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Master's Thesis



Dominique Chagas Linhares

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**Roles Women Play in the Alt-Right:
Aspirations and Limitations**

Master's Thesis

Name: Dominique Chagas Linhares

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Supervisor: doc. PhDr. Emil Aslan, Ph.D.

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Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree with my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on
30/07/2020

Dominique Chagas Linhares
Dominique Chagas Linhares

References

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Abstract

Despite women's historical involvement in far-right movements, their motivations, interests, and experiences in these groups remain fairly understudied. What follows from this phenomenon is a mismatch between analysts' expectations and far-right women's behaviors. The lack of substantial research that focuses on women's narratives and recollections of their experiences leads outside observers to project into these individuals their assumptions on women's positions. A recent replication of this phenomenon is seen in analyses of alt-right women, particularly in their support for a movement notably known for its misogynistic stances. To bridge the methodological gap between far-right researchers and far-right women, I analyze alt-right women's motivations in engaging with the group, as well as their explanations of how the movement is aligned to their interests. Additionally, I engage with women's perspectives on accusations regarding misogyny in the alt-right and the lack of space and support for women's involvement.

To access their perspectives, I conducted a non-participative netnography research on 25 alt-right women. I analyzed their social media profiles, websites, blogs, interviews, and podcasts on the subjects of women's interests in the alt-right and discussions on their experiences in the movement. The analysis showed that women actively support and help to construct the alt-right's strict stances on gender, although this does not entail they should be excluded from actively fomenting the movement. I conclude that there is both a need and an advantage in engaging with women's perspectives in women's terms, as such an approach will provide analysts and counter/de-radicalization professionals with a more realistic framework on how women operate within such groups and make sense of their experiences.

Keywords

Alt-right; far-right; gender; women's roles; motivations and expectations; netnography.

Title

Roles Women Play in the Alt-Right: Aspirations and Limitations.

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Introduction

The growth of right-wing extremism momentum worldwide, especially through online platforms, has reignited mainstream discussions about ideologies that for many laid dormant in fringe groups that did not belong into the 21st century. Much of this awakening has been connected to the alt-right phenomenon and its considerable impact on the United States' 2016 electoral process. This has exposed a small yet loud group that feels comfortable and empowered to express unsettling views of their envisioned future for white populations in the West. Disrupting the veil that separated them from the general public and rebranding old and known pervasive ideas with a modern outlook, the alt-right, and more broadly far-right extremism has found its way to reintroduce its agenda into the current political debate.

The alt-right, an amorphous aggrupation of extreme right-wingers who disregard traditional conservatism as a political mean and ideology (Hawley 2017), accommodates among its supporters white-supremacists, fascists, misogynists, neo-Nazis, etc. Most of those aligned with the movement advocate for their right to defend the nation against (non-white) immigrants, reject feminism and progressive policies and affirm their right to congregate around a white-identity in a similar manner that other minority groups have historically done, in special the Muslim, Black, and Latino communities. The alt-right has been the source of numerous controversies and to a far graver extent, has accumulated many episodes of violence against its adversaries. Much has been discussed about the group's assemblage on the internet, their communication style, core beliefs, and how those who study and cover the group should address it. However, although the issue of gender imbalance among alt-right supporters has been explored, little attention has been directed to the women who support it.

A quick investigation of the main discussions on the alt-right shows us how much gender plays a role in identifying the faces of the movement's advocates (Hawley 2019). For the common observer, women's participation in the movement is scarce; the alt-right has a preferable predatory interest towards young, white, and disenfranchised men. For those more experienced in monitoring the group's development, strategies, and main voices, contesting this perception becomes necessary to convey the extent to which women have engaged in right-wing extremism and with the alt-right's promotion. Women's participation, however, comes in seemingly

conflicting terms. As expressed by Kathleen Blee (2018), “since radical rightists favor social hierarchies, such as those that privilege native-born citizens over many immigrants, whites over nonwhites, and Christians over non-Christians, most also fervently support gender hierarchies that favor men over women”.

On this debate around the alt-right demographics and the movement’s “gender gap”, men have been portrayed as most of its supporters and public advocates. In contrast, women’s somewhat invisibility in the movement paints the image that they contribute very limitedly to its advancement. Additionally, a known feature associated with the group is its advocacy for men’s rights, pointing to a sense of victimization around this group’s experience in modern society, which is connected to its ardent rejection of feminism. With this, one is left to ask where and who are the women in the movement, besides what are their reasons for joining it.

This question has been asked many times but has received little attention academically. When the attention is focused on women’s experiences in the alt-right, it is usually to point out cases of open misogyny and attacks they indeed suffer from other members. Also, many analyses are centered on how women can advocate for a movement that does not seem to have been built by them and for them, and how they are supporting an ideology that goes against their interests as women. I defend that there is a need for rethinking how we understand women’s relation to the alt-right. The belief that alt-right women share the same interests of those who reject the movement is one of the main reasons why there is much confusion about their involvement in it. There is no need to assume their motivations and expectations; alt-right women have been vocal about where they stand.

A look inside the alt-right’s loose agenda reveals that gender plays a central role in the movements’ political and social stances. Both in its description and prescription of reality, discussions around the topic of gender by the group discloses how much it expresses mixed views concerning women’s place in the movement and society. Defenses of feminism, gender equality, and women’s liberation, even in its most mainstream fashion, are openly renounced by its advocates. In terms of women’s engagement in the movement, participants are divided between the support for their participation, as long as it is manifested through traditionalistic gender roles, and, in the most extreme cases, the negation of women’s support and relevance altogether.

Regardless of how individuals see the place of women in the movement, the opinion that these individuals are unfit for politics and decision-making is widely accepted by supporters. Consequently, women ought to be bound to their dutiful and honorable role as mothers and house-keepers (Anti-Defamation League 2018). Their main contributions to the movement and society are bearing children and taking care of home and family. Serving as supportive partners to the men in their lives, who bear the real duty of carrying on the movement's advancement, women are not commonly encouraged to expose themselves, even in terms of their support for the alt-right.

In a group where traditionalistic gender roles, misogyny, and criticism of feminism are recognizably latent positions defended by its promoters, what motivates women to engage in the alt-right and support the movement? To address this inquiry, I propose an analysis of women's reasons for supporting the alt-right. Additionally, I intend to explore how this group navigates right-wing extremism while dealing with issues such as misogyny and gender expectations that seek to place women in auxiliary roles, when not denying completely their possibility of participation. Understanding women's experiences inside the alt-right is necessary for comprehending the movement's ideological intricacies and dissonances and for formulating a strategy that is well-equipped to bar the movement's advances into politics and society. As stated by Blee (2018), "gender is key to the radical right today and in the past".

To address this topic, the research has been divided into the following four chapters. The first chapter contains the theoretical and methodological aspects of this research. It compiles sections on literature review, methodology, and theoretical framework. In the first section, the literature review, I explore the academic pieces on women's engagement in the alt-right, and more broadly, in far-right movements. In this chapter's second section, I present and explain the research's use of netnographic methods. In it, I also dwell on the relevance of virtual spaces for alt-right women's ability to congregate and show support for the movement. In the third section, I explain some of the main concepts seen in the alt-right's discussions on gender and women, which will help elucidate ideas and terms that have appeared during the netnographic research.

