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The Rise of the Alt-Right and its Online Presence

Vzestup alt-right a jeho online působení

Štěpán Rýdl

Thesis Supervisor: Mgr. Jakub Ženíšek, Ph.D.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis, titled "*The Rise of the Alt-Right and its Online Presence*" is the result of my own work and that all the used sources have been cited properly.

Prague, 23rd July 2020

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ABSTRACT

The 2016 US presidential election was significant, among other reasons, due to being noticeably influenced by a new far-right movement. Coined in 2008 by Richard Spencer, the term “alt-right” refers to a fringe online far-right movement. This thesis aims provide a brief summary of all the significant aspects of the ideology. The most important ideological tenets: emphasis on masculinity, ethno-nationalism and anti-Semitism; will be described, as well as the online presence and conduct of its followers. The alt-right movement will be compared to other far-right and conservative ideologies and its rhetoric analysed as a form of propaganda.

Keywords: Alt-right, ethno-nationalism, far-right, Gab, memes, Richard Spencer, 4chan

ABSTRAKT

Prezidentské volby v USA v roce 2016 byly mimo jiné významné kvůli nápadnému vlivu nové krajně pravicového hnutí. Pojem „alt-right“ byl poprvé použit v roce 2008 Richardem Spencerem a odkazuje ke krajně pravicovému online hnutí. Tato práce si klade za cíl poskytnout stručné shrnutí všech významných aspektů této ideologie. Budou popsány její nejdůležitější ideologické principy: důraz na maskulinitu, etnonacionalismus a antisemitismus; stejně jako působení a chování jejích následovníků v online prostoru. Hnutí alt-right bude porovnáno s ostatními krajně pravicovými a konzervativními ideologiemi a jeho rétorika bude analyzována jako forma propagandy.

Klíčová slova: Alt-right, etnonacionalismus, krajní pravice, Gab, memy, Richard Spencer, 4chan

Table of Contents

1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
2	DEFINING “ALT-RIGHT”	2
3	IDEOLOGY.....	5
3.1.	Race	5
3.1.1	Race realism	5
3.1.2	“White homeland”	6
3.1.3	Anti-White Bias	7
3.2	Anti-semitism and conspiratorial thinking	9
3.3	Masculinity and gender.....	10
3.4	Religion.....	14
4	SOCIAL PLATFORMS AND ONLINE MEDIA	16
4.1	4chan	17
4.2	8chan	19
4.3	Gab	20
4.4	Reddit.....	21
4.5	Voat	22
4.6	YouTube	22
4.7	Breitbart	24
4.8	Daily Stormer.....	25
4.9	Other social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter).....	26
5	COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES	27
5.1	Aesthetics, visibility and self-presentation.....	27
5.2	Dog-whistling	31
5.3	Propaganda	33
5.3.1	Name-calling.....	34
5.3.2	Glittering generalities	35
5.3.3	Transfer.....	36
5.3.4	Testimonial.....	37
5.3.5	Plain folks	37

5.3.6	Card stacking	38
5.3.7	Bandwagon	38
5.4	Mememes, irony, humour and possible deniability	38
6	CONCLUSION	41
7	REFERENCES	43

1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to generally introduce the phenomenon of a fringe neo-reactionary US movement called “the alt-right”, its main ideological standpoints, main leader figures, its relationship to modern US politics and culture as well as its main online “bastions” and communication techniques. A comprehensive summary of those aspects of the alt-right will be given in order to provide a comparison with other extremist movements both contemporary and preceding. Alt-right and other associated groups, ideas and sociological phenomena proved to be a security danger not only in the USA but elsewhere in the “Western world” as well. Specific examples of such risks will be provided alongside up-to-date propaganda campaigns and terrorist attacks carried out by the movement.

Even though this decentralized group has been thoroughly discussed in the US media especially during the time around the 2016 presidential elections, some of the works regarding this topic have been lacking substantial details. Alt-right is the main topic of three publications that will be used as the main sources for this work: *Alt Right: From 4Chan to the White House* by Mike Wendling who was covering the 2016 elections for *BBC*, *Kill All Normies* by academic writer Angela Nagel and *Making Sense of the Alt-right* by George Hawley, an associate professor of political science at the *University of Alabama*.

Even though these sources were certainly very helpful in covering the topic in a holistic manner, some details have been misconstrued probably due to the authors’ disconnectedness with the online “meme culture” which is very important for the alt-right movement. For example, Mike Wendling confuses the “god-emperor Trump” image collages the right-wing online sphere tends to use as a joke with a reference to the character of Jesus (Wendling 84). Anyone familiar with the fringe online discourse would understand this “meme” to be a reference

to the autocratic god-like character of “Emperor of Mankind” from a popular sci-fi franchise *Warhammer 40,000*. This might seem as a trivial detail, but as will be shown later, the alt-right is not particularly fond of the Christian doctrine and the misapprehension of this online joke could distort the image of the movement to anyone uninformed.

This thesis will try to present alt-right’s relationship to online meme and geek culture in its complexity. It is to be noted, though, that this specific online discourse has been a victim of intentional “irony poisoning” and extrapolating any definite conclusions under such conditions could prove to be difficult.

The sociological phenomenon analysed by this thesis frequently tests the limits of free speech by deliberately using racial slurs and other taboo words. These have sometimes been retained for the sake of realistic rendition and authenticity. This usage does not reflect any ulterior motives on the part of the author.

2 DEFINING “ALT-RIGHT”

To start any meaningful discussion about the topic, defining the term “alt-right” is necessary. Many journalists and political scientists tried to do so without agreeing on any definitive consensus (Caldwell).

Richard Spencer, considered by many to be the leader of the alt-right movement, is usually regarded as the person who coined the term “alt-right” in its modern sense (Pitofsky). Spencer himself describes the alt-right as a “paleoconservative” ideology that focuses on the return to “traditional values”, supports a libertarian government and traditional western civilization and is strongly anti-egalitarian and anti-universalist. These ideas manifest themselves mostly in advocacy for “race realism” (or “scientific racism”) and consequently for “white ethnonationalism.” Even though the word “alt-right” is an

abbreviation for "alternative right", Spencer insists the movement in fact offers "a liberation from a left-right dialectic." ("Alt-Right")

Many of the scholars and journalists covering the movement tend to mark the boundaries of it much less strictly. In his book *Alt Right: From 4chan to the White House*, writer and editor at BBC Mike Wendling describes the movement as "difficult to get a handle on" and as "an oppositional force with no real organizational structure" (Wendling 5). According to Wendling, alt-right is united on some topics and divided on other ones and can be best described as a reactionary ideology, defined more by what its members are opposed to – "third-way" feminism, multiculturalism, political correctness or Islam (Wendling 6-7) – and less by what they stand for.

Angela Nagle, author of the book *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right*, separates the so-called "alt-light" from the alt-right movement. She describes alt-right to be overtly racist, race segregationist, anti-semitic and to have serious political goals. On the other hand, alt-light is much more mainstream and moderate, and its members are presented as "useful idiots" to the more extreme alt-right (Nagle 9). Mike Wendling uses the term "alt-light" as well but uses the term "alt-right" as an umbrella term for both the overtly extremist section of the movement and the alt-light.

Many politicians and other non-academic public figures have used the term as well. During her presidential run in 2016, Hillary Clinton famously mentioned alt-right and tied it to her opponent Donald Trump during her rally speech in Reno, Nevada:

These are race-baiting ideas, anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant ideas, anti-woman — all key tenets making up an emerging racist ideology

known as the 'Alt-Right.' [...] The de facto merger between Breitbart and the Trump Campaign represents a landmark achievement for the "Alt-Right." A fringe element has effectively taken over the Republican Party. [...] So, no one should have any illusions about what's really going on here. The names may have changed. Racists now call themselves "racialists." White supremacists now call themselves "white nationalists." The paranoid fringe now calls itself "alt-right." But the hate burns just as bright. (Ohlheiser)

Steve Bannon, former executive chairman of *Breitbart News* and White House Chief Strategist in Donald Trump's administration, described *Breitbart News*, which he co-founded, as 'the platform for the alt-right' (Hylton). But his definition of the movement noticeably differs from the previously mentioned ones as does not seem to be connecting it with racism or ethnic nationalism but rather with much more mainstream ideas: anti-globalism, nationalism and anti-establishmentarianism.

