values which seem to be close to the precise opposite of the ones I hold.

## Alienation and the Alt-Right

This sense of rootlessness and meaninglessness is pervasive and affects people located all over the political spectrum. However, the perceived causes vary from group to group as do the solutions deemed acceptable. Conservatives often feel that the things which are being threatened are best seen as moral or civilizational traditions, such as Christmas, the nuclear family, or heterosexual marriage. The attacker, when articulated, is thus often presented as some force or body which is opposed on principle to the civilizational values of 'the West', or else is being duped

by political correctness into being opposed to these values. Social democrats often feel that the things which are under attack are best seen as popular social values, such as community, labour rights, or democracy, which they feel have been fought for in the past and are now threatened by big business or other reactionary forces. Anarchists and communists typically understand the situation to be caused by liberal capitalism reaching a kind of apogee in which workers are so alienated and capital so triumphant that what is under attack is the very essence of what it means to be human. The attacker is seen as an economic system bigger than any one clique or group, though ultimately it is being steered and upheld by a particular class.

Far-right white supremacists see things in racial terms. They often also see things in terms inflected with economics, but for them, what is under attack is the essence of what it means to be white. An ad put out by Richard Spencer, a leading figure in the alt-right and president of the white supremacist think-tank the National Policy Institute, sums it up this way:

A nation based on freedom is just another place to go shopping. It's a country for everyone and thus a country for no one. It's a country in which we ourselves have become strangers. Man doesn't live and man doesn't die for abstractions like freedom. Man lives and dies for a homeland, for a people and its freedom, for beauty, for the power of being part of something bigger than oneself. Who are we? We aren't just white. White is a checkbox on the census form. We are part of a people's history. (Spencer 2017<sup>65</sup>)

Spencer here is attempting to articulate an emotional opposition to runaway individualism. The bit is clumsy, arguing that people do not connect emotionally with abstractions like freedom, then proposing a list of other abstractions (including freedom) instead. However, it captures a sense of

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<sup>65</sup> This video is frequently removed from hosting services and may be difficult to track down in the future.

anger about alienation that is appealing to white people for whom race is an acceptable organizing principle.

Far-right activists also often see things in spiritual terms, especially fascists. Race, culture, civilization and spirit are seen as interlinked, with the accomplishments of thousands of years of European history from all corners of Europe claimed for the white race and attributed to a unique racial essence. If the members of that race, the holders of that essence, are currently in a demoralized and alienated state, their dominant political system despised by millions, their traditional cultures collapsing as they are gobbled up by the market, and the ecological integrity of the lands they inhabit in free-fall, something must be wrong spiritually and racially.

Human beings, as social animals, instinctually crave a sense of connection and community (Maté 2009). That is why putting someone in solitary confinement is considered one of the most severe punishments possible. The alienation of late modernity is devastating to our sense of connection. Far-right white supremacists in Canada, both of the fascist and liberal variety, imagine that this malaise can be remedied by racial means. Through a racial lens, alienation is experienced as a deracination (I use the term advisedly), and the lack of connection is experienced as a lack of racial cohesion. If the problem is deracination and a lack of racial cohesion, a solution presents itself: the spiritual renewal of the white race and the re-establishment of the imagined white ecumene, a kind of racial *ummah* of the Europeans.

An enemy also presents itself. Largely lacking a coherent economic analysis, the far right -- and its activists are not alone here -- is often limited to conspiracy theories, mysticism and identity politics. Unable to find common cause with non-white working people, and attributing their lack of connection with those people to racial incommensurability, far-right activists are often unable to discern the economic processes which are dismantling authenticity and connection for

all workers in Canada. Witnessing the cultural distinctiveness of new immigrant groups and overestimating their difference, they imagine that immigrant populations enjoy a racial cohesion that they lack. They experience the sense that something is being done to whites, but not to others; something racial in character and destructive in purpose. Jews have been, and continue to be, the favourite scapegoat (Caiani et al. 2012), and non-white immigrants are their tool, driving a wedge into the white population in order to divide and conquer. Bernard believes that their motivations are Satanic; Roman believes that Jews are genetically predisposed to economic parasitism. Everyone in the group believes that ‘elites’ are succeeding in a bid to replace the white population of Canada with non-white immigrants.

