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ENGENDERING WHITE NATIONALISM

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When, in September 2018, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford, professor of psychology at Palo Alto University, testified in front of the US Senate Judiciary Committee, she stood as a witness against the Supreme Court justice nominee Brett Kavanaugh, who she remembered had sexually assaulted her in the summer of 1982, when she was 15 years old. As live updates (Lee 2018) on the hearings were posted on the Breitbart.com homepage, comments and responses to the testimony were also recorded on the site. On September 27, Breitbart poster *KYRifles* offered the following remarks:

Ford lies with ease.

And why shouldn't she? No one ever calls her on it.

Remembering is hard!

She's just a girl! Giggle!!

In a way, we are seeing before us the pivot point of our civilization, Kavanaugh representing the past, Ford the future.

Kavanaugh is our past: brilliant, logical, and emphatic. Ford is our (possible) future: ditzy, whiny, and phony.

God help us.

A like-minded commentator (*just me saying*) replied:

Yep and for all the women to ponder or think about. If you have brothers male cousins sons fathers uncles they may one day be at the end of these idiots WRATH now as you can see all it takes is I remember so good luck to you all with male family members and to all of those #metool people because if it's your father they can take away your inheritance house and his good name so as they used to say THINK BEFORE YOU LEAP.

In response, *KYRifles* wrote:

I was just amazed at the comfort she had with the fact that she had of course earlier used the excuse of fear of flying as a reason to delay her testimony while admitting she flew all over the place all the time.

She just laughed it off, as if the inconsistency was nothing—a joke. Oh sometimes I feel fear, sometimes I don't, but it's OK when I'm doing something fun!

Who lies like that in a situation of such consequences? What kind of sociopath?

The answer?

She, like most women in her social circle, is a practiced liar. She regards lying as a socially approved way for a woman of her class to get what she wants.

Say she gets pulled over by the cops for speeding. She is not going to make a scene like some ghetto Serena Williams or the black woman who ended up getting arrested and hung herself in her cell. Instead she is going to tell the cop that she just received a phone call that her child has been injured and she is rushing home and she never speeds. Sometimes it works, sometimes the cop calls you on your BS—no harm no foul.

Or say that you are invited to her house for dinner but she does not feel like cooking. She doesn't tell you that—that would be rude. Instead she says that she is not “feeling well” or that the “stove broke” or something and can we do this some other time. She doesn't expect you to come over and check to see if the stove really works or not.

It's just that this time the stakes were much higher and she got called on her little white lie. That's why her previously anonymous deceit had to be made public. But it wasn't a disaster for her. She was tossed softball after softball by a female prosecutor who, for some reason, did not use the immunity (from accusations of male chauvinism) her gender offered her to crucify Ford.

These posts on the conservative new media site Breitbart open up a discussion about the gender, race, and class politics of white nationalism in the Trump era. What we see on display in these snide comments are the patriarchal values, end-of-civilization-as-we-know-it misogyny, class- and race-inflected policing of gender norms, and the devaluation of all sorts of unruly women that are commonplace among white nationalist digital posters. These are only 3 of the more than 65,000 comments posted to that site within 72 hours of the September 27 Senate Judiciary Committee hearings. Ninety-nine percent of the content was supportive of Brett Kavanaugh's nomination. Many posters exclaimed the untrustworthiness of Christine Blasey Ford's testimony. Others expressed outrage at the #MeToo Movement (a movement in which women acknowledged that they had been raped or otherwise sexually assaulted), claiming, as Donald Trump did

days later, that it was a difficult time for young men in America (Diamond 2018). Some posted expressions of outrage at a vast Democratic Party-led conspiracy against Kavanaugh. California Senator Dianne Feinstein (who is frequently referred to as Difi in the alt-right blogosphere), her husband, investment banker Richard Blum, former US President Bill Clinton, and former Secretary of State Hillary Rodman Clinton were, many posters agreed, agents of the Chinese state. They were attempting to use Blasey Ford to thwart Kavanaugh's Supreme Court appointment on behalf of China, so the story goes. In contrast to the viewpoint of mainstream liberals, many Breitbart posters saw China, not Russia, as the malevolent foreign power attempting to meddle in US politics and elections.

Gun rights also surfaced, unsurprisingly, as a major concern in the Kavanaugh Supreme Court nomination conflagration. Posters staged a sarcastic debate over who was a better shot, conservative men or women. This tongue-in-cheek debate reinforced the widely held view that conservative men and women needed to arm themselves in defense against the threat posed by the "liberal hate mongers and trolls" who supported Blasey Ford. And many cheered in response to Donald Trump's public support of Kavanaugh, which he expressed in this tweet:

Judge Kavanaugh showed America exactly why I nominated him. His testimony was powerful, honest, and riveting. Democrats' search and destroy strategy is disgraceful and this process has been a total sham and effort to delay, obstruct, and resist. The Senate must vote!