Just like any new and uncodified term, the word 'alt-right' is ill-defined and unstable in its meaning. In this work, the term will be used in accordance to what Mike Wendling has proposed: a group of individuals interconnected by the kinds of online platforms they tend to use and the way they tend to conduct themselves online, common ideas they tend to follow, such as social conservatism, the so called "race realism" and strict ethno-nationalism and isolationism, but most importantly by their common disdain for their alleged political enemies: so-called "social justice warriors", feminists and progressives. The term "alt-light" will be used as well as it showed to be useful when discussing the not-so-extremist groups and people affiliated with the alt-right.

3 IDEOLOGY

In the following few pages, a comprehensive description of the core ideological standpoints of the alt-right will be presented.

In the centre of the alt-right ideology lies the idea that the world and especially humans occupying it are and should be divided into distinct and unique groups: races, nations, sexes and others. Those who deviate from this hierarchical system become, in the eyes of many alt-righters, “degenerates” (Wendling 82). This outlook manifests itself in many ways: from strict gender roles to the endeavour to establish an ethno-state, or in the words of Richard Spencer “a white homeland.”

3.1. Race

3.1.1 Race realism

In the early stages of its development, the alt-right movement gained most of its media coverage due to its controversial sentiments regarding race and race relations in the US, a set of beliefs which its proponents call “race realism”. In his essay *Race Realism* in the *A Fair Hearing* omnibus, Jared Taylor, an alt-right author, deems race a “biological category” rather than a socially constructed one (Taylor 115). Taylor recognizes biological differences between individual races (even though he admits the most common classification of race is not the only conceivable one) such as facial structure, average height or relative frequency of different blood types. He uses these differences to later on discuss the influence of one’s race on intelligence and other character traits. Taylor does not attribute differences between average IQ scores among different races to social and material conditions but rather to genetics, a view that could be described as “race-essentialism.”

This mindset is not unique to Taylor, rather it reflects the way of thinking of most alt-righters. Opening a discussion about the influence of one's race on one's behaviour with the description of physical differences is a popular persuasive technique deployed by alt-right influencers. Physical differences between individual races are easily detectable and palpable and it is easier to argue for the existence of races from this standpoint.

Even the leaders of the alt-right are cognizant of an anti-white bias and racism inside the movement as can be documented by a *Mother Jones* interview with Richard Spencer: "I would rather you didn't write about that [him dating an Asian woman]. You are probably going to nail me with this... I think some people in the movement would probably find that terrible." (Harkinson)

3.1.2 "White homeland"

A key tenet of the alt-right doctrine is the call for the creation of a "white homeland", a euphemism for all-white country, a "white ethno-state". This idea is supported by the self-proclaimed alt-right leader Richard Spencer as well as by other influential representatives of the movement (Hawley 15).

When discussing the need for a "white homeland", alt-righters often compare such endeavour to that of the Israelis. In the words of Richard Spencer: "We need to go back and look at [Zionism's] most basic impulses. And its basic impulses are identitarian." (Hawley 15) This, at least in theory, differentiates alt-right from other forms of white-nationalist movements. On paper, alt-right does not pursue some kind of domination over other countries, it "only" strives for an ethnically homogenous country, thus rendering itself as "isolationist" (Vandiver 23). Alt-righters often support the existence of other ethnic states, often citing Japan (Fujiwara) or Israel (Ahmed) as examples.

The importance of white national identity for the alt-right stems from several different presuppositions. First, the United States are seen as a successor of the European culture and as such, white Europeans are regarded their “rightful inheritors.” Richard Spencer mentions this notion in his 2016 speech: “America was, until this past generation, a white country designed for ourselves and our posterity. It is our creation; it is our inheritance and it belongs to us.” (“Hail Trump!” 2:30-2:50) Ethnical hegemony is described as necessary for the preservation of traditional “white” culture and the existence of white people themselves. The shifts in “ethnic” demographic ratios are feared to cause a “demise of Western societies” by the alt-right, an idea that is in concord with its “race realist” worldview. In other words, if non-white people are allowed to overpopulate white people, “Western civilization” is thought to cease to exist. In a typically racist manner, alt-righters see non-white people as an obstacle in the development of the US:

To be white is to be a striver, a crusader, an explorer and a conqueror. We build, we produce, we go upward (...) We don’t gain anything from [non-white people’s] presence. They need us and not the other way around. (“Hail Trump!” 1:05-1:35)

Many authors have pointed out alt-right’s somewhat paradoxical confusion of “American” and “European” culture and their amalgamation into a “Western culture”. This term seems to be based much more in race rather than in culture. For this reason, “Western civilization”, when used by an alt-righter, has often been cited as a dog whistle meaning “white culture.” (Illing 2019)

3.1.3 Anti-White Bias

Gregory Hood, an alt-right author, starts his essay *The New Kulaks: Whites as an Enemy Class* by introducing a phenomenon he calls “a hateful schizophrenia

of the Western civilization” (Hood 3). He refers to an alleged anti-white tendency in the contemporary USA society and the rest of the “Western world”. This idea of anti-white bias is an important part of the Alt-Right’s view of race relations in the aforementioned environments. Later on, Hood connects this idea with white peoples’ fear of losing their ethnic majority status in the USA and the “European states” as well.

From the viewpoint of an alt-righter, this problem is wide-spread, influencing major institutions of American culture: schools and universities, journalism, politics etc. “Ethnic studies” as well as “post-colonial studies” and other social science fields are criticized by the alt-right for their “anti-white bias”: “[White people] are instructed to shut up, listen and obey.” (Hood 4-8)

To alt-righters, this problem is all-encompassing and embedded to Western culture’s consciousness. In *Dismantling Anti-White Newspeak* G. T. Shaw argues that “Orwellian devices” are being utilized to coerce white people into accepting their “demise”. He states that the collapsing of white birth rates is done “through sowing beliefs and attitude that make family formation impossible, and by sanitizing and normalizing miscegenation,” and that white people are being convinced to “sheepishly stand by, or even form welcoming committees, as their territories are flooded with racial aliens (Shaw, G. T. 184-186).

Nowhere in his essay does Shaw name the perpetrators of the alleged anti-white racism. The nebulous and conspiratorial term “them” has been shown to be used in the alt-right discourse to stand for a “vague” and “discursively constructed enemy” (Tuters and Hagen 15). As will be shown in the next chapter, “them” is very often used as an anti-Semitic dog-whistle.

3.2 Anti-semitism and conspiratorial thinking

Even though, as has been discussed in the chapter 3.1.2. *White Homeland*, alt-righters and Zionists form a kind of an ideological “alliance” (Makhoul 98), alt-right is widely considered an intrinsically anti-semitic ideology (Finkelstein at el. 1). In this regard, alt-right is similar to other far-right nationalistic movements.

To reconcile the paradox of the existence of both the supposedly “innate nature” of traditional roles and of “degeneracy”, “feminised men” and the influx of “illegal aliens” in the Western world, the alt-right had to construct an external enemy (Kelly 74). Alongside feminists, communists (neo-Marxists) and “the deep state”, Jews found themselves to be in the centre of alt-right’s attention and its conspiratorial theories.

The two most influential conspiracy theories which have found their way into a more mainstream online discourse (Graham 34, 35) are: “the great replacement” and “the white genocide.” Both terms can be used interchangeably, “white genocide” is sometimes cited as a more extreme version of the “great replacement.”

“The great replacement” has been popularized by a French author Renauld Camus in his 2011 book *Le Grande Replacement (The Great Replacement)* in which the author discusses Muslim immigration into France. In its most basic form, “the great replacement” claims that white indigenous Europeans and white Americans are being “replaced” by people of different ethnicities. This is supposedly being done through mass immigration, demographic growth and the drop in the birth rates of white people.