The alt-right sees itself as being locked in a bitter struggle with the left. The increasing interconnectedness of the global economy and disappearance of borders for capital – the product of decades of right-wing neoliberalism – is identified with migration, called ‘globalism’, and attributed to the left. The large uptick in Arab refugees to Western countries as a result of the Syrian Civil War – a conflict mainly between authoritarian Islamists and proxy armies funded by the military establishments of the US and Russia – is seen as a demographic tool to destroy Europe and is attributed to the left. The content of mass media, perceived to be vapid and shallow, is associated with Hollywood, and thus with Jews, and is attributed to the left. The increasing surveillance of far-right groups by intelligence agencies and police is attributed to the left as is the occasional censoring of ‘hate speech’ by massive media corporations like Facebook. Even individualism, the paramount neoliberal value, is attributed to the left.

In reality, all of these phenomena are the direct result of the policies of the capitalist ruling class, a class by definition implacably opposed to the ownership of the means of production by workers, to economic democracy, to social programs funded with their taxes, and to environmental

policies which would conserve the biosphere at the expense of profits – in short, to leftism. Different factions of the ruling class are happy to pander to liberal identity politics of different kinds – allowing transgender drone pilots or railing against ‘illegal immigration’ – because these sideshows are largely irrelevant to their project of class domination. Racism has been an invaluable tool for capitalism in that it offered a ‘moral’ justification for inequality (as well as historically serving as a warning to poor whites and providing an oppressed reserve army of labour) (Allen 2012). The ruling class, however, is proving itself more than capable of inventing new justifications for its rule, while also playing to latent white chauvinist sentiment when useful. Individuals within the ruling establishment may have various personal motivations but as a class, they are engaged in a struggle with intelligible economic motivations: maintaining and expanding control over as much of the world’s economic output and political authority as is feasible.

Crucially, this project is under no obligation to be a conscious conspiracy<sup>66</sup>, though factions of the ruling class certainly collude purposefully (Guerin 2014). A commitment to Satanism or the genocide of the white race is not required to participate in this project. Self-interest, a large stake in the continuance of the status quo, and inculcation in dominant ideologies justifying capitalist exploitation are sufficient. The economic processes of late capitalism are helped along by the policies of liberal states structurally incapable of opposing them in meaningful ways. The logical result of these processes is reflected in the world we live in. All things are commodified; alienation is endemic; workers are locked into precarity; the biosphere is irreversibly damaged. The inherent meaninglessness of capitalist accumulation, its fundamental moral and philosophical emptiness, is on display for everyone to see; and that meaninglessness is a wound carried in our hearts.

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<sup>66</sup> The neoreactionaries are closest to understanding this, with their concept of the Cathedral as a distributed system not under the control of any one guiding group. However, their solution is to ramp up capitalist domination to its purest possible form by replacing states with corporate governments, the ‘joint-stock republic’.

## Time Travel

The far right is often seen as a reaction to economic downturns, the purview of the insane, or the politics of lower-class brutes too stupid and violent to know any better. The project of the far right is actually the desire to travel back in time, inflected by the white chauvinist and authoritarian ideas common throughout the population, and spurred not by economic anomalies but by the normal functioning of liberal capitalism. Like many in my generation, people in the alt-right are tired of living in the ‘end of history’, watching it turn out to be not so much Fukuyama’s (1989) triumph of rational markets and prosperity for all, and more the slow-motion collapse of everything that matters to us. Anarchists and communists want to fast-forward through this miserable and lonely era and arrive in an imagined future, where what they see as sane and moral policies prevail, the ideal of human equality is realized, and workers, liberated from the burden of grinding, meaningless wage labour, done in the name of perpetual GDP growth, producing things that no one wants or needs, are free to do what humans do best and generate new forms of culture for the new world.