The second chapter contains the empirical results of my netnographic research. I present women's positions in terms of gender and their place in the alt-right, especially how they see themselves as an important tool in advancing the cause. In this section, I also explore how women express their

views on the issues of misogyny and the exclusion of women from the movement. Chapter three compiles my observations from the research into a discussion on how women negotiate their place in the alt-right, their expectations towards the movement, and how they reinforce and/or deny certain popular gender beliefs propagated by the group.

Finally, chapter four is reserved for the research's conclusions. It reports on the work's contributions to the field of gender and extremism and informs possible gaps in the analysis which will be benefited from future research. Additionally, the thesis conclusion raises considerations on how its findings corroborate and/or debilitate current knowledge on the field and how those can be incorporated into future approaches concerning counter-radicalization and de-radicalization practices focused on radicalized women.

Research objective and research question

Understanding that gender influences how individuals navigate through the alt-right, in great part because of how they use it to frame their experiences and roles, this research intends to address how women make sense of their participation and place in the movement. Therefore, its focus is directed to the following questions: how are women's motivations in becoming and being involved in the alt-right shaped by their understanding of gender? What are their expectations when joining in and how are these expectations matched?

I approached these questions through a netnographic research of 25 profiles of women who identify as alt-right supporters or who are commonly associated with the movement to gather information on their personal experiences. Differently from my initial proposal, which combined participative and non-participative netnographic methods to women solely from the United States, the present research was conducted through non-participative methods and has included women from a variety of countries. The reasons for such methodological changes are further explained in section 1.2 ("Methodology").

Understanding women's experiences in the alt-right are the result of their expectations towards the movement combined with the space they find to materialize them, we might expect women to see this environment as hostile to their participation. This uncritical conclusion, however, will generally not stand against the realization that women are commonly drawn into the alt-right not

despite but because of its stances on women issues. Women's engagement in a movement well-known for their antagonistic behavior towards mainstream women's rights and feminism unveils that there is much room for a discussion on how they make sense of their interests as individuals and as a group. This is the political, social, and dialectical context in which this research operates and seeks to elucidate further the participation of women in extreme right-wing movements, as is the case of the alt-right.

1 Theory and methodology

This chapter presents an overview of the methodological and theoretical framework of this research. It begins with a literature review of works that have dealt with the topics of women and ring-wing extremism, and more specifically, of women in the alt-right. This section is followed by a discussion of the methodological approach used to conduct the research, with an explanation of its advantages and limitations. Finally, in the last section, I provide a summary of relevant concepts regarding the intersection of the alt-right, gender, and women. I intend with this part to contextualize the main discussions and positions held by alt-right supporters so that it facilitates the analysis of women's perspectives and how they place themselves within the movement's gender narrative.

1.1 Literature review

Women's engagement with far-right ideology has unfortunately not received as much attention as that of men. Experts on the topic seem to agree that women are and have been historically more involved in far-right movements than what is usually expected of them. Research on the issue, however, has been falling short in addressing their motivations and experiences in such environments. With the bulk of research on the far-right focusing on violent extremism, women, who are usually not the main perpetrators of violent attacks, are either excluded from many of those analyses or their experiences receive superficial attention.

In this section, therefore, I present some of the existing researches on this topic. I divide the works on far-right women into three broad categories: methodological, historical, and

ideological/narrative. The first category concerns the works focused on how research on far-right women has been conducted and its implications to the field. The category of historical researches compile analyses of women's involvement with far-right movements through a historical lens. Finally, the third category on ideological/narrative works dwells on the motivations for women's engagement and support for the far-right. Comparative research on gender narratives of far-right women and women from other extremist movements, as well as "exit" motivations, can also be included in this category. Commonly, analyses do not fit into a unique category but are cross-dimensional.

An important observation to be made on the topic of gender and the far-right is how expectations towards men and women have been affecting negatively studies on the issue. When the far-right is viewed as a strictly male-space and individuals' involvement in it is framed in terms of violent acts, e.g. hate crimes, research commonly excludes women's experiences. This is not to say that women are not responsible for part of the violent expressions of far-right ideology, but that they tend to engage in different terms. The reasons for individuals to associate with the far-right and their disposition for supporting and perpetuating violence are numerous, and gender is a relevant factor behind people's motivations.

On her work on "Female right-wing dropouts and the meanings of violence", Johanna Sigl addresses how we can interpret the levels of women supporting and engaging with radical right-wing parties and groups. Using numbers from Germany, Sigl argues that although women appear to be less accepting of violent behavior than men, which is echoed in the low figures of women participating in right-wing crimes, it does not indicate that women are inherently more peaceful than their male peers. The author says that "the low participation of women points to the significant role of a person's socialization, in which gender images are still frequently learned according to which approving of violence and using violence as a means of achieving one's own ends is not part of the image of femaleness" (Sigl 2016).

Therefore, by observing far-right groups solely through individuals' willingness to perpetrate violence, our understanding of this phenomenon will be quite limited, especially concerning women's involvement. For Sigl (2016), "women can be active in far-right groups without displaying violent behavior" and at the same time, be part of a "social space where violence is structurally accepted". The implications of such observations are that:

“Women are imperfectly perceived as radical right-wing actors. If they display violent behaviour, they correspond even less to social images of right-wing girls and women. Rather, they are expected to act as caring wives and mothers, and to form a heteronormative stereotyped counterpart to militant male right-wingers. The far right is considered as a male-dominated interaction space in which women are rarely perceived as independent and equally radical right-wing actors. This construction results in a restricted view of possible realities within right-wing scenes” (Sigl 2016).

This observation seems to be aligned with popular alt-right narratives of societal gender roles that influence individuals’ places in the movement, which are connected with perceptions of violence and risk.

Some authors have sought to explore women’s involvement with far-right ideology through a historical lens. One important contribution is Kathleen Blee’s book “Inside Organized Racism: Women in the Hate Movement” (Blee 2003). Based on interviews with thirty-four women across the United States and the observation of racist groups’ activities and materials distributed, Blee classified women’s roles into three broad categories: familial, social, and operative. The author claims that, although their roles differentiate depending on the group in which they are included, in general, “Christian Identity and Klan groups tend to emphasize women's familial and social roles, while women in some white power skinhead and other neo-Nazi groups are involved in more direct action, playing what I term ‘operative roles’” (Blee 2003).

Familial roles are commonly associated with the domestic realm. They refer to activities related to women’s families and the nurturing of the group as a whole, especially in terms of bearing children and educating them under racist ideology. The extension of women’s caretaking to the racist group is based on the understanding of the collective as an extended family. This, in particular for women, might directly affect individual’s expectations and satisfaction with in-group relations. On this, Blee says:

“This invocation of family life also enables those within the racist movement to draw codes of behavior and understandings by which personal relationships are fashioned and judged. As they learned to understand organized racism in terms of familial qualities, recruits to racist groups apply their expectations of familial relationships to those within racist groups. For some members, this analogy is positive, bolstering their commitment to organized racism. But for

others, including many women, the equation of family life and racist group life – those who find racist groups oppressively male-dominated or male leaders patronizing or dismissive of women – feel cheated and resentful” (Blee 2003).