While Camus and other conspiracy theorists state this is done intentionally by “liberal and global elites”, some use the theory in an anti-semitic

manner. As will be shown later, “globalists” and “elites” are both examples of popular alt-right dog-whistles for Jews, and for this reason “the great replacement” as well as “the white genocide” theories have been widely associated with anti-Semitism (Wendling 44).

In its 2019 memo, FBI identified conspiracy theories as potential domestic terrorism threats (Budryk). This idea proved to be right. The perpetrator of the 2019 Christchurch mosque shooting carried out the attack in order to fight “ongoing white genocide” (Weill and Sommer). The perpetrator of the El Paso shooting from the same year expressed similar attitudes. In his manifesto, he claims that his attack was a response to a “Hispanic invasion of Texas” and that he “defended his country from cultural and ethnic replacement” and that the Hispanic community became his target after he read *The Great Replacement* (Barrouquere). The perpetrator of the 2019 Poway synagogue shooting was motivated by anti-semitic ideas. He blamed Jews for “the white genocide” and described it as “meticulously planned” (Oster).

3.3 Masculinity and gender

During the 2016 US presidential run Richard Spencer tweeted: “Women should never be allowed to make foreign policy. It’s not that they’re ‘weak.’ To the contrary, their vindictiveness knows no bounds.” After the leak of the video tapes in which Donald Trump infamously remarked that he can grab women by their genitalia due to his VIP-status (“Transcript: Donald Trump’s Taped Comments about Women”), Spencer said that it is “ridiculous” and “puritanical” to call Trump’s conduct sexual assault, later stating that: “At some part of every woman’s soul, they want to be taken by a strong man.” While such extreme views are not unanimously shared among all alt-right followers and definitely not among the alt-lighters, gender, and masculinity by extension, definitely are an

important trending topic among the mentioned communities and for this reason, the movement has been described as “intensely misogynist” (Lyon 8).

Combining this with alt-right’s overall disdain with most modern “social justice” movements, with feminism standing at its epicentre, and their fascination with traditional values, which very often manifests itself in rigid and somewhat antiquated male and female social roles, one gets a clear answer to why masculinity is so ingrained in alt-right’s philosophy.

Bre Faucheaux, an alt-right YouTuber and podcast host, describes alt-right ideas of gender roles in her essay in the *A Fair Hearing* omnibus as “radical and patriarchal”, comparing them to those which “only 70 years ago were considered a traditional lifestyle that had managed to make women happy for centuries” (Fauchex 88).

Traditionally perceived masculinity becomes a virtue which should be pursued by alt-right men. Those who for any number of reasons do not follow the “masculine stereotype” (such as homosexual men, transgender men and women etc.) are often ostracised and bullied within and outside alt-right communities. Many of the slurs and insults used by the alt-right, such as “faggot”, “soy-boy” or “beta male”, directly attack the perceived lack of masculinity of the victim and are all an excellent example of such attitudes.

Alt-righters often tend to portray their view of gender as beneficial to women, stating that modern-day feminism is damaging to most women. Bre Faucheaux’s mentioned essay *How the Alt-right Benefits Women* is a prime example of this outlook. In it, the author mentions “the feminist suicide pact” (Fauchex 89) as well as “woman’s biological role”:

Women desire to be cherished; men desire to be respected. And in order for women to be cherished, they must respect their men. A man is respected when his wife or girlfriend does not criticize him, demean him or nag him, and when she permits him to make his own mistakes. (Fauchex 92-93)

Similar ideas have been expressed by an alt-right publisher and novelist Alex Kurtagic in 2011. In a now-deleted *AltRigh.com* article, Kurtagic argues that women and men have different natural roles but that the alt-right movement needs both men and women, especially due to women's role in a specific form of recruitment:

Women are far more than nurturers: they are especially proficient at networking, community building, consensus building, multi-tasking, and moral and logistical support provision. These are all essential in any movement involving community outreach and where user-friendly, low-key, nonthreatening forms of recruitment are advisable... Women can create a much broader comfort zone around hardcore political activism through organising a wide range of community, human, and support-oriented activities. (Lyons 7)

This being said, a lot of prominent women associated with the alt-right have expressed disapproval with the way women tend to be treated in the alt-right online communities. Lauren Southern, a Canadian alt-right youtuber, described her experience with alt-right chauvinism after being criticised for not being married in her video *Why I'm Not Married*: "I am not trying to sell the idea that myself, as a 22-year-old, needs to be married right now for the sake of traditionalism and not being a degenerate. [...] What is also just completely shocking to me is the utter lack of understanding of nuance." ("Why I'm Not

Married”) Likewise, Tara McCarthy, an alt-right podcast host, has expressed similar attitude as demonstrated by her now-deleted Twitter thread:

Women in the Alt Right are constantly harassed by low status anonymous trolls... [...] Men in the Alt Right are going to have to decide whether they will continue to passively/actively endorse this behaviour or speak out against it. If you want more women speaking publicly about ethno-nationalism, I suggest you choose the latter. (Coleman)

Andrew Yeoman, an alt-right thinker with a specific national-anarchist twist, supports the idea that women are being excluded from the movement: “Many women won’t associate with our ideas.” He argues that this happens due to “sexualizing women in the movement” and that alt-right is the worst of “all the radical circles” in this manner (Lyons 7,8).

Many scholars argue this overtly anti-woman stance is a result of alt-right’s interwovenness with what is often referred to as “the manosphere” (Lyon 8; Nagle 86-88). The manosphere is an umbrella term for several different online communities: i.e. MRA (Men’s Rights Activists), who argue that the legal system as well as the media elites discriminate against men; Pickup Artists, who help men find sexual partners (often in a deeply misogynist ways); or MGTOWs (Men Going Their Own Way), who argue that women are socially in a position of dominance and for this reason actively avoid relationships with them (Lyon 8).

The lines between alt-right and the “manospherians” are often blurred. Both communities support open homophobia and transphobia and use very similar vocabulary such as “degenerates” or other pejoratives. Both groups

recognize feminists as their political opponents (Nagle 88), while supporting Donald Trump as “their presidential candidate” (Nagle 90).

While most of the above-mentioned ideas about gender are somewhat shared between the alt-right and other conservative movement, the alt-right deviates from this norm by their view of abortion. Even though the alt-right is not unified on this topic, it is, on average, more “pro-choice” than the mainstream conservative movements (Hawley 103).

3.4 Religion

Attitudes towards religion are not very consistent among the alt-right community. The most dominant portion of the movement and all its main figures are self-proclaimed atheists (Hawley 100). Alt-right’s general aversion to religion differentiates the movement from the rest of the US conservative political sphere which predominantly bases its ideology in Christianity.

Though Richard Spencer recognizes some pragmatic value of the Christian church (mainly its role in unifying the white population of Europe), he rejects Christianity as a universalizing religion and embraces it rather as an ethnic one. He bases his view of religion on the work of Friedrich Nietzsche (Harris). Even though a segment of journalists has described his interpretation of the work of the German philosopher as misleading (Galupo; Illing 2017), for example, Nietzsche’s concept of “slave morality” seems to be influential in shaping the alt-right worldview (Hawley 100).

Christianity is often seen as a “foreign religion imposed on Europeans.” Even though it is the most tolerated religion among the alt-righters, Christianity is often criticized from both the atheist and the anti-semitic position, mainly due to Jesus’ Jewish parentage as well as the alleged use of the religion by the Jewish elites to control the European people.

On the other hand, Nick Fuentes, a popular streamer, whose opinions could be described as alt-right, is a self-proclaimed Christian. Similarly, an alt-lighter and a former writer for Breitbart, Milo Yiannopoulos is a practising Catholic. Furthermore, since 2017, *The Right Stuff*, an alt-right and neo-Nazi website, has been hosting an “alt-right Christian podcast,” *The Godcast*.

