

“Online Misogyny and the Alternative Right: Debating the Undebatable”

Abstract

The aim of this critical intervention is two-fold; first, to offer a few insights to the online misogyny debate based on a case-study involving myself and Milo Yiannopoulos, the prominent anti-feminist and self-styled ultra-conservative “bad boy;”¹ second, to add a new, politically pronounced inflection to the meticulous work in the field (Emma Jane, 2014a, 2014b, 2016; Alison Phipps, 2016; Hester Baer, 2016; Rosalind Gill, 2016; Debbie Ging, 2016, 2017; Divya Maharajh, 2014; Anita Sarkeesian 2012), by arguing that although misogyny is not exclusively affiliated with a certain political register (Richard Seymour, 2013; Edward Platt, 2014), its ferocious articulations in contemporary culture – especially online – should be understood as a type of discourse fuelled largely by a set of well organised far-right, white supremacist determinations collectively camouflaged by the media-friendly term “alternative-right” (hereafter, “alt-right”). I contend that far from being a subculture that seeks to articulate a credible anti-establishment position (Allum Bokhari and Milo Yiannopoulos, 2016), the alt-right is better understood as a polished, technologically adept strand of the far-right – a strand, what is more, that is easily assimilable by neoliberal socio-economic and political rationality. Much like neoliberalism itself (Wendy Brown, 2015; David Harvey, 2005), the alt-right is vehemently opposed to any form of politics or political imaginary that seeks to establish a socialist or socialist-democratic hegemony predicated on class consciousness, collectivism, and egalitarianism.

Introduction

In early April 2015, I received an e-mail from two of our third-year students working on a practice-based dissertation on “lad culture,” asking me to take part in a debate with Milo

Yiannopoulos, who was then better known for being a senior editor at Breitbart News.² For their project, our students had already interviewed scholars such as Alison Phipps – director of the Centre for Gender Studies at the University of Sussex – and media industry professionals such as Martin Daubney, former editor of the “lad magazine” *Loaded*, and Sally Peck, the *Telegraph*’s family and travel editor. At the time, even though I was broadly aware of Yiannopoulos’ notoriety, I had no real knowledge of his ideas or of his debating style. In the end, after a hasty examination of his output, I questioned my students’ decision to provide a platform to a man whose sole purpose, it seemed to me, was to provoke. That said, and given that Yiannopoulos had accepted their invitation, I agreed to participate so that there would be a debate and not an interview. The debate was filmed and disseminated in its entirety on Brighton TV, a student-led YouTube channel associated with the University of Brighton. The debate may be found on [YouTube](#), while viewers were also invited to comment on the Twitter hashtag [#theladdebate](#). While Brighton TV output normally attracts between two and three hundred views per clip, views of this debate counted in the thousands within the first day of release; this, I soon discovered, was to be expected given Yiannopoulos’ Twitter followers who, at the time of the debate, were over forty thousand.³ I should also say that since its first appearance the debate has attracted over one hundred and thirty-four thousand views.⁴

Reflecting on the debate and on the ensuing vitriol by a veritable army of Yiannopoulos’ followers led me to the following conclusions. First, I observed that beyond the rather imaginative linguistic formulations, a few of which I had to look up, the *e-bile* (Jane, 2014) levelled at me was by no means politically neutral. Second, it was clear that the invective was aimed, to an overwhelming extent, at my *sexualised, objectified* and *feminised* body. This, of course, does not mean that I was thought of, or treated as, a woman; rather, that I was discursively treated as one in order to be sexualised and, *in tandem*, objectified.