The far right by contrast wants to travel back to an imagined past, but also, like the Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s court, to hold on to their technological infrastructure. They want to arrive, assault rifles in hand, in a past world wherein the bulwarks of traditional authority still hold strong against the faceless, alien processes of late capitalism, indeed a world wherein, to borrow from Evola, things have not yet become subject to the contingent and the material, where belief and right thinking determine the state of things rather than the other way around. This is a world wherein the patriarchal family unit is triumphant, where no one eats dinner alone in front of

the TV because a woman has prepared the meal, where Christianity provides a sense of moral certainty and where a deserving aristocracy rules instead of scheming ‘elites’. This is a Canada wherein a ‘homogenous’ white population stretches from sea to sea, through the magic of their shared racial essence forming a single cultural community, united and prosperous, alienation banished to a nightmare future. Rather than floating listlessly through an undifferentiated mass of atomized consumers, the individual in this imagined past knows his or her place. It is ordained and settled. The white men who make up the alt-right have in this imagined Canada a place at the head of families, with obedient and loving wives and no competition from men of colour (or queer women – or dildos – or meaningful lives for women outside of marriage). They are no longer cuckolded by ‘elites’ but instead take their rightful places as captains of wholesome nationalist industry. In this alt-right future-past, a white man can be proud simply by existing, secure in the knowledge that the entire social order exists to uphold his race and gender. Even the liberals among the alt-right long for this world, like the liberals more to the left imagining that capitalism can be reformed and mitigated if only the ‘right people’ were in charge.

This is a fantasy. We cannot go back. The means and thus the relations of production have evolved and will not be forgotten unless through cataclysm, and the relations of production, not the conniving of an imagined cabal of Jews, determine social relations. It being a fantasy does not mean that it is necessarily irrational. Right-wing collectivism, white racial collectivism, is a kind of rebellion against alienation, and any rebellion against alienation makes sense. The rage that springs from a meaningless existence spent selling your life an hour at a time to a capitalist is a rational rage. The despair that comes from seeing all the things you consider meaningful be devoured by the relentless hunger of the market is a rational despair. Even more rational, from a self-interested point of view, is joining a movement that says, like Atalante’s favourite slogan, *les*

*notres avant les autres*, 'ours before the others' (Gaillard-Starzmann 2006). The alt-right, vile and violent or not, is among other things identity politics for white men (Hawley 2017). It is no surprise that some white men are interested in it.

Fantasy it may be, but the time-traveling project of the alt-right, the dream of the ethnostate and the vanquishing of feminism, can be attempted. The centre, far from being a site of moderation and restraint, is a site of enormous tension, cracking under the stress of trying to hold together contradictory Western cultural ideals of hierarchy and equality, freedom and authority, capitalism and human dignity, not to mention endless GDP growth and a finite planet. As it cracks more and more, its inadequacies on display and its inability to adapt becoming more and more apparent, rebellions against it will proliferate. The far-right, and thus the alt-right, represent one such rebellion.

The far-right rebellion must never be permitted to proceed. There is no way to time-travel to the imagined past without the systematic murder and brutalization of millions of people living in the present, and no way to stay there without the systematic murder and brutalization that maintained the real white supremacist Canada of the real past. Joe told me that he does not want to murder all the people of colour in Canada, only to exclude them, as if this was a reasonable and moderate proposition. Even the most moderate among the alt-right want the new white supremacist police of a new white supremacist police state to aim guns at the heads of our friends and loved ones, to round them up and humiliate them and tag them and dispossess them, or put them in camps and deport them, to repress the demonstrators and jail the traitors. There is no other way to 'exclude' a fifth of the population. There is no way to abolish 'degenerate' sexualities without abolishing the 'degenerates'. There is no way to end women's participation in public life without violently cutting short the dreams and aspirations of half the country. There is also no way to create



the white homeland without exterminating the original Indigenous inhabitants of this land, a people so dismissed by the alt-right that they were never mentioned to me for the entire duration of my fieldwork.

This being said, the rise of Trump, Bolsanaro, and right-wing populists elsewhere shows that rage against the contradictions of global liberal capitalism and against the political centre's inability to resolve them can be easily transmuted by factions of the ruling class into a straightforward path to further power. The Richard Spencers of the world will likely not lead the masses in any far-right revolutions to establish a dystopian white utopia. Rather, if white supremacist and hierarchist social movements gain power, they will be used by capitalists to cement convenient lurches toward authoritarianism, with racism being deployed, if determined to be useful, to maintain support among a segment of the white population and to justify the repression of workers of colour. Right-wing populist rhetoric will be used to offer reassurance in the form of a "firm hand" (Gingrich and Banks 2006, 16). Far from whites being returned in a racist time machine to an idyllic pure pre-capitalist European past, we will all of us be dropped off in a techno-Dickensian alternate reality, there to toil at our meaningless tasks while gargantuan corporations produce fanciful facsimiles of 'white culture' for consumption and the seas slowly rise around us.