In terms of social roles, women’s contributions come in the form of promoting activities for the socialization of the group. Women are generally responsible for organizing parties, meetings, and rallies and for making sure participants are comfortable and happy. Commonly, social roles are gender-based; women will be the ones to organize party details, cooking meals, caring for the children, etc. Blee adds that as social facilitators, women also contribute to the outside image of racist groups for “women’s greater participation and visibility in the racist movement are probably responsible for making it more accessible to mainstream populations” (Blee 2003). When visible in racist groups, added to popular perceptions that they are not as violent as men, women’s presence “lend an air of placidity to racist gatherings and seem to lessen the threat that such groups pose” (Blee 2003).

Finally, concerning operative roles, Blee observes that women might carry out activities that encompass formal and informal leadership of groups, as well as paramilitary roles. Here, it is interesting to highlight the issue of women’s informal leadership. For Blee, although women might not commonly hold positions of formal leadership in racist groups, unless those are women-only groups, if we understand leadership as “providing group cohesion, mediating conflict, developing political strategies, and nurturing collective identity”, women’s contributions will be accentuated. For the author, “women’s informal racist leadership is more elusive, indirect, and personal” and it might be “more effective and dangerous” (Blee 2003). It follows that, although women’s roles tend to be less public than men’s, they provide a central contribution to the perpetuation of racist ideology, the wellbeing and functioning of the group, in addition to the construction of the group’s outside image.

Concerning methodological issues, one interesting trend observed by specialists in the study of the far-right is a focus on externalists' methodological approaches. Those approaches “analyze the economic, social, attitudinal, or cultural environments that nurture organized racism and right-wing extremism rather than the dynamics of the far right itself” (Blee 2007). The limitations of externalists studies arise from their distance from the subjects being analyzed. In this sense, Kathleen Blee claims that there is a need for turning to “issues of micromobilization” which is

why individuals feel attracted to these groups. From externalist examinations, in Blee's words, it is not possible to make sense of the various motivations given by people to join in because such analyses focus on broader, external conditions for the emergence of groups, but not on individuals' reasons to do so (Blee 2007).

In the author's understanding, what motivates people to support far-right groups might not be connected to issues of political ideology per se. Instead, individuals might be in a "search for community, affirmation of masculinity, and personal loyalties", and therefore, "what motivates someone to join an anti-immigrant group, for example, might—or might not—be animus toward immigrants" (Blee 2007). Consequently, to understand why people are drawn into the far-right requires researchers to dwell on "individual and collective identities" (Blee 2007). The far-right is known for using these to channel insecurities around specific groups and processes, crafting broader narratives to mobilize members and attract new supporters.

Observing how externalist studies are more popular than "internalists" does not explain why this is the case. One reason given by Blee for this phenomenon is researchers' access to such individuals. This access is both hard to get and commonly put researchers at risk. The author attests that such groups tend to treat researchers with hostility and prevent their access to its members, sometimes directing to those "explicit or implicit threats of violence for gathering data or publishing analyses of them" (Blee 2007). This alone, however, does not suffice to explain the entirety of the problem for the author. As she notices, there are numerous ethnographic works on dangerous groups, mentioning the examples of street gangs, drug users, and revolutionary parties, which also implies a considerable risk to researchers' safety.

Blee then attributes as a barrier for the conducting of internalist works the lack of political affinity between scholars and the subjects of their analyses. This lack of political affinity seems to translate into a "methodological bridge" between the parties involved; scholars will likely possess a weaker ideological drive to engage with individuals from groups that support extremist views. Therefore, "few scholars want to invest the considerable time or to establish the rapport necessary for close-up studies of those they regard as inexplicable and repugnant, in addition to dangerous and difficult" (Blee 2007).

Despite these barriers, some researchers have sought to explore women's experiences in far-right groups. In Latif et al. (2019) work "Why White Supremacist Women Become Disillusioned, and Why They Leave", the researchers conducted a series of interviews with American women who have been formerly involved in white-supremacist groups. In this work, researchers investigated the relationship between exit and disillusionment for women since those who "leave racist groups are not necessarily disillusioned with white supremacy, nor do they always become disillusioned even after being away from the movement for decades" (Latif, Blee, DeMichele, Simi, Alexander 2019). A total of 21 women were interviewed face-to-face throughout the United States and they had been associated with groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, skinheads, neo-Nazis, and Christian Identity.

The main reasons given by women as the source of their disillusionment with white-supremacism were "poor relationships with other white supremacists, violence, or mistreatment of women in the movement" (Latif, Blee, DeMichele, Simi, Alexander 2019). The researchers highlighted that the issue of poor relationships among members was the most cited factor for women's disillusionment, especially when they had experienced betrayal from their female peers. The issue of violence as a motivation for disillusionment referred both to women regretting having acted violently and problems with group infighting.

On the topic of gender, the interviewed women cited "dissatisfaction with the gender and sexual hierarchies of white supremacy" (Latif, Blee, DeMichele, Simi, Alexander 2019) as an additional reason for disillusionment. For those, the structures of their groups favored men over women and limited their agency in the group. The existence of strict gender roles that relegated women to the place of child-bearers and sexual partners seemed to affect women more than men. In this sense, women's dissatisfaction with their situation in the movements they belonged to were "heightened by the highly gendered and tumultuous culture of a movement that rewards and encourages male aggression, violence, and power over women" (Latif, Blee, DeMichele, Simi, Alexander 2019).

As the researchers pointed out though, women could have experienced many and commonly overlapping issues that caused them to disconnect from white-supremacy groups, but still not leave these environments. The reasons for that are numerous, but the main factors behind women's calculation were "perceived necessity, perceived life on the outside, and perceived

opportunity” (Latif, Blee, DeMichele, Simi, Alexander 2019). Those are connected to women’s 1) fear of violence directed at themselves and their children, especially from other members of the group, and 2) individuals’ bonding with people from outside of the movement or reconnecting with friends and family members with whom they had grown apart because of their affiliation to white supremacy. The lack of a social network of support outside of the group seems to be an important factor for women considering leaving the movements because they “leave white supremacism with few material or social resources and may need protection from the violent backlash of former racist comrades” (Latif, Blee, DeMichele, Simi, Alexander 2019).

The reasons given by women seem to point out that both their engagement and disillusionment/exit from white-supremacist groups are intertwined with more than issues of ideological affinity for racial-supremacist ideas. The cases analyzed have demonstrated that the quality of personal relationships between members and physical security are central aspects of the subjects' weighting of their experiences. When fear, isolation, and frustration are met with a concrete opportunity for leaving, women are more likely to do so. Exit from groups, however, can still be hampered by individuals’ ideological commitments to the movement and perceptions of their relevance for the group (Latif, Blee, DeMichele, Simi, Alexander 2019). And in these contexts, violence is not only a fact that might push women away from these groups but also can keep them in it, especially from fear of reprisals. Knowing how motivations for exits relate to causes for disillusionment is vital for understanding why women decide to leave or stay in white-supremacist groups, and what also attracts these individuals to such movements.

Continuing on the topic of women and the far-right, but now focusing specifically on the alt-right, I draw attention to Ashley Mattheis (2018) article “Shieldmaiden of Whiteness: (Alt) Maternalism and Women Recruiting for the Far/Alt-Right”. In her analysis of the “narrative frameworks that Far/Alt-Right women use to negotiate their place within extremist ideologies”, Mattheis focuses on Lana Lokteff’s speech at the ninth Identitarian Ideas conference titled “How the Left is Betraying Women”. The case of Lokteff, a well-known figure among alt-right supporters, is used to explore how women construct their participation and shape their motivations to engage in far-right politics.