Within the boundaries of such online attacks, and depending on one's vantage point, emasculation – here, as a rhetorical insult – is either a typical form of abuse (Jane, 2016, 564-565; Debbie Ging, 2017), or the result of a wider cultural paradigm that sees non-macho forms of masculinity as not “male” at all (Laura García-Favaro and Rosalind Gill, 2016). It became clear to me while reading the politically inflected comments posted on several online platforms, that, for the far-right, there is no abuse more impactful than that which exists within the realms of misogyny; indeed, for the overwhelming majority of contributors – and as others have argued (Jane, 2016; Gill, 2016; Phipps, 2016) – there seemed to be no *possible* abuse (or even critique) outside a discourse in (and for) which “woman,” the “female body,” and “femininity” are perennial objects: to be used, evaluated, exploited, degraded, humiliated, and, of course, controlled. Tellingly, abuse seemed to dissipate once it became clear that the feminist position was occupied by a man who, as one Twitter user brazenly put it, “was not playing the victim card.” In other words, despite their disgust over my siding with the “feminazis,” an act which in their eyes bore testament to my “emasculation,” I was, at the end of the day, still a man – a sheep gone astray, if you will. In other words, to their mind, the fact that I was a man somehow enabled me to receive their abuse in a way that set me apart from their traditional targets: women. As such, no one threatened to subject me to doxxing,⁵ and no one threatened to rape me, cut my head off, and/or rape/kill my children (Jane, 2014; 2016).

However, it also became clear that being a man who is a feminist and a Marxist, laid one bare to a series of peripheral attacks predicated, on the one hand, on one's perceived inability to produce an argument as “a man would,” and, secondly, on one's political affiliations collectively (mis)understood by all strands of the far-right as “cultural Marxism.” According to the overwhelming majority of the comments, not only did I fail in my task to defend my ill-conceived politics, but I also committed an act of gender-treason for going

against the global brotherhood of men, the consequence of which was my ceasing to occupy the position of “manhood” at all.

Debating the undebatable

The debate was a car-crash – at least as far as I was concerned. Aghast at what I was hearing come out of Yiannopoulos’ mouth, I was trying to control my anger – he was, after all, my students’ guest – while trying to put forward a research-backed argument. I realised very quickly, however, that research-backed arguments matter precious little when pitted against a form of rhetoric that is predicated almost exclusively on attention-seeking soundbites (the wacky left), on inconsistency (radical feminists, according to Yiannopoulos, are a minority but they also run the world), and on downright bigotry – asked what he would do with women who allege rape, Yiannopoulos replied they ought to be told to “grow up.” Alas, the case of Brock Turner, the Stanford University swimmer *cum* [rapist](#) of intoxicated women who got off with a ridiculously short custodial sentence, had not come to light yet; nor had, indeed, the multiple sexual assault and sexual harassment allegations against the likes of [Bill O’Reilly](#) of Fox News, and [Harvey Weinstein](#), the all-powerful Hollywood film producer.

It was a mistake to debate him on these terms and, with hindsight, I concur with Laurie Penny for whom Yiannopoulos’ “performative bigotry,” lauded as strength by his alt-right devotees, should deter any conscientious interlocutor from entering into a debate bereft of an ethics of discussion (Penny, [2016](#)). The appeal of such rhetoric has been defined by Ruth Wodak as indicative of the “arrogance of ignorance” (2015, 2) of the far-right, a type of argumentation which “appeals to common-sense and anti-intellectualism” and “mark[s] a return to pre-modernist or pre-Enlightenment thinking” (2015, 2).

For the purposes of this article, I relay a short *precis* of the debate and its most pertinent strands below before I proceed to delineate the basic tenor of the invective directed

at my person. I will use this invective to substantiate my central argument that online misogyny is a form of political performance which, however facilitated by the sleek digital veneer of social media, is in fact redolent of deeply embedded social problems further fuelled by what Alison Phipps and Isabel Young call “retro-sexist,” “neoliberalised” forms of masculine competitiveness and misogyny (Alison Phipps and Isabel Young, [2015](#)). In the same vein, the online comments will help us understand, I will argue, the alt-right not as a subversive subculture, but as a movement deeply embedded within the history of the far-right, and as a *performance* of the post-2008 neoliberal imaginary.