## 10. Conclusions

Just before I completed my fieldwork, I sat in the apartment of one of the leaders of the alt-right group, watching him get drunk and rail about other far-right organizations. For him, everyone was either LARPing, weak-willed or small-minded. Some were marching around in ridiculous uniforms, alienating people with their obsession with the WWII-era fascist aesthetic. Populist groups like La Meute were pathetic boomers afraid to say what they really thought about minorities. Skinheads were white trash. The so-called ‘alt-light’ was full of “homosexuals and Zionists”. The identitarians over in Europe wanted the continent to become a “theme park of ethnicities”, he said, with no vision for the white race as a whole and no will to articulate one. They had invited him to a big conference to talk about plans for starting a chapter in Canada, but had gotten cold feet at the last minute, and he had ended up flying over only to find that the ‘conference’ had turned into a single meeting in Switzerland, at which he was told he couldn’t use the European identitarian group’s brand, logo or material. People in his own alt-right group were constantly drinking too much which made it hard to organize them. He frequently had to kick people out. He told me about one man who had been ejected:

He was normalizing pedophilia. He said that Québec was strongest when it was controlled by the Catholic Church, and he said that that was because the priests encouraged big families, and for people to fuck kids to make big families. He got kicked out. We didn’t want to do it violently, so we asked politely. We voted. He left.

Bernard, too, had been cut down to size: “He was being too intense about Christianity on the Facebook group.” He explained that Christianity was all well and good, but that predicating the movement on “a common Christian identity, like Jordan Peterson wants” was largely “seen as a failure” by the alt-right. As for himself, he was leaving activism entirely, he said, to focus on his family and personal life. His wife was getting worried about the possibility of reprisals from antifascists. “Anyway,” he said, “I don’t think I have the talent to run this kind of group. Maybe I’ll keep an eye on things, but from afar.”

Far-left movements are famously schismatic, putting one in mind of the classic scene in Monty Python’s *Life of Brian*, in which the Judean People’s Front splinters into the People’s Front of Judea, the Judean Popular People’s Front and the Popular Front of Judea, the last consisting of one individual. Indeed, Wikipedia lists at least nine extant, autonomous communist parties in Canada including the Communist League, the Communist Party of Canada, the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist), the Parti communiste du Québec, the Parti marxiste-léniniste du Québec, the Red Youth Front, the Revolutionary Communist Party, Socialist Action, and the United Jewish People’s Order. Movements on the far right are no different (Hawley 2017), and if the alt-right is anything, it is divided. Seen from a distance, the various subgroupings of white supremacy can all seem pretty much the same: they want white supremacy! But on closer examination, the permutations of far-right white supremacist ideology are innumerable, and interpersonal conflicts abound. Anthropology and the ethnographic method are well placed to discern and explore the resulting sites of tension.

The alt-right is susceptible to conflict stemming from competition over masculinities. While it positions itself as the defender of white masculinity against “the twin threats of miscegenation and emasculation” (Berlet 2004, 30), adherents seem hard pressed to reign in

*attacks* on other white men, both inside and outside the movement. A *de jure* disavowal of the concept of multiple masculinities or a gender spectrum clashes with a *de facto* understanding of men as divided into different gendered classes based on proximity to a masculine ideal. Further, the exact parameters of this masculine ideal are a subject of conflict, as different members have very different ideas of what it means to ‘be a man’. The alt-right predilection for juvenile shock humour, self-conscious exaggeration, venomous, generalized misogyny and elaborate internet-based inside jokes exists in tension with conservative visions of white masculinity involving tradition, Christianity, wholesome hard work and family values. In addition, the masculinities that members embodied prior to their conversion to the alt-right were often at odds with far-right masculine ideals in various ways. Another problem adherents ran into was that a perfect masculine ideal is, of course, an ideal, which cannot be realized by most or all men. One method members used to overcome these points of dissonance was to present themselves as having transitioned from one type of socially desirable, but ultimately misguided, masculinity to a more conservative form. This way, they were able to ‘cover all their bases’ with regard to a masculine ideal, a newfound commitment to religion and family values, for example, existing alongside a previous identity as a hard-drinking hedonist who had lots of sex.