Other alt-right or alt-light groups have embraced Christianity as well, not necessarily for their intrinsic beliefs but rather due to its direct connection to Western civilization. For example, *Proud Boys*, an alt-right gang-like group, have proclaimed Christianity a “Western Religion” in their now deleted 2016 article (Press). In a similar manner, cultural symbols referring to Christian heritage such as the phrase “deus vult (God wills it)” or Crusader flags are often used in alt-right iconography or as a part of the community’s memes, be it in a semi-ironic manner (DeCook).

All of those facts could be seen as evidence to alt-right’s tolerance of Christianity, a sentiment that is supported by an alt-right essayist and author Gregory Hood who thinks alt-righters are becoming less overtly hostile to Christianity:

There is actually more of a tendency moving back towards Christianity. However, this “Christianity” is of a form deeply hostile towards most recognized Christian authorities today. (...) Everyone on the Alt Right agrees contemporary Christian leaders have essentially betrayed their own flock. Where there is a difference is whether they believe this is inherent to Christianity or whether contemporary Christian leaders are essentially heretics. (Hawley 104, 105)

Following the example of other conservative right-wing movements, alt-right is not very fond of Islam either. But because of Islam's tight relation to Arabic and other ethnicities, it is difficult to say whether this sentiment is a result of dislike of another cultural paradigm or of a pro-white ethnic tendency on the side of the alt-righters. The same could be said about Judaism, which is seen as hostile to most of the alt-right's goals and ideals due to its connection to various alt-right conspiracy theories: "the great replacement", "holocaust denial" and others. Alt-right's attitudes towards Islam and Judaism have been subject to the research of Daniel Odin Shaw who confirmed alt-right's hostility towards the religions in question (D. O. Shaw 84).

Past the traditional Abrahamic monotheistic religions, alt-right's opinion of other religions seems much more straightforward. Since their beginnings, European and American far-right groups seem to have been attracted to European pagan religious iconography: Sonnenrad (the "Black Sun" symbol), sig runes (the "SS" symbol) etc. Similarly, far-righters have utilized these symbols in their own self-presentation. For example, runes have been used on flags and prop shields of the attendees of the Charlottesville Rally, an event meant to unite the US far-right groups (Little). In this framework however, Paganism does not function as an ideological influence over alt-right ideology, rather it provides imagery that can be used to evoke connotations of tradition and European heritage. In the regard of using religious identity and icons for secular purposes, the alt-right shows similarities to other contemporary far-right nationalistic movements (D. O. Shaw 80).

4 SOCIAL PLATFORMS AND ONLINE MEDIA

Lacking access to the main-stream media, the alt-righters and alt-lighters were forced to create "a multi-layered alternative online media empire" (Nagle

45) consisting of explicitly fascist websites such as The Daily Stormer, populist conservative news media sites such as *Breitbart News* as well as a whole ecosystem of social media communities, most importantly on 4chan, 8chan and a plethora of Reddit's "subreddits" (Merrin 2017). In this chapter the importance of each of the aforementioned websites for the establishment of alt-right's online presence will be discussed.

4.1 4chan

4chan is an English-language imageboard website launched in 2003. The website is divided into over 70 categories, so called "boards", such as /lit/ (literature), /vp/ (Pokémon) or /p/ (photography). Although alt-right and other extremist voices can definitely be heard on regular on 4chan boards, the site wasn't started in order to amplify those ideas, nor does this type of content comprise majority of the website's posts. Most of 4chan's content is dedicated to non-political posts such as anime and manga, video games, sports and fitness or music.

Despite that, 4chan has grown a reputation of an insufficiently moderated social media website and as such it was described as "one of the darkest corners of the Web" in The New York Times (Tarabay).

For alt-righters, the most important part of the website is, without a doubt, the /pol/ board. Standing for "Politically Incorrect", the board's stated goal is "discussion of news, world events, political issues, and other related topics". It has been running since October 2011 and was first started as a replacement for the /new/ (world news) board which had been deleted from the platform due to high volume of racist discussion. /pol/ has become what is known as "containment board", meaning that it is supposed to keep far-right and overtly political discussions off 4chan's other boards.

For these reasons, /pol/ has been often characterized as racist, sexist, antisemitic and explicitly alt-right and neo-Nazi (Ludemann 3). /pol/ has been involved in many of the events linked to alt-right. For example, in 2017 the /pol/ community organized the “It’s okay to be white” troll campaign, during which posters and stickers with the titular slogan were placed in streets and on campuses in the United States, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom. It, in the words of one of the /pol/ users, was a „proof of the concept“ that a „harmless message“ would cause a media backlash (McGladrey), a sentiment which will later be associated with the alt-right’s usage of the “milk” emoji, the character of Pepe the frog as well as the “OK sign”. The recognition of the OK sign as a hate symbol (“OK hand sign”) is a result of /pol/’s another troll campaign in 2017. The symbol was used, among others, by Brenton Tarrant, the terrorist behind the 2019 Christchurch mosque shooting, during one of his hearings (Corcoran). At this point, it is difficult to say whether the symbol is still used in an ironic manner or whether it has grown into a “real” hate symbol which it was supposed to mimic. After the attack, /pol/ was temporarily blocked by Australian internet providers due to it containing videos of the shootings (Walker).

All of the above-mentioned cases are examples of the immense influence with which /pol/ shapes the discourse both online and in the traditional media. For these reasons, /pol/ has been described as an incubator for a great number of alt-right memes (Zannettou et al. 188). When compared to other far-right online communities: Gab and r/The_Donald subreddit; /pol/ was found to be the most active one as it shared the greatest total number of racist and political memes. (Zannettou et al. 200).

4.2 8chan

8chan, currently known as 8kun or as Infinite-chan (stylized as “∞chan”) is an image board intentionally imitating 4chan both in its functionality and stylization. It was created by Frederick Brennan in 2013 as a “free-speech-friendly” alternative to 4chan which has, according to Brennan, “grown into authoritarianism” (O’Neill).

8chan is often characterized as an even more radical “twin” of its predecessor, 4chan. It is even less moderated, its only rule being “Do not post, request, or link to any content illegal in the United states of America. Do not create boards with the sole purpose of posting or spreading such content” (Dewey). Despite that, boards designated to discuss such topics as child rape were created. The Daily Dot reported that these boards exist to share sexualized images of minors as well as explicit child pornography (O’Neill).

In August, 8chan got into media spotlight again. Brenton Tarrant, the Christchurch shooting perpetrator; John Timothy Earnest, suspect of the Poway synagogue shooting, and Patric Wood Crusius, suspect of the El Paso shooting, all used 8chan as a platform to spread their manifestos (Dewey). All of the shootings were linked to far-right extremism, the Christchurch shooting to alt-right extremism specifically (Edwards). Tarrant was hailed as a hero by some of the 8chan’s /pol/ board users (Fagnoni).

After the shootings, Brennan who ceased to work for the website in 2018, stated that the website should be shut down (Roose). The then owner of 8chan, Jim Watkinson, was asked to testify about the extremist content by the *United States House Committee of Homeland Security* (Paul and Culliford). The website has been voluntarily shut down in August 2019. 8chan has been relaunched by

Watkinson in October 2019 under the name “8kun” (both the “-chan” and “-kun” suffixes refer to Japanese honorifics).

8chan could be seen as the end of a metaphorical “alt-right pipeline” as conceptualized by Luke Mann. According to him, regular 4channers smoothly transition to “more aggressively anti-SJW” materials on YouTube, from there to Gab and finally to “the shock humour and Nazi memes” on 8chan (Munn 8).

4.3 Gab

Gab is a social media platform launched in August 2016, which promoted itself as a “free speech” alternative to the dominant social media of the time, Twitter and Facebook. In spite of advocating free speech, over the past years, Gab has been under scrutiny by journalists and social media experts alike due to its lack of moderation which attracted many users previously banned for hate speech on other social networks (Wilson 2016).