The debate started with definitions – the moderator asked us both for a definition of “lad culture.” Yiannopoulos said that it defined boys or young men who were “boisterous” and prone to “let[ting] off steam,” while I said it was a complex phenomenon with deep social, cultural and political roots. Yiannopoulos then continued that men were at a “structural disadvantage,” and that boisterous young boys these days grow up according to “feminist standards;” he continued that “feminists and other minorities” have now become socially and culturally hegemonic – here, he mentioned that “women under thirty now earn more than men for the same job” – and that this has left men feeling disoriented. To counter that, I proceeded to relay the results of the latest World Economic Forum (WEF) [Equality Report](#) (2014), which contained very worrying data about gender equality in the UK. My interlocutor rejected the WEF conclusions (and my style) as “journalistic”. Asked by the moderator whether he thought there was a crisis with men, he noted that “men worry” about being laughed at and/or about being considered as “potential rapists;” further, he argued that there is an “unreconstructed,” “purist” form of masculinity which men should be able to express. To the same question, I answered that there was indeed a crisis with young *people* – student debt, having to work more for less and so on – while Yiannopoulos, after a brief reference to the ways in which the “wacky left” has accommodated “whingeing” and

“whining” women, changed the tenor of the discussion by suggesting that there are essential features of masculinity – which he defined as “virtues” (competitiveness, strength, physical aggression) – before playfully concluding that “men are pigs.” Addressing the so called phenomenon of “rape culture” in contemporary Higher Education, he continued that “women use their sexuality as a weapon,” and when asked what we are supposed to do with women who allege rape, he concluded that we ought to take them in a room and tell them to “grow up” because the real world is much more dangerous than the cloistered walls of *academe*. Finally, he argued in favour of a biological basis for sexual difference before concluding that the world – Western civilisation – was the result of male genius, and that women’s professional choices, albeit calibrated to a certain extent by culture, society, politics and/or history, may be better explained by biology and some sort of genius distribution index, according to which men are, on average, more intelligent than women.

Judging from Yiannopoulos’ reaction (and that of his online followers), the most infuriating of my assertions was that if a woman feels harassed (or, indeed, assaulted), then we must understand that she has been harassed (or, indeed, assaulted). Of course, in saying so I did not mean that there are no misunderstandings or, indeed, cases in which men have been wrongfully accused of such offences. However, it became very clear, very quickly, during the course of the debate, that conclusions mobilising [data](#) from Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabularies (HMIC) and peer-reviewed academic [research](#) were collectively dismissed by Yiannopoulos as orchestrated feminazi propaganda seeking to establish a new gender order, in which misunderstood men are the *real* victims. These reports show that sexual crimes against women by men are not only overwhelmingly more frequent *and* on the rise, but are also significantly *under-reported* (HMIC, 2014, 18). Since it became obvious to me that all such data mattered little to Yiannopoulos, I argued that the perception of a bodily or cognitive experience as unwanted, unsolicited, abusive or, indeed, scarring, ought to be taken *as such*

and be dealt with accordingly. That said, and beyond the fundamental inconsistency of his argument – on the one hand, “men are pigs,” on the other, women tend to exaggerate while using their sexuality as a weapon – it seems that without openly condoning sexual assault against women, Yiannopoulos adopts a fundamentally far-right position on women’s rights: sexual advances from men ought to be accommodated and understood as something natural that men just *do*, and that while women may meaningfully contribute to the public sphere, first, they must acknowledge that their primary expertise lies within the private sphere – the family home (Melissa Deckman, 2016; Ronnee Schreiber, 2008) – and, second, they must accept that men are better suited to rule, to govern, and, of course, to legislate – even when legislation concerns women’s bodies, and/or women’s civil and reproductive rights (Chris Hedges, 2008, 73-94; Deckman, 2016, 176-200).