(@realdonaldtrump, September 27, 2018)

My goal in this chapter is to use examples such as these to shed some light on the interpretive processes of white nationalists as they confront political challenges and seek to consolidate and expand the influence of their movement. In particular, I am interested in how gender matters politically to rank-and-file white nationalists. In my main argument, I suggest that for white nationalists, gender equality, nonconformity, and fluidity tend to be viewed as existential threats to the white race, and further that *maintaining sex and gender hierarchies is essential to the white supremacist racial order that they seek to reproduce*. Accordingly, gender is not just a site of difference or inequality that white nationalists use descriptively in their politics. It is also an essential category of difference that informs their worldview, and it is invoked repeatedly to elaborate and refine their political viewpoints. My argument here builds on an important strain of feminist scholarship in anthropology and American Studies that has demonstrated the importance of the coconstitution of race, class, and gender politics, and the maintenance of a racial-gendered order, in the making of the United States as a concrete social formation (see Brodtkin 2007; Collins 2017; Davis 2004; Di Leonardo 1998; Morgen 2002; Mullings 2005, 2020). The work of Sarah Haley (2016) has been especially inspiring, as her book, *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity*, tells the history of imprisoned black women's brutalization in convict labor systems and the role that this brutalization played

in the making of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century US political economy. Haley directs our attention to the historical institutionalization of specific forms of gendered racial terror, organized to devalue and dehumanize Black life more broadly, and enacted in part via the exclusion of racialized subjects from the protected category of “woman” (2). This is precisely what is at stake today in the political ascent of white nationalist movements in the United States and around the world, and understanding the ways these groups innovate politically is part of a broader effort to understand the way that white nationalist gendered racial terror is currently institutionalized and how it can be abolished.

My work on white nationalist political culture is based on a deep ethnographic plunge into the white nationalist digital world. This entailed reading all kinds of online media content including YouTube testimonials, news articles, blogs, opinion pieces, and message board postings on forum websites such as 4chan and 8chan/8kun. The websites I visited most regularly (Breitbart, Reddit, 4chan, Stormfront.org, Gab, and Voat, among others) have maintained digital communities associated with the alt-right, a white nationalist movement that has coalesced in large measure through the use of social media and online platforms (Bjork-James and Maskovsky 2017; Hawley 2017). By the beginning of the Trump presidency, the alt-right constituted the more “mainstream” movement in comparison to other white supremacist groups, about which I will say more below. My ethnographic approach is inspired by scholarship on online political cultures that looks at the proliferation of digital communities and the ways that computer-mediated communication shapes political thought and action (Bjork-James 2015; Coleman 2014; Juris 2008). The rise of new forms of US-based white supremacy online has received a great deal of scholarly attention of late (Bjork-James and Maskovsky 2017; Daniels 2009; Feagan 2013; Hawley 2017). I explore online talk and sentiments about gender to help us to understand political reasoning and improvisation by alt-right proponents and to locate this within the broader US right-wing political culture of the Trump era.

What’s new in the new white nationalism?

White nationalism is not a unified movement. It consists of a diverse set of political, social and cultural projects, communities, programs, organizations, and activities. The Southern Poverty Law Center estimated that approximately 100 white nationalist groups were operating in the United States in 2018 (and the number of groups had fluctuated between 95 and 146 since 2003) (SPLC n.d.). Under the banner of white nationalism are what the Southern Poverty Law Center would call “extremist” groups that elaborate explicit racist ideologies rooted in long-standing ideas about white biological or cultural superiority and that seek to transform the United States into a white ethno-state through violent means. Groups that make explicit claims about white superiority remain on the fringe politically, but other groups have moved to the mainstream, mostly through the work of the media-savvy alt-right leaders, who have been careful to

emphasize white racial grievances and resentments and the need for white community restoration over overt arguments for racial superiority. With this tactic they have found new audiences for their xenophobic and racist political projects (Bjork-James and Maskovsky 2017).

The alt-right's rising popularity cannot be attributed exclusively to the messaging of its leaders such as Richard Spencer and Steve Bannon, however. Significant shifts in US political culture and political economy have also facilitated its newfound popularity. The freighting of national identity to white ethnic identity has had a long inglorious history in the United States (Saxton 2003). There are, however, several significant developments that make white nationalism in the Trump era different from that of past eras.