Masculinity is a profoundly important element of what it means to be alt-right. Clashes over the proper ways to embody masculinity, or which masculinity should be embodied, are an area in which the alt-right is vulnerable to schism. In many ways the various visions of masculinity valorized in the alt-right are irreconcilable and are currently held together mainly by shared adherence to other ideological points – and by the alt-right’s heavy emphasis on internet activism which prevents many adherents from ever meeting. When they do meet, they are often disgusted with each other, as when Joe met the podcasters behind *This Hour Has 88 Minutes* and dismissed

them as “short, fat nerds”. In addition to clashes over masculinity, disagreements over the proper type and degree of misogyny are a source of great tension. Calls for ‘White Sharia’, whether ‘ironic’ or not, have polarized the alt-right. Religious and more classically fascist figures like Ben are appalled at rampant misogyny, preferring a more traditional sexism which valorizes women as mothers and wives. Calls by some for more women in the movement are resisted fiercely by others.

The alt-right’s relationship with male-supremacist internet subcultures is a phenomenon which warrants further study. These subcultures have acted as a pipeline to alt-right groups and it is possible that this process can be disrupted. Not all members of these subcultures agree with the most stridently misogynist and conspiracist viewpoints espoused in their literature. Some men affiliated with ‘pick-up artist’ scenes presumably simply want to have sex and have views no more misogynist than the ambient norm; certainly not all of them are committed racists. Finding ways to siphon such men away from the pipeline could deprive the alt-right of potential converts. How this can be accomplished is up for question, but anecdotally, testimonials on Reddit by former adherents to Red Pill philosophy indicate that many men simply join out of sense of loneliness, bolstered by generalized anger which becomes directed toward women. An article in *The New Statesman* by Amelia Tait (2017), interviewing men who have renounced the Red Pill, depicts men finding male-supremacist views comforting because they can explain men’s negative experiences with individual women, or because the ‘pick-up artist’ element promises to alleviate intense loneliness. Several refer to the Red Pill as a cult, indicating that techniques used to extricate people from abusive New Religious Movements could be effective in the case of the Red Pill.

The large number of tensions within the alt-right which do not have to do with gender will be difficult for the movement to continue to encompass as many of them are irreconcilable. As different camps solidify under various would-be leaders, splits and schisms will accumulate.

Revolutionist and reformist elements within the movement will face extreme difficulty in co-existing. Continuing terrorist attacks by men affiliated with the alt-right will push pragmatic adherents more and more to the liberal, reformist camp. Reformists will find it almost impossible to distance themselves from the violent actions of the terrorist elements within the alt-right and will go ‘crypto’, resorting to obfuscation and prevarication to hide their affiliations. Their front groups will be identified as arms of the alt-right by scholars and antifascists; whether or not this will impede their organizing significantly is not yet clear, although most of my interviewees expressed concern about resistance by antifascist groups, with Joe telling me that “Antifa in Montreal is fucking huge” and Felix saying, “They have the numbers in Montreal. We can’t fight them in the streets.”

Christianity constitutes a major ideological conundrum for the alt-right, with many adherents advocating more religious influence and others remaining steadfastly secular. Leaders of the alt-right group in Montreal seem content to allow vague Christian identity politics but draw the line at proselytism and perspectives which place Christianity above racism. With all mainstream denominations of Christianity denouncing racism and US Orthodox bishops recently reiterating that it constitutes a formal heresy (Assembly of Bishops Communications 2017), sincere Christian faith can profoundly challenge the alt-right project.