Rebels on the right – or misogynists, far-right champions, and neoliberal cheer-leaders

Although, for the sake of space, it is not possible to relay here all the responses that our debate instigated on various online platforms, I give below selected samples from YouTube and Twitter which reveal the tenor of the attack. Those included have not been edited in any way other than omitting repetitive comments for the sake of space. Invective focuses overwhelmingly on a) my lack of virility, b) the shape of my body, c) my having renounced my masculinity for feminine mannerisms and female genitalia – “mangina” was a recursive form of abuse – and, finally, d) on my inability to measure up to Yiannopoulos’s superior intellect because of all the above.

YouTube comments

RATCHILDUK: [...] This giant fucking mangina has the gall to say that if a woman feels she was sexual harassed then it MUST have been harassment.

MERCER VIRUS: Where do these issues come from insecure fat women or filthy JEWS

PLAY OFOZ: The mangina does critical theory, in short a ball busting communist.

SEANYBOO1969: [...] That fat fucking smarmy twat, i so wanted to punch his lights out [...] futher education has become regressive house of Cultural Marxist idiocy & identity politics on steroids! [...] I'm proud to be a white straight British man steeped in "Lad" working class culture, & any minority who feels threatened by this can kiss my white male arse [...] this so called academic, as well as Feminists & the hard political left who have a stranglehold upon academia say fuck all about other ethnic/cultural groups who are committing far more real sexual/geneder/hateful horrors around us [...] FemiNAZIs & people like this fat cunt proff' say nothing about muslims on campus segregating audiences, attacking women for been uncovered, they say nothing about the rampant culturally & racist rape & grooming of many thousands (latest report states as many as one fucking MILLION) white British underage girls by black & brown muslim men over 2 decades! [...] Only good thing about him & all those like him, is when civilization falls because of their crack pot meddeling & the destructive policies they've pushed, & we regress back to a simpler (but more brutal) time of survival of the fittest, us lads with our "Lad Culture", will be winners & we'll have someone to canabalize & eat when the food stops been delivered to Tescos ! First dibs on Academio Manginaio fatso, i bet i could make him last me a year!

Twitter comments (#TheLadDebate)

@theokoulouris (12/04/2015)

[#theladdebate](#) @Nero imagine the mayhem if I actually were a woman. They would have actually threatened to cut my head off and rape it.

@adiabat79 (12/04/2015)

@theokoulouris @Nero Nah. The main difference is that you aren't playing-the-victim. That's what causes the online threats [#theLadDebate](#)

Beyond my etiolated masculinity, it is clear to me that the contributors cannot construct a critique outside the realm of misogyny. Anything associated with the female body, or a perceived performance of femininity, sexual or otherwise, is worthy of contempt. Not only that, but the hierarchical position of the genders – male / subject, female / object – is taken as natural – that is to say, biologically determined – and as such axiomatic. Any deviation from

this norm warrants contempt, ridicule and threats of violence. Yet, comparing the invective directed at my person with that directed at women feminists (Jane 2014, 2016), it becomes obvious that, however offensive, the abuse against male feminists compares poorly with the invective and threats of violence directed at female feminists (Jane, 2014, 564-565). It seems, what is more, that Yiannopoulos' followers do not object to my feminism as a matter of socio-cultural or political positioning, but to the fact that being a man I renounce, so to speak, my perceived natural superiority. According to the last tweet above, my natural masculine superiority enabled me to overcome hurt and stop playing the "victim card." In short, in the eyes of the alt-right, even a "smarmy," out of shape "mangina" like me is *de facto* superior to the countless women who have received torrents of abuse online. This, I suppose, is because, ultimately, I do not have a "pussy" that they can "break irreparably" (Jane, 2014, 563) and, therefore, I am neither biologically nor symbolically subject to such forms of sexual violence. That said, despite the fact that such abuse is not always produced by [men](#), its semasiological currency is at all times bounded by the axiomatic power (physical, sexual, cultural) that men have – or *ought* to have – over women. And this, to be sure, is a position to which all forms of the far-right – from paleoconservatism to the alt-right – seem to be adhering (Mathew Lyons, 2017a, 2017b; Deckman, 2016; Schreiber, 2008).