Mattheis begins her analysis by pointing out that white women have been historically fundamental to the “spread of white supremacy, hate, and domestic terrorism”, as well as been

“active supporters and proponents of white social, political, and economic power” (Mattheis 2018). However, when their participation in white-supremacist groups is discussed, it displays with commonality tropes of women’s passiveness. Their biggest contributions for said movements are framed in terms of motherhood and marriage. In case women do assume more active roles, “it is believed that they are duped or coerced by men into participating” (Mattheis 2018).

The fact that women do engage numerously and are active promoters of racist politics requires that their involvement is taken more seriously. They are not only instrumentalized to attract new members to white-supremacism, which often happens when women’s security is framed against pro-multiculturalism and pro-immigration arguments, but they play a role in the recruitment of individuals themselves. Deserving of more attention, in Mattheis’ words, is how “Far/Alt-Right women are tailoring messages to recruit for the movement” (Mattheis 2018), in special when those messages target other women.

Through her exploration of Lana Lokteff’s speech, Mattheis identifies three discursive paths used to construct a narrative for women’s engagement in the far/alt-right community. These are used to place women as defenders of white culture, but in a way that does not emasculate men. The first path is through “rooting women’s power in a framework of gendered complementarity” (Mattheis 2018). This works under the idea the men and women have been made by nature in a way that complements each other. Individuals, according to their gender, fall into specific roles and that of women is to bear life and inspire men. The author observes that when women are called into action within white-supremacist groups, they should not let it drive them away from expected feminine roles. As a consequence, “every call for women’s action is paired with a marker or reminder of women’s ‘true’ place” (Mattheis 2018).

The second path observed by Mattheis is what she calls “alt-maternalism”. The concept explores how women within the far/alt-right construct domesticity as their natural desire, as well as their natural paths in life. In this sense, the framing of women’s roles as mothers and wives is naturalized and reinforced by white women as roles that they “not only must play but, more importantly, want to play in the movement” (Mattheis 2018). Finally, the third strand of discourse promoted in Lokteff’s speech is that of Western Civilization being white men’s gift to white

women. Lokteff argues that Western society, and all that it encompasses, has been white men's romantic gesture to please white women who, in turn, serve as their inspiration.

The product of the connection of these three discursive paths culminates into a broader narrative of women's place and roles in the movement, one that still accommodates their active participation but only as long as it does not overpower men's. For Mattheis (2018), "Lokteff connects her first and second narrative strands to a third strand by continuing her theme of literal desires; here, it is men's desire for sex and women's desire for marriage and family that leads to the development of Western civilization". Women's call into the far/alt-right lies both in their recognition of the urgency of stepping up to protect white lives but also in their honoring of white men's dedication and sacrifice to defend Western society for white women and children. For the author, this narrative also allows its supporters to "romanticize hate, racial and religious discrimination, and even hate-based violence up to and including genocide and war in a framework that appeals to women" (Mattheis 2018). Violence, in this context, is rationalized as an expression of love and care that is natural for men.

The trend observed by Mattheis in her analysis of Lokteff's construction of women's place in white-nationalism, however, is not exclusive to this ideology. In another analysis by Mattheis and Winter (2019), the authors compared narratives around the construction of the "ideal woman" in identitarianism, represented by Lokteff's speech at the IXth Identitarian Ideas Conference, with a jihadi text titled "Women in the Islamic State: A manifesto and case study". The latter's authorship has been attributed to the Khansa' Brigade, which Mattheis and Winter describe as "an all-female policing unit that operated inside the caliphate" (2019). According to the Islamic manifesto, its goal was to clarify "a number of issues regarding the role of women in the Islamic State that had hitherto been obscured by sensationalist media reportage and deliberate misinformation" (Mattheis, Winter 2019).

Despite acknowledging that the ideologies are not similar nor reciprocal, the authors argue that they share attitudes towards gender that are worthy of comparison. The main similarities shared by the narratives concern the existence of gender-specific roles that work in complementarity, and women's roles as being ideally domestic. In both cases, the authors highlighted an explicit rejection of feminism as a corruptive ideology. Women's roles were also portrayed as that of

nurturers and care-givers, while that of men was to further the group/ideology. In Mattheis and Winter's conclusion:

“for both orators, there are no two ways about it: bearing and rearing children ‘for the cause’ is the *raison d’être* for in-group women. If they fulfil this ideal, whether through birthing their own children or educating those of others, the idea is that they can become vessels for the cause, a way to foster future generations of the in-group and sustain it through periods of hardship or tribulation” (Mattheis, Winter 2019).

Endorsing arguments that women's roles are furthering white-supremacism is Julia Ebner and Jacob Davey's piece on “How Women Advance the Internationalization of the Far-Right” (2019). For the authors, there is a need for changing how we see women in far-right movements; women are engaged, and their roles are multiple and vital for the furthering of such groups despite being traditionally underrepresented in those. Although most far-right groups count with a majorly male membership, women are becoming “increasingly important as broadcasters, dramatically amplifying messages across the spectrum of worldviews that comprise the international far-right” (Ebner, Davey 2019).

The authors highlight an important aspect of women's engagement with the far-right which is their presence and success in the virtual sphere. They see this as a problematic trend because women have been serving as a “soft introduction to hard edge ideology, facilitating the ‘redpilling’ of individuals who are vulnerable to radicalization” (Ebner, Davey 2019). Despite their prominence in such spaces, the authors acknowledge that gender remains a disputed and contested issue that still needs to be negotiated by women if they want to have a presence in this “hyper-masculine ecosystem” (Ebner, Davey 2019).

Ebner and Davey also argued that understudied factors such as “a fragility of feminine identity, reaction against the abuse of women, and a backlash against contemporary progressive ideology and feminism” could provide policymakers and practitioners with important information for action (2019). Understanding how far-right women mobilize their identities in terms of traditionalistic gender tropes and through the rejection of progressive ideas will better equip us in approaching this group with preventive and counter-radicalization programs. The researchers go beyond to say that there needs to be special attention dedicated to how anti-feminist ideology is a considerable drive for women to align with the far-right. In their view, “a number of women

identifying with far-right groups highlight conflict with feminists and hostility towards conservatives as being driving causes for their radicalization”, and therefore, they suggest that further attention should be paid to “the apparent lack of civil discourse in spaces for women” (Ebner, Davey 2019).

Another point raised by the authors is that counter-strategy approaches aimed at women should explore the hypocrisy of far-right ideology in its treatment of this group versus what is promised to them. The movement’s undeniable misogyny is at odds with its promise of female empowerment even if it is done in terms of the rejection of feminist ideas. Finally, Ebner and Davey argue that even though some women have achieved some prominence in the movement, “most women operating within far-right circles are simultaneously marginalized and denigrated by the groups that claim to protect them” (2019). This contradiction, therefore, is an inherent weakness to far-right movements that should be explored by professionals engaging with these groups.

The abovementioned works have much informed and guided the present analysis; their contributions are seen throughout this work. I intend with this research to expand on their observations and bridge two areas that require more exploration: mainly, alt-right women’s experiences and negotiation of their place in the movement, and aside from that, how virtual spaces might be connected to this process. In the next section, I present how this endeavor was conducted, outlining the methods applied to achieve this research’s goal, in addition to its advantages and limitations.