A major contributing factor has been the prolonged crisis in political economy in the United States and across the globe and its attendant crisis in political legitimacy. At the economic level, neoliberal capitalism has been prone to crisis since its inception in the late 1970s, and it has failed to guarantee freedom or equality for most people. After the 2007–2008 financial crisis, finance-led neoliberal capitalism has remained in place, but it has taken on an even more dispossessive and hyper-exploitative form. It has become clear that in the eyes of the global financial elites, the solution to the volatility and long-term crisis of the political economy is the severe constraint on popular sovereignty, separating it from capitalist decision-making, and giving almost dictatorial authority to the central banks. But a full-fledged political crisis emerged after 2007–2008, when neoliberals and neoconservatives alike were exposed as corrupt, ineffectual, and beholden exclusively to economic elites. Political elites thus lost legitimacy long before Trump was elected president—and his election is best understood as an effect of this crisis, not its cause. The alt-right rose to prominence and expanded its popular appeal precisely as this legitimacy crisis deepened.

Another factor contributing to the rise of the alt-right is the collapse of the two competing forms of liberal centrist cosmopolitanism, which elaborate different and antagonistic racial projects even as they share a commitment to many classic liberal values and to globalist dreams of one sort or another. The racial projects of neoconservative and neoliberal variety—colorblindness and multiculturalism, respectively—eschew white supremacist ideologies, at least explicitly. On the one hand, neoconservatives have made a political art form out of the selective appropriation of Civil-Rights-era political discourses about enfranchisement and equality to justify the rollback of Civil Rights legislation and policies and to advance color-blind policy and post-racial ideology (Mullings 2005). For their part, neoliberals have countered neoconservatism's post-racialism with a multiculturalist framework that recognizes and celebrates racial and ethnic differences, though the extent to which this recognition is linked substantively to a robust vision of equal proprietorship of public institutions or to redress and eradicate racial inequalities is hotly debated. If there was one similarity between these two positions and one line that was not crossed in the culture wars from the 1980s to the 2000s, however, it was that whiteness was off the table as a project

of national unification—or so it seemed. What is now clear in hindsight is the extent to which both neoconservatives and neoliberals failed to address racially inflected grievances expressed across the political spectrum.

The roots of this failure, at least with respect to the rise of a new white racial politics on the right, lies in the extent to which colorblindness was always a stealth political strategy for advancing white nationalist political priorities in the post-Civil Rights era, when explicit claims about white racial superiority became politically unrespectable even as they remained rather popular among the Republican base. Crypto race-baiting has been a hallmark of Republican politics since the 1960s, when, in the context of the Civil Rights movement, Republicans put concerted effort into appealing to white Southerners' racial resentments to gain their support. The politics of white community grievances found new adherents in the 1970s and beyond as white ethnicity became politically legitimate and even fashionable as a white ethnic identity politics formed in direct reaction to Black Power and other militant protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s and as an alternative as well to elite WASP culture (Di Leonardo 1989; Steinberg 1981). During the Reagan era, the racialized and gendered attack on the “welfare queen” was crucial to New Right anti-big-government policy advances, the rise of supply-side economics, the breaking of the Fordist social compact, the rollback on the social wage, the attack on affirmative action, and the rise of nonunionized postindustrialism (Di Leonardo 1989, 79–144; Goode and Maskovsky 2001). The culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s and the neoconservative condemnation of “illiberal” causes such as affirmative action, multiculturalism, “political correctness,” and liberal immigration policy helped to further shift white ethnic politics to the right by linking the politics of white ethnic pride to white racial resentments (Steinberg 2001).

The ideological assault against welfare dependency, multiculturalism, affirmative action, and big government widened considerably in the Bush era, especially after 9/11. In this period, the basis for popular compassion and political support for the poor, immigrants, and people of color diminished while new fractions of the middle classes (especially lower- and middle-class white suburbanites) came under fire and financial duress as the libertarian attack against government—any government, not just big government—gained traction. “Welfare queens,” already vanquished in the 1990s by the Clinton-era welfare “reform,” were joined by teachers and pensioned government employees as the new Republican targets: “government-dependent” profligates living life too large off the government dime (Angelo 2019, 153–176). Finally, during the Obama era, the attack on dependency from the right intensified and was once again elaborated in explicitly racist terms. The Obama administration was effective in enforcing civil rights laws, reforming immigration, expanding access to healthcare (though on terms set by the right in the 1980s), and reviving the economy after the 2007–2008 financial crisis. But the right was outraged by his soaring rhetoric about the audacity of hope, and his ascent to the presidency itself was viewed by many as an affirmation of neoliberal triumph (Esposito 2011). Importantly, #BlackLivesMatter and the Movement for

Black Lives, with their critique of racialized state violence, also surfaced during the Obama era, posing an overt challenge to some of the institutions where white nationalism had festered and grown in recent decades, such as the criminal justice system (Mullings 2020). Throughout all of this, neoliberal and neoconservative governance struggled to manage “race relations” or to substantively address racial inequalities or white grievances (Steinberg 2007).