Disagreements over outreach strategy will hamper offline organizing. If alt-right groups begin to practice charity outreach along the lines of church groups or NGOs, they will discover both that organizing street initiatives is costly in time and energy (Busher 2016) and that, at least in cities like Montreal, it will make them vulnerable to clashes with antifascist groups. On the other hand, sticking to nighttime poster campaigns and internet propaganda will be seen as milquetoast by some within the movement who will advocate more strident efforts. In addition, a violent

element dedicated to propaganda by the deed will simmer in the background, exploding sporadically and each time constituting a setback for those attempting to appear palatable to the public. Lacking central leadership, the alt-right will never be able to contain these terrorist episodes. Taken all together, these grave ideological and strategic differences will result in factionalism and infighting within the movement and will impede the realization of its goals.

One of the deepest divisions within the alt-right group I studied was the fascist/liberal split. Fascist opposition to liberal capitalism is at odds with the white supremacist liberalism espoused by many, including the group's leadership. Bernard's fear that a racist liberal state would simply reproduce the status quo in non-racial respects, and result in a culture which he would find just as degenerate as the current one, is shared by a significant portion of far-right activists. Anti-liberalism is one of the mainstays of far-right extremism – Carter (2017) even uses it as her definition of 'extremism'. As a whole the alt-right is elitist and wants to replace the current ruling class with a different one while maintaining social hierarchy. Who would constitute the new ruling class, however, is not something on which everyone agrees. Men in the business and finance fields are disproportionately represented in the group's leadership and senior membership, and such men may not be accepted as appropriate candidates for a new elite class by classically fascist members already suspicious of capitalist elites. The question of what an alt-right economic policy would look like is almost entirely ignored by adherents, other than through vague anti-corporatism and anti-globalization rhetoric. If elements within the alt-right are ever forced to concretely articulate an economic vision it could very well split the movement even further.

The economic vision most likely to gain any traction in the mainstream is, however, the racist or 'leukocratic' liberal vision, as a version of this stance has been electorally successful in Europe whereas revolutionist fascism and right-wing anti-capitalism have not. It is also the alt-

right stance most likely to gain support or at least acceptance from factions within the prevailing liberal power structure. Under conditions of extreme pressure from the populist right, factions within the Canadian ruling class could co-opt a watered-down version of this stance for political gain. Arguably, Donald Trump, a billionaire life-long capitalist privileged from birth ruling on a populist, nativist platform, represents this having already happened in the United States. Importantly, this type of racism is not a new format but rather a return to liberal norms of 50 to 100 years ago.

Ultimately, a major emotional driver of the alt-right is rage against late modernity and the failings of the political centre, transmuted into raced and gendered right-wing reaction. The alienation engendered by late capitalism has reached a fever pitch. The final crisis of capitalism predicted by Marx may come less in the form of the Depression To End All Depressions than in the form of the total collapse of meaning and authenticity – if the total collapse of the biosphere does not come first. In either case, I argue that the alt-right project in general represents the desire to travel backward in time to a pre-liberal age where meaning and authenticity are self-evident, and where, conveniently for the white men making up the movement, racial and gender hierarchies are steadfastly established. I argue that the resistance to the meaning-destroying processes of late capitalism is completely rational, and that the desire to be part of a superior ruling caste is, if ethically untenable, itself also at least rational.

The project of the alt-right – the establishment of a white- and male-supremacist state in North America – is, clearly, a violent and ethically unacceptable fantasy which must be resisted by all individuals and groups who are invested in human dignity and basic egalitarianism. This is not to say that the liberal centre must be defended. Rather, real alternatives to the economic and political system currently threatening the existence of complex life on earth must be articulated



and implemented, and they must be alternatives which offer all groups dignity and respect. Unjust systems of hierarchy allowing tiny groups of people to dominate the economic activity of much of the globe must be abolished and economic democracy established, modifying the economic base. Identitarian ideologies of any political stripe must be combatted by articulating philosophies which allow for solidarity across identity categories. Forms of cultural identity which transcend race *and* unconvincing civic nationalism are sorely needed. A spirit which stoutly rejects the desiccating individualism of late capitalism and which demands unremitting accountability from anyone in a position of power must be adopted. A concern for the planet's rapidly disappearing biosphere must be elevated to the top of every policy agenda. A new world is not only possible, but deeply necessary; and it does not need to be based on all the old hierarchies writ large once again.

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