1.2 Methodology

The methodology chosen to carry out this research was an inductive qualitative data analysis employing netnography methods in a non-participative approach. The choice for an inductive approach to qualitative data analysis emanated from my decision to focus on the description of the phenomenon explored rather than interpreting it through a theoretical lens. For this reason, I have opted for abandoning the usage of Ground Theory methods to analyze the data, as was proposed in my initial project since it would extend the scope of this research beyond its current capabilities. Even though my observations have been interwoven into major narratives to explain how alt-right

women express, at least publicly, their alignment to the movement, it was not in the research's objective and abilities, at this stage, to analyze it theoretically.

By using netnographic methods of data collection, I sought to highlight its potential for the study of online extremism. Netnography, whose name combines the terms "internet" and "ethnography" (Kozinets, Dolbec, Earley 2020), engages with online environments where researchers can, through participative and/or non-participative approaches, observe how individuals of a community socialize in said places. It is based on ethnography, which is a methodological approach commonly applied in anthropological studies of communities and their social interactions. According to Addeo et al. (2019), netnography "adapts the traditional ethnographic techniques to the study of online communities and practices". Netnography, however, has its particular advantages and limitations over ethnographic approaches; those will be further explained below.

Given the alt-right's thorough presence and usage of online spaces, and how their language and modes of operation are intrinsically intertwined with the characteristics of social media and the internet as a whole, it seemed advantageous for this work to make use of netnographic tools. The relevance of online spaces for women's presence in the movement by how they relate to these environments as facilitators of their participation, engagement, and cooperation, as well as providers of security and anonymity for individuals, has also influenced the selection of this methodology.

There is one main advantage in conducting non-participative netnography research to the study of far-right movements, which entails that the researcher is not making their presence visible to the members of the analyzed community. That is guaranteeing to researchers safety through anonymity while carrying out their work. This safety is however limited; researchers are still subjected to threats from far-right individuals once their studies are made public. However, while conducting their analyses, they might be freer from possible interferences and attacks from the subjects in question.

In terms of the focus on online spaces, for women, in particular, there is an important aspect that deserves our attention. As will be addressed later in this research, online platforms are not only a tool for connection, cooperation, and recruitment for women, but also are a space that offers them

a sense of security. Many alt-right women report high levels of anxiety regarding their safety in the offline world. As a consequence, they seem to be more likely to turn to social media and other online spaces to safely pronounce their support for the alt-right. Such spaces have then provided women with physical distance and anonymity that permits them to more comfortably support the movement.

Regarding the data collected, the key sources of primary data were derived from the online content produced in social media platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, as well as blogs and websites for both individuals and organizations. Debates around women's experiences while supporting the alt-right have been extracted from the sharing of the livingness of public figures known for their advocacy for the movement. The research will limit the scope of its analysis to women who are public about their support for the alt-right, even when this happens through pseudonyms and other attempts to enclose identities. There are two reasons behind this choice: 1) to avoid using materials from fake accounts, and especially, from accounts that might intentionally seek to mislead the reader, e.g. false identities and the reporting of events that cannot be verified; and 2) to highlight the experiences of the women who ideologically help to construct the movement and who are at the forefront of the recruitment of future members for the alt-right, in special of other women.

As a limitation of this research, I acknowledge that this choice entails that my access to women's experiences will not be complete. Collecting data from public sources, where women were conscious that their positions would be available to other people, and how it could affect the movement's image, might have influenced how they portray their experiences. As said by Kathleen Blee (2007), "publicly available data may not accurately reflect the internal ideology of members or even goals of groups because of considerable divergence between the statements of self-proclaimed leaders and the beliefs of far-right activists and between the public facade and the internal dynamics of far-right groups". In this sense, I recognize that the narratives here exposed and explored only tell women's stories and experiences partially and that this work will be benefited from researches with participative approaches, both online and offline.

Furthermore, this research has also contended with cases of deplatforming¹ efforts put in place by social media platforms to hamper hate speech in the last years, which tends to push alt-right figures out of those environments. However, there were still numerous sources from which the data analyzed was extracted, many of those re-uploaded materials from de-platformed individuals themselves or by other alt-right supporters. This shows that despite the attempts, media companies still fall short on limiting public access to this content, which was of relatively easy acquisition.

The choice of the profiles analyzed was conducted by gathering individuals' names as the research itself was being performed. Initially, the focus was on women who are well-known figures within the movement, both in terms of peer recognition and volume of produced content. Through these women's connections with other profiles, of similar and smaller visibility, I was able to gather around 25 names² whose positions were then analyzed. The paths through which those women have come into the movement are different and so are how they express their support. And perhaps most importantly, how these women self-identify concerning white-nationalism, traditionalism, and the alt-right are equally different.

One issue faced during this research was how to classify women as alt-right supporters. In some cases, this task has been fairly easy, as the women themselves have proclaimed publicly to be part of the movement. In other cases, women have opted for not using the label "alt-right" while

¹ Deplatforming in this context refers to the limitation of access or banning of certain individuals from social media platforms. This is done to curb the sharing of controversial and/or extreme content from online forums, e.g. hate speech.. Many alt-right figures have been targeted by deplatforming efforts in the past years. There are still many discussions around deplatforming's effectiveness and its impacts on the study and monitoring of online extremism as "researchers looking into the behavior to inform policymakers and the public no longer have visibility into the concerning behavior once it is removed, which could distort public opinion and decision-making based on an inaccurate picture of threats" (Greer 2020).

² The names and/or pseudonyms of the women analyzed during this research are usually mentioned in the text only when directly referring to their quotes. Additionally, not all women have been directly quoted. I have prioritized mentioning quotes that were either 1) highly supported by other alt-right women in discussions, 2) seemed representative of the positions held by the majority of women, or 3) deviated considerably from the perspectives shared by the individuals analyzed. A list of all the individuals included in this research can be provided upon request.

upholding the movement's core ideas. The reasons for this choice varies; some women believe the label carries strong negative connotations, especially after the events of the Unite the Right rally³ in Charlottesville in 2017. Other supporters have stopped using the label after suffering personal attacks by fellow alt-right members. This was the case reported by Ayla Stewart, for example. After a series of disagreements in terms of religious beliefs between Christian, Pagan, and non-religious alt-right supporters, Stewart, who is a Christian, decided to stop describing herself as alt-right, even though she still holds the movement's views. On this topic she said:

“I will personally no longer be using the Alt-Right label while still retaining all of the same beliefs I have advocated the past few years, that of traditionalism, sovereignty, and faith. [...] I still hold all the same beliefs I held years ago when I stumbled across the Alt-Right, but the term itself has changed or shrunk down such that I find myself outside of it now. It no longer reflects Vox Day's 16 points of the Alternative Right and now openly attacks my faith from the highest levels up” (Stewart 2018).

Some of the women reject the label alt-right altogether but are classified as such by the media and by analysts. One example is Laura Loomer who claims to be a conservative investigative journalist and to be part of the “new right”. Loomer, who is a Jewish woman, has had many clashes with anti-Semitic alt-right supporters for anti-Semitism is a strong feature among members of the movement. Loomer has called alt-right supporters “terrorists” and said the movement is not truly right-wing, as many of its supporters are aligned with Nazism which, in her view, is a left-leaning ideology (Loomer, McInnes 2017). Women like Loomer have also been classified as being part of the “alt-lite” for their rejection of white-supremacism while still upholding other key aspects of the ideology, e.g. nationalism and xenophobia.