A final element fueling the rise of the alt-right has been the rise of the politics of sentiment. In a situation in which the reigning capitalist and racial ideologies are unpopular, and in which neoliberal guarantees of prosperity for all and neo-conservative moralizing can no longer persuade people, the politics of sentiment is filling people’s hearts (Grossberg 2018; Maskovsky and Bjork-James 2020). This combines with the fragmentation of the public sphere (Di Leonardo 1998) such that facts, authority, expertise, and rationality have been frequently associated with flawed, ineffectual, elitist, and punishing forms of liberal governance such as neoliberalism. Importantly, this critique has been leveled by groups across the political spectrum. The denunciation of the “fake news” of the mainstream media by Trump, his white nationalist supporters, and pundits on Fox News is but one example of popular suspicion of elite forms of expertise and knowledge. Other examples abound, from Black Lives Matter’s condemnation of CompStat and other crime statistics as racist (Taylor 2016) to the revolt against vaccinations in some quarters (Kata 2012). Overall, passion has not replaced rationality in politics today, but in the current conjuncture, the politics of resentment, the rise of angry publics, and the crisis over authority and knowledge culminate in a situation in which rage and resentment have been taken to new levels of intensity in liberal democratic politics, bringing these politics to the breaking point. Moral panics around sex and gender were pervasive during this period. Indeed, as we shall see, the restoration of conventional white family “norms” around gender hierarchies, proper gender comportment, public/private dichotomies, and the exercise of authority in work and home have become an urgent set of political preoccupations popularly, and are of central concern in particular to white nationalists in this situation.

Stop fighting nature: “traditional gender roles” as white nationalist common sense

At the core of alt-right thought and action is a visceral, affective sense of masculinity in crisis and in need of restoration, and a celebration of masculine authority. In *White Lies: Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality in White Supremacist Discourse*, Jessie Daniels (2016) documents the existence of a hegemonically white, heterosexual, masculine culture in the online communication associated with the white supremacist group, Stormfront.org. My findings resonate strongly with hers in many ways: the overt use of a white racial frame in nearly every alt-right online post; the commonplace use of the Internet as a tool for harassment and intimidation; frequent comments against the LGBTQ community and in support

of efforts to control sexuality in patriarchal and heterosexist ways; a global view on white masculinity's sources; a deep suspicion of democratic rules and norms, which, many alt-right enthusiasts worry, work against the white community; and a coercive, toxic use of irony and jocularly that brings the community together around the ridicule of its political opponents. Humor also works to deflect accountability for the authors of seriously objectionable posts, the content of which can be disavowed as a joke if necessary (Daniels 2009, 61–90).

Yet misogynistic elaborations of white racial identity have proliferated in the decade since Daniels conducted her groundbreaking research. The alt-right community in 2020 seems even more deeply concerned about the demise of “traditional gender roles” and the need for their restoration than it was a decade ago. This position is now frequently justified and legitimated by the use of universalistic claims about a natural order, discoverable by science, of relations between men and women. According to many posts and comments to alt-right.com, the academic and behaviorist flank of the liberal establishment marginalizes daring scientists who are purported to have proof of the existence of universal gender and racial differences, and the liberal establishment, so the story goes, fights against human nature and against the truth of universal gender difference by insisting on universal gender equality. It should come as no surprise that this natural order of things ideology makes women naturally submissive to male authority; prioritizes women's reproductive and child-rearing capacities to which all other behaviors and sensibilities are tied; and views men as naturally more aggressive, more public, and more capable of leadership and effective decision-making than women. These sentiments correspond closely with those expressed by the online men's movement in the lead-up to Donald Trump's election in 2016 (Dignam and Rohlinger 2019).

Central to the alt-right's politics is thus the effort to denigrate, shame, devalue, and pathologize people who violate the norms of the purported natural order. The cast of characters who have waged war on human nature is long, and the rationale for condemning various violators is as nuanced and impressive as they are dangerous and sexist. As such, among the alt-right, a great deal of ire has been directed at feminists, Hillary Clinton, “sluts,” “welfare queens,” women with too many tattoos, and other wayward woman who are viewed as threats to the white race. I found that transgender people, feminists, and “the liberal establishment” were at the top of the alt-right hate list. Transgender people are often described as violators of a natural order rooted in universal gender differences. Alt-right enthusiasts also describe “the liberal establishment,” especially feminists, as suppressors of knowledge of this natural order. Here is how Russell James, a Stormfront.org frequent poster, explained the problem of feminism from a white nationalist perspective, in 2019:

“Feminism” was never about equality between the sexes. (I use quotes around the word “feminism” because let's face it, there's nothing feminine about it.)... Men and women are not the same, they have very different

musculoskeletal systems, reproductive systems, and brains. Which translates into profoundly different abilities and capabilities. In turn, this means they have profoundly different roles and profoundly different sets of responsibilities. Traditionally the role of women was to have babies, breast feed them (the two things that not only do women do better than men, but men can't do at all), and take care of the home. Men were responsible for provisioning and protecting the family. Modernity abstracts the role of men, making it look as if anyone can do it. But the truth is, men still do those things much better than women. This is borne-out by all the evidence. For example, it is well known that single mother households are far less prosperous than family environments in which the father is present. And that prosperity isn't just financial. Not only do two-parent and single-father households make more money, but the children do better in life in every category. They're more educated, less prone to criminality, less likely to have children out of wedlock, and more likely to feel more "fulfilled" in every way. "Feminism" encourages women to pursue meaningless "careers" in place of doing what comes natural, i.e. have and raise children.... It's clear that men and women can never be "equal." If we were the same, then there would be no point in having two sexes, we would have only one sex.... The funders and organizers of "feminism" understand that the sexes are complementary rather than "equal," so why do they promote the contrived concept of "equality between the sexes." What is their real aim? The answer is clear to anyone who has spent any time pondering the question. They're trying to destroy Western Civilization and "feminism" is one of a handful of Cultural-Marxist "movements" (along with multi-culturalism, queerism, socialism, hyper-consumerism, etc.) they using to do it. "Feminism's" purpose is to weaponize women against men and children.

Posts like this are not atypical. Of equal importance are the time and attention given to shaming emasculated men—men who are too weak to assume the properly aggressive posture needed to defend their race, restore their culture, and honor their heritage. Perhaps the critique of weak men is best exemplified by the condemnation of "cuckservatives," or cuckolded white conservatives, who surrender their honor, masculinity, and their womenfolk by supporting policies such as criminal justice and immigration reform and who exhibit an unhealthy dependency on the liberal establishment.

Underlying these themes is an old story about biology, sex, and gender. Alt-right protagonists seek to use just-so stories about "universal gender difference" and human nature to justify and legitimate a hyper-masculinist authoritarianism counterpoint to liberal multiculturalism and feminist orthodoxy. The alt-right critique of liberalism is rooted in a Romantic view (Löwy and Sayre 2001) that seeks to replace liberal modernity's excesses, especially, so their argument goes, its purported aspiration for racial and gender equality, with an anti-globalist

nationalism. Frequent alt-right.com poster Vincent Law wrote a think piece called “Women are Nature’s Greatest Nationalists” in 2017 that was later reposted on Stormfront.org. Noting that women are more “hardcore and patriotic” than men in Russia but that this is not the case in the “West,” he pondered how race, nationalism, and gender work together in nature. “Women are sub-rationally pursuing their own biological imperative at all times,” he wrote, followed by a complicated argument about the way that women respond to “evolutionary pressures” that make them both more tied to their ethnic communities but also more likely to leave them if those communities are threatened by a more powerful outside group. Implicitly, in his view, it is women’s reproductive capacity and their essential child-rearing capacities and obligations that have created a situation in which they either demand protection from men of their ethnic group or leave the group to seek the protection of other ethnic nationals. For their part, men can sometimes appear more passive than women in their defense of the tribe/nation, because the threat of violence is more real for men than it is for women because men are inherently active while women are passive. He wrote:

The men feel a reluctance to go as hardcore as the women because that would necessitate action. I’ve heard Russian girls say that muds are sub-humans with a casual breeziness that blew me away. They say these things though and then go back to being cute and being feminine girls. They aren’t going to pick up the AKs anytime soon, no matter how much they hate the hachis. But if a man starts thinking like this ... there’s a chance he might have to act on his conclusions. And so men are more careful in what they allow themselves to believe, or openly say. Because it has the potential to have actual consequences. Only after women sniff the air and see which way the wind is blowing, and when the situation becomes dire do they start hedging their bets, or engaging in open treachery to their own tribe. This is arguably the state of Scandinavia and much of the Anglo-Sphere as things stand now. But beyond the Hajnal line, there’s still some fight left ... which is why I lay off the woman hate while I’m there.