Certainly, these comments are not devoid of political valence. The long YouTube comment above is particularly telling. In a veritable *tour de force* that fuses misogyny, racism, anti-intellectualism, anti-Semitism and islamophobia with a visceral hatred of the left, SEANYBOO1969 even provides an eschatological solution to the inevitable according to him fall of (Western) civilisation: *literally*, eat the left. Though claiming an "oppressed" status – whether by "feminazis" or by "political correctness" more widely – these contributors occupy positions of exceptional confidence as they set out to attack the general tenets of a roughly conceptualised "liberal" or "progressive" left that, in their eyes, has

facilitated the triumph of a diverse array of so called “identity politics” over an equally roughly conceptualised notion of white, western masculinity. The Manichean nature of this approach pits feminists, liberals, Jews, and left-wing academics, against a strong, sinewy, straight-talking and, above all, *white* masculinity, whose cultural and/or political aspirations cannot be accommodated by the, according to them, relentless as well as collective flight into political correctness. Though this claim should be taken to have been partly remedied by the advent of a “straight-talking,” white US Commander-in-Chief who “grabs women by the pussy,” the alt-right’s understanding of itself is predicated, first and foremost, not, as it seeks to suggest, on an enlightened struggle against “the establishment,” but on a fanatical opposition to any hue of Marxist politics punctuated by class consciousness, egalitarianism, solidarity, and internationalism. As such, and as I try to argue below, far from being a movement beyond the clutches of neoliberal conservatism – an ideology it seeks to disavow – the alt-right may be better understood as a particularly successful and thus utterly insidious performance of neoliberalism itself.

In one of the most popular online articles on the alt-right written for Breitbart, Allum Bokhari and Milo Yiannopoulos argue that it is “an amorphous movement” (2016). Writing in the third-person, presumably to maintain a veneer of journalistic objectivity, the authors argue that the alt-right comprises young, creative, provocative activists, who inhabit the most subversive, underground corners of the internet (Bokhari and Yiannopoulos, 2016). The authors proceed to provide the intellectual genealogy of the movement, in which they include the white supremacist Richard Spencer, the gay masculinist Jack Donovan, a sprinkling of the French New Right – the “neoreactionaries” (also known as #NRx) – before concluding with the social anthropologist Jonathan Haidt, whose work on what he calls “the conservative mind” Bokhari and Yiannopoulos summarise (Bokhari and Yiannopoulos, 2016). At the heart of the authors’ commentary lies the enlightened individual – protective of his culture

and yearning to be free – who comes head to head with the dictates of liberal politics and liberal society: economic and cultural oppression, self-censorship, identity politics, and the need to pay lip service to political correctness (Bokhari and Yiannopoulos, 2016).

Interestingly, it seems that the only gripe the alt-right has with the left is that the latter insists on the importance of equality as a necessary condition of liberty – just as much as it insists on liberty as the enabling condition of equality –⁶ and on the promotion of an internationalism that unites people according to class more than it does according to culture.

Although the ideological antecedence of the alt-right fuses aspects of paleoconservatism with strands of the European New Right (Lyons, 2016), the glue that links all strands of the far-right – from the “mama grizzlies” of the Tea-Party movement (Deckman, 2016) to the alt-right (Lyons, 2017) – is trenchant opposition to all socio-economic, cultural and political propositions based on egalitarianism and collectivity: trade-unionism, anti-capitalist resistance, and gender/racial equality. For all the self-proclaimed intelligence, creativity, and eagerness of its members to carve a path away from “the establishment” – a singularly facile but eminently marketable term that bundles together a politics ranging from the “cultural Marxism” of the Frankfurt School to the stratocratic financialism of the Bush and Clinton administrations – I read the alt-right as yet another far-right formation enabled by post-2008 neoliberalism; more precisely, as a strand of *militant* neoliberalism that turns inwards seeking to defend free market economics from the post-2008 electoral advances of the left.