Although the alt-right is a phenomenon commonly associated with the United States political and social landscape, I have opted to broaden the scope of the individuals analyzed by not establishing

³ The Unite the Right was a rally that took place in Charlottesville, Virginia, on August 11 and 12, 2017. On the second day of the event, a peaceful protester named Heather Heyer was killed by James Alex Fields Jr. in a vehicle-ramming attack. Fields was later identified as a white-nationalist and purposefully drove the car against the crowd in Charlottesville.

a geographical delimitation to their origin (in terms of birth and residence). This differs from my initial proposal which was to focus on American alt-right women solely. While conducting the research, I concluded that there was no justification to establish a geographical delimitation; alt-right ideology is hardly bounded by physical frontiers, and by setting territorial delimitations, I would exclude several cases that were relevant for understanding the issue here analyzed. In terms of timeframe, this research is delimited to the years 2010 to 2020. Even though the term has been coined in 2008 by Richard Spencer, it was only two years later when the first alt-right online platform was created, the blog *Alternative Right*, starting the groups' presence on the internet and shaping its future *modus operandi*.

1.3 Theoretical framework: the alt-right and gender

Many of the most known positions on gender associated with the alt-right are based on male supporters' perspectives. Those commonly characterize the movement's stances on gender roles in the group and society in general, and, relevantly to this research, inform us of their positions on women's place and relevance to the group. The present section dwells on concepts and beliefs commonly defended by alt-right men. With this focus, I intend to 1) familiarize the reader with popular alt-right beliefs on gender and how these are used to construct narratives around men and especially women's roles, and 2) introduce the context in which women operate in the alt-right, and most importantly, positions that antagonize women's participation. As I will present in my netnography research, women do help to construct the movement's positions on gender by supporting, reformulating, and rejecting some of these beliefs. Their perspectives, however, deserve special attention, which will be addressed in the following chapter.

At the core of the alt-right's position on gender is the defense of gender essentialism, which is based on the idea that men and women are born with a set of features that inform their preferences and behavior. Those features are innate to one's gender and are fixed throughout one's life. In this case, gender is, in its essence, determined by nature and not culture. For the alt-right, differences between men and women are profound and inform "how we interact together and apart, to the very telos of who we are" (Bateman 2016). Part of their rejection of progressive values arises from the movement's view on how gender tends to be "glossed over" to push our system

“towards an ever encroaching bland, androgynous uniformity” (Bateman 2016), which ignores the particularity of each gender.

For the alt-right, regardless of culture, men and women are necessarily distinct individuals; each one possesses traits that were designed to work in complementarity with the other. Social balance and cohesion are greatly relevant within white-nationalism and this can only be achieved if people fall into ideal archetypes of gender. In those, women are nurturers, are driven more strongly by their emotional side, and are naturally suited for caretaking roles. Therefore, their biggest contribution to society, and the roles which they more comfortably perform, are taking care of the family, supporting their husbands, and looking for their children. Women are not only responsible for their physical wellbeing but are also tasked with inculcating their children with traditional values that are aligned to white-nationalism. Their aptitude for nurture is connected to physical fragility and the primacy of emotions over rationality. Women are then seen as generally unfit for leadership and politics and for that should not carry the main burden of the advancement of white-nationalism, which should be the responsibility of men.

The male counterpart of the alt-right’s gender archetypes is that of the protector. Men are natural providers of the means to sustain their families. They are expected to provide their family on a financial basis, but also in terms of physical security. The role of the protector is extended to the defense of society against external threats. Men are expected to be more in touch with their rational side, which deems them more fit to occupy positions of leadership. The protection of the nuclear family and (white) society is ideally the role of men. Hence, men and women are not only expected to fit into the gender boxes envisioned for them but are also told that while doing so, they will firstly be contributing to the well-functioning of the community, and secondly, will find personal fulfillment in conforming to the roles nature has designed for them.

Women’s subordination to men comes from the latter’s sacrifice to protect the family and society. When women follow their traditional roles, they are honoring the sacrifice of men to protect individuals and the community. Men and women interactions can commonly be described as one of cooperation through subordination, especially when happening within the marital life. Equality between the sexes is viewed as undesirable because it is pointed as being responsible for “the decline in Western birthrates” (Devlin 2006), and, in the long-term, it does not serve the natural roles that should be occupied by each individual.

When navigating how gender is addressed by alt-right proponents, we unveil those idealized roles individuals should perform and how it affects their relations to each other and society. Yet, there is a deeper interest in safeguarding traditional views on gender that go beyond assuring the existence and collaboration between protectors and nurturers. That is the control of women under conventional and restricting rules to guarantee the successful continuation of the white race. Some well-known conspiracy theories perpetuated by alt-right supporters denounce plots that intent to substitute white individuals by non-whites, which would justify the need for white-nationalism. Two of the main theories behind it are the Great Replacement and White-Genocide theory. As we will see, both conspiracy theories are deeply intertwined with gender and the control of women.

The Great Replacement theory argues that “white European populations are being deliberately replaced at an ethnic and cultural level through migration and the growth of minority communities” (Davey, Ebner 2019). For its proponents, whites are being slowly replaced by non-white immigrants in their own countries. In a matter of some generations, the former group will become a minority in the West. Besides immigration, another factor that drives this trend relates closely to the issue of gender. The replacement of white individuals is also claimed to be forwarded by the decline of birth rates among their communities. Proponents of the theory say non-white immigrants reproduce at a faster pace than white-native populations, which guarantees their ethnic and cultural success in comparison to the latter.

To combat and reverse this trend, white-nationalists must halt the migration of non-whites to Western countries and proceed with remigration policies, which are the “forced deportation of migrant communities to create an ethnically and culturally homogenous society” (Davey, Ebner 2019). Yet, those policies are not enough to guarantee the continuation of the white race. To achieve it, the trend of decline in birth rates must be reversed. This, in turn, requires combating feminism for its deviation of traditional gender roles. The Great Replacement Theory is then enmeshed with misogynistic views of gender, as it blames women, as more specifically feminism, for diverging from their role in parenthood. Putting women into their “places” and constricting their decision capabilities to follow their desirable paths in life becomes a central fight in white-nationalism.

The White-Genocide theory argues for something in the lines of the Great Replacement in which it is also supported by claims that white populations are being replaced, but besides immigration,

issues such as abortion and violence against white individuals also play a role in the process (Davey, Ebner 2019). Defendants of this conspiracy theory specifically blame a “Jewish elite” for conducting such a plot of eliminating white populations. In either one of the cases, reproductive rights and women’s rights, in general, are tied to the decline of the West. Restricting those becomes a central goal for eliminating threats to white communities and this passes through the toughening of discourses and behavior around gender.

Women are per definition central to the perpetuation of the race and for the success of white-nationalism. “Without children, the race has no future, and without women, men cannot have children” (Devlin 2006). Many of the anxieties expressed by the alt-right regarding modern society are connected to their perception that women are being driven away from their duty to preserve the white race in the face of substitution and annihilation. Women do so by avoiding motherhood and marriage, and by being more accepting of immigrants, in special those from non-white countries. The first is caused mainly by feminism, while the second by the belief that women possess looser ties to their communities.