Gab is widely recognized to be an alt-right and alt-light platform, a fact which is being reflected by the choice of its logo: a “pepe-like” green frog (a sort of an alt-right cartoon mascot). An analysis (Lima et al.) compared Gab’s userbase with the profiles of extremists, which have been compiled by *SPLC*, an American non-profit organization dedicated to fighting hate crime and extremism, and the *ADL*, the *Anti-Defamation League*. The study shows that over 60% of the listed extremists have an active Gab account, some of them being verified accounts. These include, among others, Milo Yiannopoulos, Alex Jones, Richard Spencer or Mike Cernovich. Authors of the study propose that approximately 35 % of Gab users follow at least one of the examined profiles.

The team conducting the study also analysed the profile of an average Gab user. The results very much correspond to other characterizations of an average alt-righter or an alt-lighter: a Caucasian male with a strong right and extremely

conservative political leaning who gets most of their political news from social media or “alternative” news media (YouTube, Breitbart and Infowars were all found to be among the top 5 most shared domains on Gab), a sentiment which is echoed in the very end of the study:

Our analysis of what users share in Gab unveiled a lot of political statements. Posts indicate that, while users support free speech, a small part of the posts not only mirror political views but incorporate hate speech. (...) These results indicate that an unmoderated social media such as Gab has become an echo chamber for right-leaning content dissemination. (Lima et al. 521)

4.4 Reddit

Reddit is a discussion website based around the idea of “down-votes” and “up-votes”. It is segmented into specific subpages called “subreddits” (usually stylized “r/name”) with different content focuses. Up-voted messages are shown at the top of the corresponding subreddit, while the down-voted ones are located in the very bottom. This system allows for an organic community-driven discussion.

Since 2012, subreddits associated with the alt-right have been r/AltRight (now deleted) and r/TheRedPill. With millions of monthly users (Rohlinger 214), a subreddit dedicated to discussions and memes in support of U.S. president Donald Trump, r/The_Donald (now deleted), has been described as alt-right as well (Sarlin), even though alt-light seems more fitting due to a lack of regular anti-semitic and overtly racist content.

The r/The_Donald subreddit was demonstrated to be “very successful in pushing memes to both fringe and mainstream web communities” when

compared to other far-right online communities: Gab and the /pol/ 4chan board (Zannettou et al. 200).

The now deleted subreddit r/AltRight was linked to a more overt form of extremism. An analysis of 6-month behavioural patterns of the community showed its right-wing extremist leanings when compared to a comparison group of similarly situated online political communities (Grover and Mark).

4.5 Voat

Gab is to Reddit what 8cwhan is to 4chan. It copies Reddit's basic functionality: up-votes and down-votes; while being more traditionally conservative. Edwin Hodge and Helga Hallgrimsdottir comprise both Voat and altright.com into a group of alt-right websites which originate in the early years of the ideology. Those websites have been, however, overwhelmed both by the explicitly white supremacist websites such as 8chan and by the more traditionally conservative communities such as r/The_Donald or /pol/ (Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir 5).

4.6 YouTube

YouTube is a video sharing social media network created in 2005. It is now the biggest video sharing platform online.

An existence of a "radicalization alt-right pipeline" on YouTube has been often theorized by both media and social media experts (Ribeiro et al. 1). A paper by a team lead by Manoel Horta Ribeiro seems to support this claim. According to it, three big communities of YouTube content creators allow a migration of users from milder to a more extreme content.

First of these groups are the "Intellectual Dark Web" represented most notably by Ben Shapiro, a conservative commentator; Jordan B. Peterson, a

Canadian psychologist, professor of psychology at the *University of Toronto* and a public conservative speaker; Sargon of Akkad, a former member of the *UKIP* party and a self-proclaimed anti-feminist; and *PragerU*, an American right-wing think-tank. “The Intellectual Dark Web” is the most mainstream group of the three, comprising mostly of right-wing conservative influencers who have been allegedly shunned by mainstream media for their conservative and controversial ideas (Weiss and Winter).

Content creators from the “Alt-lite” group deny embracing white supremacist ideology, but they are cited to “frequently flirt with concepts associated with it,” such as the “Great Replacement theory” or other globalist conspiracies (Ribeiro et al. 1). Some of the more well-known channels are: Lauren Southern, Nick Fuentes, No Bullshit, Paul Joseph Watson, Stefan Molyneux or Tommy Robinson.

The “Alt-right” group supports fringe ideas like white ethno-nationalism and anti-Semitism. This is the smallest group of the three, most probably due to YouTube’s banning of the overtly extreme content. The most recognizable names on list are: AltRight.com, a channel ran by Richard Spencer, Bre Faucheux, The Golden One or Black Pidgeon Speaks.

The paper discusses the way YouTube “radicalizes” its users by recommending more and more ideologically extreme videos in their “recommended section.” The three groups are shown to share very similar communities, with the alt-right’s one being the most active one. Furthermore, all of the three groups’ views, likes and comments “sky-rocketed” around the time of the 2016 US Presidential elections (Ribeiro et al. 10).

4.7 Breitbart

Breitbart News Network is an American far-right and conservative news and commentary website founded in 2007 by Andrew Breitbart. It has been cited to have published several conspiracy theories and misleading stories (Roy).

Following Andrew Breitbart's death in March 2012, Steve Bannon became the executive chairman of the network. Under his management, *Breitbart News* became aligned with the alt-right after he proclaimed it to be "the platform of the alt-right" (Posner) while simultaneously disavowing the more xenophobic tendencies of the ideology:

Are there some people that are anti-Semitic that are attracted? Maybe. Right? Maybe some people are attracted to the alt-right that are homophobes, right? But that's just like, there are certain elements of the progressive left and the hard left that attract certain elements. (Posner)

A conservative commentator, public speaker and former *Breitbart* editor-at-large Benjamin Aaron Shapiro published an article in which he described *Breitbart* under Bannon's management as "the alt-right go-to website" and to be "pushing white ethno-nationalism as a legitimate response to political correctness" and its comment section as a "cesspool for white supremacist mememakers" (Shapiro).

During the 2016 US presidential elections, *Breitbart News* became an "online rallying spot" for supporters of the Donald Trump's presidential campaign (Grynbaum and Herrman). In March 2016, a number of top *Breitbart* employees including Benjamin Shapiro resigned due to what they called a "fail in Breitbart's mission": "Andrew [Breitbart] built his life and his career on one mission: fight the bullies. (...) In my opinion, Steve Bannon is a bully, and has

sold out Andrew's mission in order to back another bully, Donald Trump." (Gold)

In August 2016, Steven Bannon stepped down as an executive chairman of the *Breitbart News* to join the Trump campaign as its chief executive (Keneally). Alongside him, the *Breitbart News* have employed a plethora of journalist and online celebrities who are in various ways connected to alt-right and alt-lite communities. The already mentioned commentator Benjamin Shapiro is often cited as a part of the "Intellectual Dark Web" while simultaneously being highly critical of the alt-right movement (Rezvani and Talley). Milo Yiannopolous, a popular online commentator, troll and an alt-lite writer, was in charge of Breitbart's technology section from 2015 until he resigned in February 2017.

4.8 Daily Stormer

Daily Stormer is an American far-right neo-Nazi commentary website started in 2013 as a replacement of its founder's previous website Total Fascism. Daily Stormer is openly alt-right, calling itself the "world's most visited alt-right website" (Gallo). The name of the website is a reference to *Der Stürmer*, a World War II German tabloid which published Nazi propaganda.

Daily Stormer has expressed white supremacist views, partaken in Holocaust denial and advocated for the genocide of Jews (O'Brien). As of May 2020, the website has hosted live "demographic countdown" which showed the projected timeline of white people becoming "outnumbered" by non-white people in the US.

Daily Stormer has been widely associated with the alt-right "troll culture" and regularly hosts far-right memes and dog-whistles. After Donald Trump's presidential inauguration and Britain's decision to leave the EU, its founder,

Andrew Anglin, declared that “[the alt-right] won the meme war; now we've taken over the GOP, and we did this very, very quickly” (Gallo).

4.9 Other social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter)

Even though Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok are all among the 12 most popular social media, the alt-right movement seems not to have a prominent and well-established communities on them.