Since the 2008 crisis the champions of neoliberalism have been actively engaged with the task of shifting blame away from the calamities of their own making: financial deregulation, deindustrialisation, and privatisation of public assets. Feeling vulnerable, neoliberal advocates in all structures of the social hierarchy appear ruthless. This is by no means an exaggeration. We need only recall the way in which the neoliberal consensus of the

European Union dealt with the rise of the radical left in Europe – *Podemos* in Spain was broadly neutralised, but SYRIZA in Greece was utterly crashed (Helena Sheehan, 2016) – or how Bernie Sanders’s presidential campaign was undermined by the neoliberal nucleus of the DNC. What is more, the developments after the June 2017 General Elections in post-referendum Britain cannot be ignored. Jeremy Corbyn’s decisive break with (New) Labour’s neoliberal past and unprecedented success in inspiring broad sections of the British electorate – most importantly, the youth – forced the Conservatives into a humiliating Pyrrhic victory which lost them their majority in the House of Commons. Faced with the prospect of losing power and, therefore, the ability to further entrench neoliberal austerity in Britain, the Conservatives did not hesitate to forge an unholy alliance with Northern Ireland’s Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). This development does not only complicate the strict impartiality of the British state in Northern Ireland under the Good Friday Agreement (Daniel Finn, 2017), but further complicates Britain’s relationship with its colonial past by unproblematically re-emphasising the platitudinous currency of “Britishness,” and, of course, the question of race – especially post-Brexit (Nadine El-Enany, 2017). What is more, the DUP’s positions on gender equality, LGBT rights and climate change, all sit very uncomfortably within neoliberalism’s putative commitment to all forms of gender and sexual politics that serve its purpose.⁷ However, since one of the functions of neoliberalism is the absorption and appropriation of democratic opposition (Brown, 2015; Harvey, 2005; Mark Blyth, 2013; Petrus Zuidhof, 2012),⁸ and since its perverse morality of trickle-down economics remains largely unassailable by the political and economic rationality of traditional and new media (Tom Mills, 2016; Henry Giroux, 2011; Jodi Dean, 2010), I do not see why it would not wholeheartedly absorb a technologically-driven, far-right ideology like that of the alt-right, an ideology which demonises the immigrant and the refugee but not the hedge fund manager, or an ideology which glorifies the “mama grizzly” but not the radical feminist; ultimately,

faced with the possibility of its extinction, neoliberalism does not hesitate to absorb and instrumentalise an ideology which valorises social Darwinism over egalitarianism, and promotes self-interested individuality over collective struggle.

The assimilation of the far-right by mainstream politics has deep historical roots. Analysing European politics in the aftermath of the October Revolution, Gopal Balakrishnan argues that the inclusion of socialist elements in governments across Europe resulted, by and large, in the neutralisation of these elements and in the opening up of “an alternate modernity of the ‘revolution of the right’” (Hans Freyer, cited in Gopal Balakrishnan, 2017, 30). Therefore, Balakrishnan continues, “[s]ocialism ... lost its position as the automatic recourse for all the partisans of change,” (Robert Paxton, cited in Balakrishnan, 2017, 30). Owen Worth, whose work explores the rise of the far-right post-1990s as a response to neoliberalism, argues that “[neoliberal democracy] has sought to build upon prejudices that have been a feature of the far-right (anti-immigration, welfare chauvinism) in a manner that complements market economics and in some way seeks to extend its hegemony” (Owen Worth, 2015, 154-155). Seen from within the analytical spectrum of Gramsci’s hegemony, Worth argues that the far-right has succeeded in winning the hearts and minds of electorates because it managed to focus on what it perceived to be the negative side-effects of globalisation, and because it successfully combined attractive right-wing, populist rhetoric – anti-immigration, anti-multiculturalism, anti-EU, and (importantly) anti-women – with a commitment to neoliberal market economics. I argue that, *mutatis mutandis*, this observation holds true in post-Maastricht European politics not only in relation to the neoliberal consensus of the EU, but, more worryingly, in relation to the legitimisation of the far-right as a credible political movement.