1.3.1 The role of feminism

Not many ideas can be said to be so broadly and unquestionably accepted in the alt-right as the rejection of feminism. Views on feminism vary from it being a political and social illusion to “mental illness” (Radix Journal 2015a). However extreme, women’s rights and empowerment, and equality between the sexes are both perceived as a departure from the sexes’ natural roles, as well as an attempt to subvert society in a way in which women have control over men.

For the alt-right, defeating feminism is as important as battling multiculturalism and multiracialism. In this subject, Greg Johnson (2011) defends that:

“preserving our race’s biological integrity requires more than defeating multiculturalism and multiracialism. It also requires the defeat of feminism and emasculation (male infantilization) and the restoration of sexual roles that are not just traditional but also biological: men as protectors and providers, women as nurturers. These sex roles are norms, meaning ideals. Realistically, not every man or woman will be able to function according to them. (That’s what makes them ideals!) But a White Nationalist society needs to maintain these ideals as norms

nevertheless, for even in a racially homogenous society like Japan, feminism and male infantilization are causes of personal and social misery and below-replacement birthrates, particularly among the educated and intelligent who should be reproducing more rather than less.”

The white-nationalist author goes as far as to affirm that feminism is not the solution for misogyny but is the cause of it. In his argumentation, misogyny is a male-resented response to women competing with men in traditionally male spaces. Additionally, feminism is understood by many in the alt-right and other movements, as is the case of masculinism⁴, as a tool to oppress men. In the words of Richard Spencer (2015), “feminism is a symbolic and psychic punishment of men for millennia of patriarchal rule” in which men must “endlessly engage in sadomasochistic ritual and role playing in order to extirpate the sin of once governing society”. Opposing feminism is then white-nationalism's way to end the resentment between the sexes and therefore is the “cure for misogyny as well as race hatred” (Johnson 2011).

Instead of serving as a source of liberation for women, feminism is accused of instrumentalizing them to destroy Western society by giving women the false impression of equality and empowerment while enforcing anti-white and anti-Western narratives (Radix Journal 2015b). The framing of feminism as a tool to persecute and disenfranchise white men in their communities is quite common. Feminism is portrayed by the alt-right not as a reconciliatory cause, seeking to balance out existing inequalities between the genders, but as an “accusatory mindset, plus a guilt-prone mindset for White guys” (Radix Journal 2015b). It seeks to earn “influence, cultural power, and money at their expense while stuffing minds within an Orwellian concept box, making it hard to think outside key assumptions” (Radix Journal 2015b).

Within this perspective, the movement perceives feminism as a fundamentally anti-men ideology, and even more dangerously, as one that is anti-white men. The acknowledgment of this discursive

⁴ A social, political and economic movement for the defense of men’s experience based on the male condition. It advocates for the defense of masculine traits against attacks that try to frame it in negative terms. There is a common attempt to present it as a movement similar to feminism and not as its antithesis. However, misogyny and male-supremacy are quite popular features of groups that identify as masculinists.

framing can help us understand how the alt-right has become an ideological refuge for many misogynistic groups, commonly found among the manosphere⁵. For the alt-right, those movements' goals are legitimate as they want to restore the idea of the "woman to a state in which she was in fact admired in such a fashion" (Joyce 2018). That is because they view feminism as having destroyed the idea that people should only be admired and respected for their actions. This of course, only happens as long as their behavior is aligned to traditional gender roles. Feminism has, in the alt-right's view, attached a special and almost inherent value to women despite their actions and, in many times, praising behavior that denigrates a woman's dignity while telling her otherwise. And this cannot be accepted.

About those misogynistic groups, Andrew Joyce (2018) justifies their resentment towards women and the need for the "re-domestication of the female" on the basis that:

"MGTOW is not so much a statement of hatred of the female as an admission that the man going his own way finds it impossible to love and commit to Woman in her present state and in the current culture. Pick-up artistry is merely the nihilistic response to Woman in her present state and in the current culture, in which the male concedes that the sentiment of sex is gone, and with it the prospect of meaningful marriage and family, but seeks to reap as much intercourse as can be obtained from the debauched and demystified females of postmodernity. The Incels acknowledge bitterly the fact they are the prime casualties of Woman in her present state and in the current culture, enduring sexual disenfranchisement as a consequence of the decline of monogamy and the economic impact of feminism. The advocates for "White Sharia," and increased control over the behavior of women, are disillusioned by Woman in her present state and in the current culture, and are merely seeking the most radical form of reversal."

This scenario motivates alt-right men to express their dissatisfaction with how women and sex are treated in modern society. Accusations of misogyny directed to the alt-right are usually dismissed by the movement as failing to grasp how "the postmodern West as a whole is sexually

⁵ The manosphere is understood as a network of social media accounts, websites and blogs that address issues around masculinity and men's life style. Positions such as anti-feminism, misogyny, and male-supremacy are popular among supporters. Some of the most well known groups of the manosphere are Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), pick-up artists (PUAs), and involuntary celibates (Incels).

unsuccessful, being more neurotic than erotic, and inducing the sexes to hate each other while producing STDs faster than it produces children” (Joyce 2018). In this view, anti-women groups are only considered misogynistic because others fail to understand that “they are the expression (with greater or lesser success) of the desire to make women loveable, admirable, cherishable, even metaphysical again” (Joyce 2018).

Finally, for some alt-right proponents, many women do not even truly hold feminist views; women would do so because supporting feminism has become something expected of people, in special of women. In this case, women would claim to be feminists because “they want to be perceived as intelligent and/or out of fear of misjudgment” (Radix Journal 2015b). Based on this approach, a considerable number of women would still believe on the existence of natural differences between men and women, and in reality, under a favorable environment, would admit to “daydreaming about having children or caring for babies” and to “enjoy submitting in bed” (Radix Journal 2015b).

What is considered of feminism is that it is fundamentally unnatural to the vast number of women and that consequently, the alt-right should offer those with a “safe-space” to express their stance on desirable femininity. Through the challenging of modern views of gender and the rejection of feminism, the alt-right attends to white women’s true desires, bringing them to the movement’s side. However, at the same time as there are women’s features that are favorable for achieving the alt-right’s vision for society, e.g. women’s desire for submission, other features can hamper their abilities to fully support for the movement.

1.3.2 Women as traitors

Concerning women’s nature, one popular trope among male alt-right supporters is the belief that women have evolved to have more loosen ties to their communities than men. This belief has been labeled by Vincent Law (2017a) as the “Females as Agents of Tribe Destruction” theory, and it explains why white-nationalism should be somewhat resistant in attributing a key role to women in the movement. Law explains the idea behind this theory as follows:

“Two tribes face off in pre-historic times and one tribe wins. What happens to the men of the loser tribe? They get slaughtered. And the women? They get taken as wives. Now, the women that are captured by the winning tribe need to adjust to the trauma of losing their tribe and accepting the victors if they are to survive. Which means that evolutionary pressure may have selected for women with *less* tribal loyalty over time. Because the more loyal ones would have had a hard time adjusting and would have probably gotten killed as well” (Law 2017a)

This same argument is voiced by F. Roger Devlin (2016) when stating that even though “female loyalty to the tribe is certainly possible, [...] we would be wise not to count too much upon it”. He argues that:

“Speaking more generally, women are less loyal to the tribe into which they are born than are men, and there are evolutionary reasons for this. In our environment of evolutionary adaptation, our remote ancestors lived in bands of fifty or a hundred persons whose men were frequently fighting one another. To be successful in such fights, men had to practice loyalty to the other men of their own tribe. When they were successful, they took the women of the vanquished tribe for themselves. This did not generally create any problem for the women of the defeated tribe. Women are naturally equipped to form new bonds with such conquerors quickly and easily. Their instinct is to subordinate all other considerations to the successful rearing of children. Loyalty to their defeated menfolk interferes with the fulfillment of this natural imperative, so they have generally not cultivated such loyalty to any great degree. At least, such is a woman’s natural inclination” (Devlin 2016).