Facebook used to have problems with white-nationalistic and alt-right content hosted on its servers up until the implementation of rules that ban “praise, support and representation of white nationalism and separatism” in 2019 (Beckett) Some journalists called the ban ineffective (Newton). This seems to be true, as in 2020, Facebook offered \$100 000 to anyone who could program an AI which would identify hate speech in image memes (Mehta).

Instagram’s userbase, when compared to those of other social media, is much younger and seems more progressive when dealing with social issues. But because of its userbase’s relatively low age, Instagram became a suitable place to indoctrinate “Gen Z” with alt-right ideology. Due to its functionality (the website is a photo-sharing network), Instagram became especially useful for spreading memes which could lead to radicalization of the younger audience (Chowdhary).

TikTok is the newest social media of the four. For this reason, it has not got much attention from scholars or journalists. Some of them have reported the platform to have a possible “nazi” and “white supremacy” problem (Cox), but those seem rather insignificant. Having searched TikTok for the hashtag #altright, 48 out of the first 50 posts were actually attacking the alt-right. One of

the remaining two was expressing support to Donald Trump and the second one was making fun of the ongoing BLM protests.

Even though alt-righters are present on Twitter, it seems it is not a the most useful platform for their “cause.” For example, Richard Spencer, even though his profile is followed by over 80 thousand users (most of them are probably his political opponents and journalists), he gets little to no traction “retweet”-wise and “like”-wise. That being said, a lot of alt-right dog-whistles such as (((echoes))) or the frog or milk emoji originate on Twitter.

5 COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

5.1 Aesthetics, visibility and self-presentation

In an interview for *VICE News* Spencer characterises an essential component of the alt-right movement: aesthetics. “[Journalists] want to see us because we’re flashy. Yeah. We understand PR. We understand how to talk to and manipulate journalists.” (“We memed alt-right into existence” 2:20-2:35)

In 1936, Walter Benjamin coined the term “anesthetization of politics” as being an integral part to fascist regimes (Benjamin). Benjamin connected it to fondness of “spectacles” such as flags, uniforms, parades and rallies. Similar tendencies can be seen in the alt-right movement which is often thought to be a kind of a reinvention and rebranding of the fascist ideology (Braune 11). Alt-right seems to bring this notion to the world of the 21st century and actualize it with alt-right’s emphasis on high-class elegance as well as internet and meme culture; something, that has not been the case with the more traditional far-right movements. Alt-right circles very often tend to produce their own insignia: flags, symbols, but memes and jokes as well. The flag of a fictional “Republic of Kekistan” is a great example of this phenomenon. Its design is based on a German

Nazi war flag, with the iron cross being replaced by a 4chan logo and the “German red” replaced by green, possibly referring to Pepe, the frog (Neiwart). The “Kekistan flag” has been – similarly to Pepe – used both in a harmless satirical sense, as well as a more extremist one, for example, during the Charlottesville *Unite the Right* rally (“Deconstructing the symbols spotted in Charlottesville”).

Clothing is also a crucial aspect of the self-presentation alt-right tends to utilize. Contrary to the stereotypical image of “a skinhead”, wearing an old black jacket often with clear extremist symbols, the alt-right is much more fashionable. Richard Spencer is rarely seen wearing anything else than a well-fitted suit or a vest. The same is true for Nick Fuentes, an alt-right online personality, who streams exclusively in formal clothing. In preparation for the *Unite the Right* rally, which was supposed to be the first “real world” rally of the alt-right and other far-right communities, *The Daily Stormer* published a blog-post with a subsection titled “Dress for Success.” In it, the author of the article advises his fellow alt-righters to “look slick and sexy, (...) keep it fitted” and not to wear shorts. “We don’t want to go for punkish. As I said, the skinhead movement was cool at the time, but times have changed.” (Anglin)

The article continues with a photo of a group of people at a former rally, holding Swastika flags, performing the Nazi salute while looking quite angry.

Right now, when you type “Alt-Right rally” into Google Images, this is the first image. That is not what we want. (...) It doesn’t represent us and it is not an aesthetic that appeals to the kind of people we are trying to appeal to, which are normal people. (Anglin)

Today, the 2017 *Unite the Right* rally in Charlottesville is most known for the terrorist attack in which one of the protestors rammed his car into a crowd of

peaceful (Cavallaro and Stanglin) counter-protestors, killing 1 and injuring 28. After the attack, alt-righter communities started to realize the damage this event has done to the movement's public image (Atkinson 2). A popular 4chan thread called *Fixing the Alt Right* by an anonymous user addresses these concerns ("Fixing the Alt-Right"). According to the author of this message, alt-righters should "disavow all Nazi/KKK edgelord LARPer," referring to the tiki-torch march, an affiliate event which took place before the main rally next day. "There is no way to lose public support quicker than going around making Nazi salutes holding Tiki torches while chanting "Jews will not replace us". This instantly makes the average person hate you." This demonstrates both the alt-right's interest in its own self-presentation as well as the fear of being connected to the more traditional nationalistic and fascistic movements.

This effort to be seen as a new movement with no ties to its fascistic roots can be shown by the way the alt-right labels itself as well. Rarely do alt-righters use any language that could bear any possible negative connotations to previous far-right movements (i.e. "Nazis", "fascists", "nationalists" etc.) and that could thus discourage a segment of their possible sympathizers.

For these reasons, new terms and coded language is introduced by the alt-right, such as:

- **Race realist:** "Racist" is replaced by a "race realist", a person who does not hold any personal antipathies towards a different ethnicity, but rather "realistically" and (pseudo) scientifically examines the ways race influences personal and group behaviours.
- **White-identitarian:** Because overtly racist behaviour is generally frowned upon in modern day USA, anti-minority tendencies of the alt-right have to be coded. Such euphemisms often refer to the ethnic

identity of the speaker rather than the identity of the addressee, such as “identitarian”, “white-identitarian”, “white nationalist”. These terms carry a positive meaning (“I, white-identitarian, am for preserving my cultural heritage.”) rather than a negative one (“I, a racist, am against other ethnicities”).

- **Western culture/civilization:** Donna Zuckerberg, an American classicist, has commented on alt-right’s use of the term in her *Vox* interview: “The [alt-right’s] goal is to turn a phrase like “Western civilization” into code for “white culture” and to cement a narrative about history that glorifies patriarchy and undercuts cultural progressivism.” (Illing 2019)
- **Counter-semitism:** Because “anti-Semitism” is no longer a publicly acceptable political ideology, the term is transformed into a “counter-semitism”, which does not describe “hostility toward Jews”, but rather signifies a response to initial “hostile action *from* Jews” (G. T. Shaw 196).
- **Alt-right:** The term “alt-right” – alternative right – itself is a way of distancing oneself from the traditional right-wing political movements. Although, in this case it is directed against the traditional establishment republican Right more than the old-fashioned nationalistic movements. (Hawley 92)

Some branches of the movement and individual alt-righters have adopted a kind of a pan-European aesthetic in order to emphasize their white European heritage. As we’ve discussed earlier, this notion is very American-centric, as seeing Europe as one homogenous culture is problematic at least. This tendency manifests itself in many ways. Now deleted Richard Spencer’s *National Policy Institute’s* promotional video “Who Are We?” (“Decrypting the Alt-Right” 11:44-

12:15) depicts visual references to Roman, Anglo-Saxon as well as Scandinavian history when talking about white Americans' cultural heritage. Semi-popular YouTuber The Golden One often uses costumes in his videos – both of a Roman soldier and of a Viking. In similar fashion, alt-right iconography often utilizes symbols from all of the above-mentioned indigenous European cultures: Nordic and Celtic runes or traditional Slavic symbols. Those were used, for example, on flags of the attendees of the Charlottesville Rally (Little).

These are all tactics through which the alt-righters try to conjure an image of themselves: an internet savvy, “hip” countercultural movement for white men. S. L. Hartzell comments on this in her analysis of the alt-right's rhetoric: “This framing enables the “alt-right” to construct rhetorical distance from its material and ideological white nationalist roots,” (Hartzell 23) and in doing so, it provides “mainstream white people” a channel through which they can express their pro-white racial consciousness without the necessity of identifying as white nationalists.