It would be superfluous on my part to list the advances of the far-right in several European countries here (Antonis Ellinas, 2010, 2013, 2015; Wodak, 2015; Paul Hainsworth,

2008; Bert Kländermans and Nonna Mayer, 2006). I contend, however, that beyond narrow cultural and national differences, the arch-enemy of all far-right nationalisms is an emancipatory politics that seeks to shift blame from the multiple “others” of contemporary life – immigrants, refugees, Muslims – to the iniquities of transnational capital, deregulated finance, and relentless privatisation of public assets (Wodak, 2015, 191-208). If there is something to be gleaned from all this is that, sanctified by the hollow process of majoritarian parliamentarism, neoliberal democracy – to the extent that it can, and in so far as it does not harm its interests – has no qualms in absorbing the far-right even when, on a surface level, doing so opposes its basic tenets. Golden Dawn’s eighteen neo-Nazi MPs in the Greek Parliament are case in point. What is not very well known is that alongside their brutal campaign of violence against anything and anyone they hold responsible for Greece’s humiliation – immigrants, refugees, the Jews, and the Muslim world *tout court* – Golden Dawn’s MPs tabled over one-hundred and forty parliamentary motions in favour of Greece’s shipping [capital](#) in the first eighteen months of their tenure. And, to be sure, their well-documented campaign of violence, which resulted in the murder of the Greek rapper Pavlos Fyssas in 2013, has been complemented by their extreme misogyny, which culminated in a shocking, and by now notorious, incident, in which Ilias Kasidiaris – Golden Dawn’s press spokesman and all-round Nazi macho-man – repeatedly slapped Liana Kannelli – a prominent MP of Greece’s Communist Party (KKE) – on national [television](#).

Scholars have sought to map the emergence of the far-right in diverse ways and from different disciplinary vantage points. Settling the politico-cultural identity of the 1960s, Rebecca Klatch argues that while it is true that the mass student movements of the 1960s, especially in the US, aligned largely with the New Left, the decade should also be interpreted as “the incubation stage for [future] conservative movements” (1994, 199). Further, she argues that forms of counter- or subculture provided the 1960s New Right with the legitimacy

and the means to “foment political activism (Klatch, 1994, 200-201). For all its alleged subversiveness, 1960s counterculture did not resolve only around women’s lib and civil rights, but also around “an emphasis on spontaneity, self-expression ... and self-gratification” (Klatch, 1994, 201). In short, the 1960s were not only about the promotion of social justice and equality, but also about the promotion of a libertarian ideology, according to which “[a] healthy society is one of unlimited self-interest” (Klatch, 1994, 203).

Although it is right to think of the nature of the far-right as a composite movement, it is also right to recognise that it developed as a backlash against the demands of post-1850s social movements, and against the tenets of general socialist discourse. As Balakrishnan writes, “[a] miscellany of opposition to the welfare state, godless Marxism and a more nebulously conceived cultural levelling, the ‘revolution from the right’ was essentially a call to true elites to stand their ground against a worldwide revolt of the masses” (2017, 19). This counterstrike was further invested, Balakrishnan continues, in a wider intellectual discourse predicated on an all-encompassing perception of a West in decline – fragmentation, rupture, class-conflict – and in a call to (re)define philosophico-political inquiry within “an epochal perspective on the destiny of the Occident” (2017: 19). At the heart of this far-right backlash lay – and, as the above invective suggest, *still does* – first, a vehement opposition to all forms of cultural, economic or political levelling – in short, an opposition to all forms of egalitarianism – and second, a need to (re)appraise western civilisation as essentially masculine. In the socio-political convulsions of post-1850s Europe, the far-right saw the “potentials for renewal in the twilight age of Western civilization [that] could only be grasped in an encounter with its archaic origins ... with Greece, Rome, Judea and Germania being the main variants” (Balakrishnan, 2017, 27). And, as far as the extreme right is concerned, one cannot get more masculine than the symbolic military excellence of Greece, Rome and