Accompanying the idea of women as the handmaidens to their ethnic brothers in arms is thus the heterosexist idea that they are biologically programmed also to be disloyal to the tribe/nation. For Law, this disloyalty has already reached epic proportions in the “Anglo-Sphere,” making women-hating a reasonable response there. In contrast, women have not yet reached this stage of treachery in Russia, Law seems to think, presumably because of its more deeply entrenched and less-contested gender hierarchies. I am as interested in teasing out the elegant, if deeply troubling, gendered racial heterosexist nationalistic logic at work in his thinking as I am in invalidating his ethnographic claims. Indeed, this logic, let us call it an alt-right political rationality, prevails across the white nationalist media world. We can see it, for example, in the certainty with which Breitbart posters dismissed the credibility of Christine Blasey Ford, a woman they see as

disloyal not just because her testimony threatened Brett Kavanaugh's Supreme Court nomination. She lacked credibility also because she was a white woman whose actions, professional status, and assertiveness challenged the foundations of the white nationalist gendered racial order and as such she posed a threat to white community restoration. Law's piece further gives us some clues about the ideological source of Donald Trump's love of Russia and Vladimir Putin (cf., Ashwin and Utrata 2020). Every pro-Russia, pro-Putin comment that Donald Trump would make worked like a dog whistle for alt-right members whose blog posts are frequently praising strong and masculine Russia in contrast to a weak and feminized West.

This leads me to my final point about the people who make up the alt-right's rank and file. Women in the white nationalist media world are famously invisible and underrepresented (Daniels 2009). There is an obvious reason for this: even cursory attention to alt-right blog posts reveals visceral expressions of misogyny. Women-hating is an alt-right *national* pastime. My perusal of the alt-right mediascape gives me the impression of a space comprised of aging men who are fed up by what they see as a lifetime of disrespect, elaborated mostly in terms of their wounded whiteness and imperiled masculinity, and of young men (some of whom openly identify as Incels [involuntary celibates]), whose embrace of white racial identification and pride is inseparable from their expression of hatred of women. Given the extent of misogyny in the posts, it would seem that hating women is an essential feature of alt-right white identity.

Yet, woman-hating also undermines alt-right movement building. Indeed, many alt-right leaders see women as important to the cause because their presence softens the movement's reputation, helping it to gain mainstream acceptance. Indeed, many alt-right leaders see women as crucial for their ability to help to recruit men. In a comment that resonates with Law's claims about women, race, and nationalism, an alt-right pundit told a writer from *Harper's Magazine* that women are the "lionesses and shield maidens and Valkyries" that inspire men to fight for the future of white civilization. "What really drives men is women," she explained, "and, let's be honest, sex with women" (quoted in Darby 2017). And there are women posters to alt-right websites. Here is one example: Anti-PC pundit and University of Toronto psychologist Jordan Peterson made a series of comments and tweets about "the pathologies of racial pride," as part of his long-term crusade against liberal and left "identity politics" (Bartlett 2018). But this perspective ran afoul of white nationalist sensibilities as well, as one woman on alt-right.com pointed out in a lengthy post from 2018:

As the daughter of an (M.D.) psychoanalyst, I have witnessed Jew/shabbos goy [sic] pseudo-intellectual fraudulence in the psych field for my entire life.... Red flags are everywhere with this guy. One thing that really stood out to me was the 'recommended reading list' on his website, because it looks like it was created by social workers in the employ of the World Zionist Union. Peterson is now raking in tens of thousands of Patreon shekels

from mislead individuals simply because he didn't toe the Party Line on pronouns. But he's the biggest intellectual fraud of this entire movement. Boycott, divest and sanction from Jordan Peterson—now.

The anti-Semitism expressed here is further confirmation that what is at stake on the alt-right is not just an end to the attack on an imperiled white minority, as its main protagonists frame it for popular consumption. The threat extends as well to nature itself and to a set of racial and gender hierarchies that are closely sutured together by passionate devotion to the just-so stories about science and nature that have circulated popularly and in some academic circles for decades, if not longer (Gutmann 2019; Lancaster 2003).

And there is a class story here as well. The alt-right is generally disdainful of economic and political elites and suspicious of finance and monopoly capital. This disdain is, of course, frequently expressed in explicitly anti-Semitic terms, as it was during the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017 (Green 2017). The alt-right leadership seeks to inspire particular fractions of the white middle and working classes with its rhetoric of pseudoscientific stories about gender, and with its promises of economic prosperity for white men, their womenfolk, and their families, frequently elaborated in precisely these terms. And it is these groups who are contrasted to purportedly uppity feminists whose presumed deceitfulness is rooted in part in their elite class position, as the quotes at the start of this chapter indicate.