5.2 Dog-whistling

Dog-whistling is a form of political messaging that means one thing to the general public but conveys a different, hidden meaning which is understandable only to people who are familiar with the specific dog-whistle. This is done mostly to protect the “dog-whistler” from public scrutiny or legal repercussions. Former Republican Party strategist Lee Atwater described dog-whistling and its usage by the Republican party in his 1981 interview:

You start out in 1954 by saying, "Nigger, nigger, nigger." By 1968, you can't say "nigger" – that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like *forced busing, states' rights* and all that stuff. You're getting so abstract now, you're talking about cutting taxes. (...) You follow me

– because obviously sitting around saying, "We want to cut this," is much more abstract than even the busing thing." (Perlstein)

During one of his streams, Nick Fuentes was asked by a viewer about the "cookie question" to which he replied:

Wait a second. It takes one hour to cook a batch of cookies and you have fifteen ovens - probably in four different kitchens, right? – doing 24 hours a day for five years, how long would it take to make six million [cookies]? I don't know. It certainly wouldn't be five years, right? The math doesn't seem to add up there. ("Nicholas J. Fuentes: The Cookie Question")

Nick Fuentes was of course not really talking about cooking cookies but was rather dog-whistling his beliefs about the Holocaust – specifically, his holocaust denial beliefs. Anti-Semitic dog-whistles are particularly popular among the alt-righters due to their conspiratorial thinking. Those can include phrases like "controlled media", "international bankers", "elites" etc., all referring to alleged Jewish control over mass media and banks.

Another form of anti-Semitic dog-whistle are the now infamous "(((echoes)))" or "triple parentheses" ("Echo"). This visual symbol originated on the *The Right Stuff* podcast in 2014 (Wilson 2017) and has been widely discussed by mass media in 2016 (Williams; Singal; Yglesias). Echoes are used to denote a Jewish person, or a company, institution or social phenomenon supposedly influenced by "the Jewish conspiracy." Triple parentheses are to be a visual representation of this influence, which "echoes through history". In June 2016 the *Anti-Defamation League* recognized (((echoes))) as a form of an online hate symbol (Hern). Similarly, some anti-semites use)))reversed triple-parentheses(((to mark themselves as anti-semites or to be of non-Jewish origin.

In similar fashion to the “cookie question”, “the Pitbull question” is often brought up (Hart). Pitbulls are presented as dogs with significantly higher risk of attacking a human. Because of this, Pitbulls are often used as a dog-whistle to stand for African American people who are over-represented in crime statistics. This dog-whistle also conveys the belief that the higher criminality of the African American community is due to genetics as Pitbulls were specifically bred to be a fighting breed. This idea is used for example in Stonetoss’ comic *Wagging the Dog* (“Wagging the Dog”).

Alt-right has been successful in establishing other forms of dog-whistles as well: most notably, emojis. This appropriation of harmless images often functions as “media baiting.” The aim is to make the media report on something insignificant which can be subsequently used by the alt-right against them. This happened, for example, with the “milk” emoji, the “frog” emoji and the “ok” symbol. All of them have been used on Twitter to signify one’s affiliation to the alt-right movement (Gambert and Linné).

Even the new expressions discussed in chapter 5.1. *Aesthetics, visibility and self-presentation* such as “race realist”, “white-identarian” or even “western culture” and “alt-right” can be seen as a form of a dog-whistle.

5.3 Propaganda

In the upcoming chapter, alt-right’s behaviour online as well as off-line spaces will be examined through the lens of Alfred Lee’s and Elizabeth Lee’s assessment of propaganda (Lee and Lee). As a part of their work for the *Institute for Propaganda Analysis* in 1939, Alfred and Elizabeth Lee examined propaganda and classified its devices into seven major categories: name-calling, glittering generalities, transfer, testimonial, plain-folk, card-stacking and bandwagon.

5.3.1 Name-calling

Name-calling is a form of a verbal abuse in which a person or a group of people is associated with a demeaning label. Alt-right uses name-calling mostly in the online space in order to harass their opponents, as some of the more vitriolic insults could be potentially damaging to its brand if employed in the “off-line world”.

When being interviewed, the alt-right leaders tend to use more obscure and less blatantly offensive language. But labels such as “mainstream media”, “establishment”, “cultural Marxist” or “global elites” are still employed even in those circumstances.

Because of their interest in the online meme culture, alt-righters tend to be quite inventive when using insults. Most notably, they have invented a plethora of neologisms. One of the favourite ones, which can be used against any adversary who does not hold alt-right beliefs, is “cuck”. The word refers to “cuckoldry” and can be interchanged for an insult with a virtually identical meaning: “beta male.” Alt-righters verbally attack not only progressives but other conservatives, who are not radical enough, as well (Hawley 91-93). For these purposes, a “cuck” often transforms into a “cuckservative” (Wendling 80). Other such insults are, for example, “libtard”, “snowflake”, “rapefugee”, “Tumblrina” or “soy-boy.”

Name-calling in the online space is often realized via memes – a sort of a visual code with specific informal ever-shifting rules. Those most often used in the communities dominated by alt-righters are “The Happy Merchant”, a stereotypical Jewish caricature; “a coomer” (from “coom”, a phonological twist on the word “cum”), a visual insult addressed to someone with a supposed masturbation addiction, or “the NPC” (from “non-player character”, a gaming

term), a smear against those who are thought to be unable to think for themselves and only repeat ideas of “the mainstream media” and “the establishment”.

Similarly, a “normie” (from “normal person”), a well-established piece of internet slang, plays a prominent role in alt-right’s rhetoric. The word denotes a person who is not familiar with the internet meme culture and thus becomes a useful tool in alt-right’s communication toolkit. Angela Nagle recognizes the cultural importance of this term and for this reason she named her publication “Kill all Normies”. Mike Wendling includes “normie” in his list of popular alt-right lingo, describing it as someone “who hasn’t yet taken the “red pill”” (hasn’t yet adopted the reactionary ideology) and who is “a bland vanilla person with mainstream taste” (Wendling 90). To mention an instance of “normie” used by an alt-righter, the title of the second essay published in *A Fair Hearing* omnibus by Colin Liddell called *A Normie’s guide to the Alt-Right* seems appropriate (Liddell 15).

5.3.2 Glittering generalities

A “glittering generality” is an emotionally appealing phrase which is very vague, or which has no real definition. Some of the most common glittering generalities are for example: “common good”, “freedom”, “reform” or even “democracy”.

Because of alt-right’s efforts to maintain an approachable public image, its members have to use vague language very often. At the annual *National Policy Institute* conference in 2016, Richard Spencer connected white people with the qualities of “strivers, crusaders and conquerors”. In his words, white people “build, produce and go upward” (“Hail Trump!” 1:05-1:35).

Alt-righters also use expressions similar to glittering generalities but with negative connotations when speaking about their supposed enemies. For

example, in the speech mentioned above, Richard Spencer talks about “the great crimes committed against [white people],” without ever specifying what these crimes are. Conspiracy theories such as “the white genocide” function in the same manner.

5.3.3 Transfer

Transfer carries the respect and authority of something respected to something else to make the latter accepted. Typical use of “transfer” is an establishment of a connection between a political project and a national or religious symbolism which is already revered by the intended audience (Sproule 136).

Apart from the examples provided in chapter 3.4. *Religion*, alt-right’s use of religious Christian iconography is sparse. Donald Trump has been occasionally depicted as Jesus Christ. In similar manner, the Christchurch shooter Brenton Tarrant was visually associated with the imagery of Christian saints (Fagnoni).

What has been much more prevalent is Donald Trump’s depiction as “God Emperor of Mankind.” This popular meme depicting Trump wearing a decorative golden armour and wielding a giant flaming sword with bright halo and USA flag in the background (Mukherjee) is a reference to *Warhammer 40,000* which is a very popular gaming franchise among the online gaming community. It is reasonable to assume the creator of the meme tried to capitalize on the popularity of the franchise for their own political goals.