Germania, further valorised by the whiter-than-white grace of Christian fundamentalism (Hedges, 2008, 73-94).

Conclusion

In one of his more intemperate [addresses](#) to the Greek Parliament, Antonis Samaras – former Prime Minister of Greece (2012-2014) and, still in 2015, the most right-wing leader of New Democracy (ND), one of Greece’s largest (if not the largest) political parties – argued that he was of the “straight, masculine school” and, therefore, a man who spoke directly. In saying so, Samaras did not only imply that women are not capable of “straight-talking,” but became exasperated when Zoe Konstantopoulou – the then (first female) Speaker of the Greek Parliament – accused him of sexism. This example is useful here because ND is – or perhaps, was – an example of an ostensibly moderate, centre-right political party, which has nevertheless seamlessly absorbed elements of the Greek far-right in ways that are not only advantageous but also instrumental to the realisation of its neoliberal objectives. The far-right enabled ND to reframe the brutal austerity imposed on Greece by the EU, with a view to further bolstering its already noxious anti-immigration rhetoric, and accentuating the cult of “straight-talking” masculinity as the most robust form of resistance to the egalitarianism and multiculturalism of the left. The cult of this resurgent, emboldened masculinity is prevalent not only in Greece, where Golden Dawn’s neo-Nazis burn torches at [Thermopylae](#), but also in Britain, where pro-immigration, female politicians like Jo Cox are executed in [cold blood](#), and where black, female politicians like Diane Abbot receive [misogynistic abuse](#) on a daily basis; and, of course, also in the USA, where President Trump’s sexism is considered by some to be innocent, *manly* “[locker-room banter](#).” Unless we treat online misogyny *predominantly* as precisely this – the articulation of an increasingly powerful far-right populism buoyed by re-energised forms of post-crisis neoliberalism – we run the risk of

misunderstanding the vehemence of its discourse, while further demonising working-class culture as *de facto* problematic. More importantly, we run the risk of further obscuring what ought to be at the centre of the debate: that online misogyny is the digital transmogrification of very real *political* problems, whose potential solution may only be actualised if material equality and social justice become universal conditions of emancipation.

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¹ See <https://yiannopoulos.net/>.

² A practice-based dissertation is a third-year project submitted in partial fulfilment of a BA (Hons) degree in Media Studies, at the School of Media, University of Brighton.

³ Yiannopoulos was banned from Twitter in July 2016. His handle was @Nero.

⁴ Our students’ edited version of the debate may be found [here](#).

⁵ Doxxing refers to the act of searching and revealing one’s personal and/or sensitive information on online fora.

⁶ I refer here to Etienne Balibar’s concept of *egaliberté* (see Callinicos, 2006, 47).

⁷ In a recent article, Nancy Fraser argues that the “the hegemonic bloc that dominated American [or Anglo-American] politics was progressive neoliberalism ... [a] real and powerful alliance of two unlikely bedfellows: on the one hand, mainstream liberal currents of the new social movements (feminism, antiracism, multiculturalism, environmentalism, and LGBTQ rights); on the other hand, the most dynamic, high-end ‘symbolic’ and financial sectors of the U.S. economy (Wall Street, Silicon Valley, and Hollywood). What held this odd couple together was a distinctive combination of views about distribution and recognition” (Nancy Fraser, 2017, 46).

⁸ See also Lia Haro and Romand Coles (2017).