To call the racist, misogynistic, heterosexist, and authoritarian logics that inspire belonging in the alt-right digital world politically dangerous would be a gross understatement. But an analytical point also needs to be made about the nature of the alt-right's misogyny. There is a contradiction at the heart of it: women are desirable but inherently distrusted. They are politically necessary for the movement and the white race's survival, because only they have the power to spur wimpy, emasculated men into action, yet they are politically unreliable. Managing this contradiction is a major preoccupation for the movement. Exposing the alt-right's deep-seated misogyny, and its contradictions, is an essential task for those who would seek to undermine its popularity and neutralize its influence.

Towards the abolition of white nationalism

I have argued in this chapter that gender is more than just a marker of difference in alt-right thought. It is a set of essential ideological precepts that sutures together and helps to legitimate a worldview that links condemnation of the liberal establishment with an infinite number of existential threats to the white race, from transgender people, to ineffectual and ideologically compromised conservatives, to immigrants and Black Americans—all groups whose rejection of racial and gender differences has caused the white race to suffer (see also Hochschild 2016). In this formulation, tolerance and the celebration of

difference as an intrinsic social good is dangerous, and Donald Trump's xenophobic nativism, racist attack on Black America, and his public misogyny have been music to many a white nationalist's ears. Yet I think Trump was more a follower in the movement than a leader, insofar as he drew upon the interpretive frameworks of the alt-right to make sense of politics and current events. Abolishing white nationalism thus requires more than just the electoral defeat of Donald Trump. What is also needed is an anti-racist political program. There is a long history on the academic left to disregard or underestimate racism's entrenched capacities to shape political, social, and economic life in the United States. As I have written elsewhere (Maskovsky 2020), this was particularly acute during the Trump presidency, when calls could be heard from the social democratic left to use a program of economic populism to overcome Trump-era ethnonationalism. Yet it is my view that only an explicitly anti-racist politics can hope to diminish white nationalism's popular and political influence, as the abolitionist and Civil Rights movements demonstrated against similar foes in past eras and as we saw occurring in June 2020 in the protests against police violence and the reinvigoration of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. I will add here the importance of the fight for gender equality as well, which cannot be deferred while other political battles are waged, particularly since the alt-right has coupled gender and race in its vision of a white nation. The work of building, aligning with, supporting, and acting in solidarity with anti-racist and anti-sexist political projects should continue as a priority that shapes our scholarly agendas.

Coda: an ethnographic refusal

This chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the ethical predicaments that we encounter when studying white nationalism. Such considerations of the ethical dilemmas that emerge in studies of political groups that we see as threats and whose ideologies we ultimately seek to abolish are important. I want to elaborate here, tentatively and without any sort of sanctimony, a brief sketch for what an abolitionist anthropology of white nationalism might look like. For many of these ideas, I am indebted to people of color scholarship, especially that of Black feminists and Indigenous scholars who have written against the plantation system and its afterlife and against settler-colonialism (Haley 2016; Shange 2019; Simpson 2014).

How should we write about the people with whom we are not aligned, people we oppose politically, and groups we seek to defeat, whose ideologies we have an urgent need to abolish? This has been a long-standing issue of concern in feminist and decolonial scholarship (e.g., Abu-Lughod 2002; Mbembe 2015; Simpson 2014), which has pointed out the insufficiencies of using the idea of cultural relativism to justify or legitimate anthropological inquiries into groups we oppose and see as dangerous. In a critique of a recent article by Jon Anderson (2017) that describes the ethical systems of gun enthusiasts in the United States,

and the ways they justify gun ownership and use in the aftermath of mass shootings, Hugh Gusterson wrote:

Anderson bends over backward to see the gun debate from his natives' point of view ... My point [is] that we risk naturalizing the ideology of gun owners if our explication of their worldview is not balanced either by critique or by the juxtaposition of a contrary community's viewpoint.... While it is surely bad ethnographic form, lazily indulging our ideological reflexes, to simply condemn our human subjects, it is also problematic to just recite their worldview without pushing the conversation deeper, probing for friction between belief and reality.

(2017, 59)

I could not agree more with Gusterson.

But pushing the conversation deeper also requires the explicit unsettling of the liberal logics that tend to inform ethnographic writing and that establishes the foundational anthropological premise that knowledge of the other is an intrinsic scholarly good. Audra Simpson has written about refusal at some length, to mark a difference in her way of writing about Indigenous peoples in North America (McGranahan 2016; Simpson 2014, 2017). Simpson has refused to represent Indigenous people in her analyses as people who “had all things been equal would have consented to have things taken, things stolen from them” (2017, 12). This requires a refusal to represent Indigenous groups as living in cultural worlds defined by settler-colonial logics, the refusal, in short, to represent Indigenous groups as locked singularly in battles with states that overpower them, and instead to consider the ways that they never accepted the power of those states in the first place.