In a sense, alt-right’s usage of popular online memes could be interpreted as “transfer” as well. Memes, such as *Pepe* for example, already possess a degree of recognizability and positive connotations. Hijacking these symbols proved to be a useful strategy for the movement.

5.3.4 Testimonial

“Testimonial” tries to link a political idea to a specific, favoured person or institution. Because alt-right views are by no means mainstream or generally acceptable in modern US society, the movement has not been able to utilize this aspect of propaganda. Rather, they have been appealing to such general concepts as “science” or “rationality” to support their views (Wendling 19).

The movement has also tried to establish their own “celebrities” and institutions. Many of the alt-right and alt-light influencers such as Milo Yiannopolous or Nicholas J. Fuentes have now become semi-popular online celebrities. A think-tank *National Policy Institute* (NPI) was founded by Richard Spencer in 2005 to provide a sense of authenticity to alt-right views.

Alt-right was also successful in using Donald Trump as part of their propaganda. Even though Trump has never officially endorsed the alt-right, alt-righters were able to turn his campaign and subsequent presidency into a validation of their own political goals. This has been done mostly via Twitter (Jordan 31).

5.3.5 Plain folks

For propaganda to be successful, it has to appeal to the “plain folks.” In alt-right’s case “plain folks” are white atheist or Christian conservative, mostly young Americans. In an interview for *The Atlantic*, Richard Spencer describes “the condition” of a prototypical alt-righter: “Our lived experience is being a young white person in 21st century America. Seeing your identity be demeaned.” (“Rebranding White Nationalism” 0:05-0:15)

Alt-right has also been able to capitalize on the “geek” and “gaming” online culture. This is one of the reasons why alt-right was so active and

established itself during the *Gamergate* era. During it, gamers were presented as “ordinary guys who just wanted to enjoy video games without any politics in it.”

To reach the “ordinary” people, alt-right also had to rebrand “white nationalistic” ideology to be more appealing to general public, a process which has been described in more detail in chapter 5.1. *Aesthetics, optics and self-presentation*.

5.3.6 Card stacking

The “card stacking” device provides overwhelming amount of information on one side of an argument, while providing little or none on the other.

According Margaret DeLany, “the greatest example” of alt-right card-stacking was done by *Daily Stormer*. It maintained a news feed which exclusively reported on non-white crime stories which helped to perpetuate negative stereotypes (DeLany 134).

5.3.7 Bandwagon

Bandwagoning is a process during which the propagandist tries to have people “follow the crowd” and accept an idea because “everyone’s doing it” (Sproule 136).

Alt-right’s usage of “bandwagon” can be demonstrated, for example, by its introduction of the word “normie.” Normie is someone who does not understand and participate in the online meme culture. Alt-righter have often used the term to gloss over any criticism about their racist, sexist or homophobic jokes or memes, stating that “the critic just is not in on the joke.”

5.4 Memes, irony, humour and possible deniability

The term “meme” was first coined by an Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene* in which he described “memes” as a

“cultural units”, akin to genes, that “propagate themselves (...) by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation” (Dawkins 192).

In the first decade of the 21st century, however, the early the Internet culture adopted the term but ascribed it a rather different meaning. “A meme” is now widely understood to be any idea distributed through Internet (mainly through social media platforms) in a form of a joke. Traditionally, memes are realized as an image (the previously mentioned “Pepe, the frog,” or “the happy merchant”), a catchphrase (“Harambe”) or a combination of the two (“Doge” and others).

Memes usually start out as an “inside joke” of a particular online subculture and from such a position they can “overflow” to the mainstream online culture. A prime example of that can be, once again, the “infamous” frog Pepe.

Nowadays, memes are a standard tool of “online warfare” between politically engaged groups. However, this was not always the case. Marc Tutters and Sal Hagen argue that memes have been first used with a political charge during the 2012 US presidential election and would get a widespread international recognition later during the 2016 election (Tutters and Hagen 4).

First such endeavour by the alt-righters was the 2014’s *Gamergate* movement (Merrin 206). What first started as a rather serious conversation about ethics and a perceived bias in video-game journalism quickly transformed into a harassment campaign against feminist, liberal and “SJW” or “woke” game developers and journalists, most notably an independent game-designer Zoe Quinn and feminist critic Anita Sarkeesian (Bezio 6-8).

To a certain extent, the *Gamergate* movement can be seen as indicative of the tendencies of the whole reactionary “troll” culture of 4chan and Reddit and thus of the alt-right movement as well. For example, many of the pejorative terms such as “safe space”, “snowflake” or “cry bullies” which are now being utilized in a more mainstream conservative and reactionary discourse, have been developed during *Gamergate* and have their origins in *Gamergate* threads and posts on 4chan, 8chan and r/RedPill, a reactionary Reddit community (Lees).

In 2016, 4chan users started a “trolling campaign” aimed against the LGBT+ community in which they tried to convince the general public that LGBT+ organizations recognize paedophilia to be “just another sexual orientation” and are using a new abbreviation LGBTP: “P” standing for “pedosexuals” (Brammer).

All the aforementioned “battles of the culture war” demonstrate similar tendencies of the alt-right’s utilization of memes and trolling in its political engagement. The “campaigns” either construct a “false-flag” movement which is supposed to hurt the opponent in the eyes of the general public (the “LGBTP” campaign) or it constructs an exaggerated symbol which is specifically designed to be attacked by the mainstream media, which is then used against them as they are characterized as overreacting (the previously discussed “milk” or “ok” symbols as well as Pepe, the frog meme).

While some of those “campaigns” waged by 4chan and Reddit trolls could be dismissed as just ironic humour, irony is a powerful tool for alt-right recruitment. It has been previously pointed out by some scholars that irony can function as a sort of a “cloak device” and any criticism can be dismissed by the expression “it’s just a joke”:

If an audience is receptive to the image’s intent, then they show themselves to be amenable to recruitment, while hostility can be

diverted by claiming the poster was merely “trolling” as a joke.

(Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir)

In words of Richard Spencer, “the alt-right was memed into existence” (“We memed the alt-right into existence” 8:20-8:50).

6 CONCLUSION

Alt-right is a grass-root political movement with an uncertain future. Its prominence peaked between *Gamergate* era and the 2016 Presidential elections, which marked a sort of a milestone for the movement. Donald Trump’s victory first seemed to be a victory for Richard Spencer and his followers but later showed to be the opposite. Especially due to Trump’s military strikes in the Middle East and his pro-Israeli stance, he fell into disgrace in the eyes of alt-righters.

Key tenants of alt-right ideology have been discussed. On one hand, alt-right is traditionally conservative and far-right, emphasising such ideas as white nationalism, social conservatism or strict gender roles. On the other hand, alt-right is very different to its contemporaries and predecessors. For example, it does not root itself in Christian morality. It actively tries to distance itself from its neo-Nazi roots. This is done mostly via its aesthetics and self-presentation. Alt-right is also possibly the first US far-right movement to have its origins online. Both these facts explain its emphasis on the recruitment of young gamers.

To recruit them, alt-right took part in the *Gamergate* movement and explored the possibilities of utilizing memes, irony and online humour as a form of propaganda. Alt-right’s specific spin on traditional propaganda has been presented. Several ways through which alt-right alters its self-image have been presented alongside its favoured persuasive techniques and tactics. Several

examples of alt-right's troll campaign aimed against "traditional media" have been presented.

Furthermore, alt-right's presence on social media have been examined. Alt-righters proved to be capable of using those online spaces to push their agenda. This is being done through their own web sites as well.

Alt-right seems to be a part of a general world-wide rise of reactionary far-right as well as other populist and extremist movements. It gained notable traction with Donald Trump's presidency but then lost its laboriously crafted public image after several incidents such as the Charlottesville *Unite the Right Rally* or the Christchurch shooting took place. Several other terrorist attacks as well as propaganda campaign have been mentioned and connected to specific ideological aspects of the movement.

Due to those as well as other disinformation campaigns and relativistic tendencies, alt-right has been rendered as a possible security risk to the USA and other "western" countries. Whether alt-right sees another surge in popularity in the upcoming years remains unknown.

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