I want to take Simpson's idea of ethnographic refusal here and see if it can be applied usefully to the study not just of those who themselves refuse the settler-colonial logics that frequently set the terms of their depiction but also of those who are the political proponents of those logics. Let me explain further. As I suggest above, I am leery of applying a conventional “explaining the other” ethnographic approach to the question of gender politics in the alt-right and its allied groups. Take the example of J.D. Vance's memoir, *Hillbilly Elegy* (2016), as a cautionary tale that reveals the limits and limitations of this strategy. This book provides a portrait of multigenerational poverty in Appalachia, and the challenges poor whites face in maintaining middle-class positions in the face of drug addiction, workforce precarity, and their alienation from middle-class standards and values. In popular and some academic circles, it became an inappropriate stand-in for an ethnographically informed account of the white nationalist rank and file (e.g. Senior 2016). One reason for why this is inappropriate is that a vastly different, and more affluent, segment of the white working and middle classes would be the proper ethnographic subjects for such an account. In fact, the author himself, a Yale law school graduate and potential US senate candidate, has

more in common with white nationalist supporters of Trump than did the many less affluent relatives he wrote about in his book.

A somewhat more successful attempt to explain the rank and file of the right in the United States has been Arlie Hochschild's *Strangers in Their Own Land* (2016). This book locates the widely held convictions that Black and Brown people are "cutting in line" ahead of more deserving white people, liberals are elitists, and the federal government is to blame for undermining the basis of honor and dignity of the Louisiana residents (Hochschild's ethnographic subjects) in a moral economy that recognizes the harsh realities of capitalism and the sacrificial citizenship that success in the United States now requires. Yet I worry about what kind of political project emerges from Hochschild's ethnographic account. In the book's afterword, she tells us. People on the right felt affirmed by her depictions of people similar to themselves while liberals were outraged that she gave voice to their political opponents. Hochschild understands the difficulties of drawing easy political lessons from her ethnographic material. In the end, she suggests programs that enable young people to cross the partisan divide, to learn about the lives of others, and to gain a sense of the other's alienation. I am sure that this would do some good. But it puts those who are heavily invested in gendered and racialized political violence and those who are targeted by that violence on far too even a playing field. Hochschild imagines some inherent progress from mutual experiences of shared vulnerability. She does not provide a way for us to address the harm that white community grievances routinely cause those who are cast out of the category of the human by them.

What if we refuse to use ethnography to get to know white nationalists on these kinds of intimate ethnographic terms and insist instead on recognizing them as the central protagonists in the project of producing and reproducing hierarchies of human differences (Weheliye 2014)? What if we refuse to use ethnography in the attempt to find the hidden cultural mechanism for convincing white nationalists to "switch sides"? What if we instead put ethnography to use in identifying the political repertoires of white nationalist groups so that they can be defeated? I am not suggesting stripping the humanity of the oppressors. However, they deserve to be taken seriously as political subjects who act of their own volition in ways that are fundamentally invested in the oppression and subjugation of others. We need to understand the political capacities of the groups they form, the extent of the popularity of their ideas, and the dilemmas they face in putting together a coherent political program.

I want to embrace the idea of ethnographic refusal in another sense as well. In addition to refusing to make white nationalists' cultural worlds known so that their secret anguish can be placated, à la Hochschild, I also want to refuse to condone the liberal sanctimony and outrage that might follow from my analysis above. As outrageous and dangerous as their worldview is, liberal outrage is precisely what white nationalists expect from their political opponents. And they use its expression very effectively to score political points about liberal cosmopolitans' elitism and hypocrisy. Indeed, the widespread condemnation of

Trump's racism actually worked politically to reinforce the sense of grievance felt by many who held white nationalist sensibilities, because those who harbored white community resentments frequently felt unfairly characterized as racists by the anti-Trump commentary. Overcoming the long-standing political maneuver of treating the accusation of racism as worse than racism itself is an essential part of the effort to abolish white nationalism.

What we need to think through together is what kind of ethnographic practice can help to abolish white nationalism. What kind of analyses do we need to advance a political victory against illiberal forms of racism that does not settle for reviving the neoliberal governing programs that created the conditions for the white nationalist recent upsurge in the first place? What kind of anthropology do we need that helps us to think of other political possibilities, those that take gender, sex, race, and class seriously and that imagine the new political possibilities that might surface in the defeat of Trump-era white nationalism? In other words, what we need as anthropologists and as people is more than just the defeat of white supremacy in all of its permutations. We also need to develop new forms of political thought and action that go beyond both white nationalism and neoliberal rule to create something that actually looks like justice, freedom, and equality.

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