One extreme analogy used to explain this trope has been expressed by Daryush Valizadeh (alias Roosh V). Valizadeh expresses concern for women’s threat to white-nationalism by comparing childless women to female dogs that go through false pregnancies. His idea is that women who do not have children experience symptoms of false pregnancy, such as weight gain, depression, aggression, restlessness, anxiety overt emotional attachment, and defensiveness, similarly to what female dogs experience. These last two symptoms, in Valizadeh’s words, manifest in women through an “emotional attachment to objects that are outside of her personal domain of home and family, specifically minorities and Islamic migrants” (Valizadeh 2017). In his view, this explains why women are more likely to defend and nurture such individuals, which is directly prejudicial to white-nationalism’s goals.

Discussions around women in the alt-right are surely not ignored, although, for some proponents, they are not taken as seriously as they should. For Devlin (2016), “sometimes the men in our movement fail to appreciate sufficiently the relevance of this subject to our political struggle as a people”. What is usually at stake in such discussions is not the relevance of women, but the nature and extent of women’s involvement in the movement. This is, in turn, something that women would be more aware of than their male counterparts. “They know that they control the perpetuation of our race, and in the final analysis, that’s almost all that matters”, says Devlin (2016). The knowledge of this fact presents us with the need to address in what terms alt-right’s male proponents understand women’s roles.

1.3.3 The place of women in the alt-right

The previous assessment of the different views on women held by alt-right men lays down the roles that women are expected to play for the achievement and success of the movement’s vision for society. It also explored how feminism hampers this process, using women as a tool to disempower white men. However, despite acknowledging that women do play a part in the establishment of white-nationalism, their relevance does not imply that they should be viewed as active participants in this process. In this part, I explore some of the opinions of the movement’s male proponents regarding 1) the need for women’s active participation and 2) accusations of misogyny. With this, I intend to address their opinions on whether women should be brought into the alt-right ranks and the reasons for it.

When navigating spaces of debate around women’s participation in the alt-right, it is possible to divide men’s opinions on the issue into two categories: normalization of women’s absence and opposition to women’s participation, or gatekeeping. Avid support for women’s engagement on the men’s side is almost nonexistent. For those who could be categorized as normalizing women’s absence in the alt-right or the lack of equal representation of the genders in the movement, the argument is that this phenomenon is a consequence of the natural characteristics of men and women.

According to Michael Polignano (2010), the lack of women’s presence in white-nationalism is not due to a “moral failing on the part of the woman” but is justified by the “hard-wired biological

differences between sexes”. Classifying women as risk-avoiders, because of biological pressures from carrying most of the responsibility of parental care and the success of the offspring, Polignano affirms that women are less likely to publicly avow politically incorrect ideas, such as white nationalism. However, in his view, this trend is likely to change as soon as women can no longer “ignore the fact that the world their children will inherit will be worse than the one into which they were born” (Polignano 2010).

Likewise, on the subject of why there are still so few women in the white-nationalist movement, Greg Johnson (2011) has stated that “most women see politics as a largely masculine enterprise” and that women are correct in thinking this way. For him, women are currently waiting for men to build a credible white-nationalist movement so they can later join in. Once men have helped white-nationalism achieve such status in society, women will come in to play their important roles as “natural networkers, nurturers, and multi-taskers” (Johnson 2011).

For this group, the “woman question” in white-nationalism will be solved eventually. For this reason, it is not necessary to rush women’s engagement in the movement. The biggest burden of building the foundations of white-nationalism should be carried by men. Criticisms under the claims that the alt-right is misogynistic or limits women’s participation are usually ignored. For Johnson (2011), “the last thing the movement should do is soften our message or compromise the pursuit of our ultimate aims simply in order to court women”. Under this perspective, women’s roles are necessary for the success of white-nationalism in the long term, but not for its establishment. The alt-right’s message should be promoted mainly by men and for men and reaching out women means that some aspects of these messaging will need to be toned down for the sake of being more effective with this group, which is not seen as a desirable strategy.

Within the second group, those who promote opposition or gatekeeping to women’s participation, the justification is usually on the basis that there is no foreseeable advantage in bringing women into the movement. On the contrary, their inclusion into the alt-right can be detrimental to the cause as women are less committed to white-nationalism than men. Additionally, many view women’s presence as a source of internal division and infighting among men.

In this respect, Johnson, who has also put forward arguments for the normalization of the lack of women in the alt-right, pushes the limits of his opinion by saying that sexual diversity is a source

of weakness to all political movements. Since white-supremacism does not enjoy much support from the broad society, it should use its non-commitment to sexual equality as an advantage regarding other movements. On this issue, Johnson (2011) says that “if our enemies are slowing themselves down by tying themselves to women in three-legged races, why should we be eager to adopt their handicaps instead of sprinting unencumbered for the finish line?”

Besides sexual diversity not being perceived as a goal nor a strategy for most alt-right male supporters, many of those will also voice concerns regarding the opinion that women who join white-nationalist movements only do so out of personal interest. According to Matt Forney (2016), “women are coming out of the closet as ‘pro-white’ or ‘nationalist’ because they want to bask in male attention, and the males are all too happy to give it”. In his view, women inside the movement will cause “beta males”⁶ to “throw their ‘fashy’ principles out the window the minute some surfboard starts stuffing her bra” (Forney 2016).

What is expected to follow from women’s inclusion in the alt-right is a series of infighting and division between men who seek to gain their attention. Therefore, women are usually seen as a mere distraction that must be avoided should the movement wants to maintain their focus. The pattern in which “a movement/subculture gets some traction, women start flooding into virtue signal, the men buy it hook, line and sinker, and the whole thing devolves into white-knighting and backstabbing” (Forney 2016), is what the alt-right should avert for the sake of its success.

More than being a distraction, women are also accused by members of the alt-right of lacking commitment to the movement’s principles. For Forney (2016), women are “political groupies, trying to convince the group’s leaders that they’re totes about the non-aggression principle, while they (un)consciously work to undermine the movement under the guise of making it less ‘misogynistic’, ‘racist’ or ‘homophobic’”. Consequently, “trying to ‘appeal’ to women is an exercise in pointlessness” (Forney 2014). The alt-right’s focus should be on attracting men, and men specifically, because they are the ones who can carry a white-nationalist revolution. In

⁶ “Beta male” is a pejorative description assigned to men who do not align with traditional masculine traits and are seen as performing some type of submission to people (other men and women) or to movements that are seen as not benefiting men (such as feminism).

Forney's words, and as counterintuitive as it is for an individual who seeks the continuation of white populations, "it's not that women should be unwelcome, it's that they're unimportant, [...] they are sideshows, not the main act" (Forney 2014).

Another trend observed is what can be called gatekeeping. This is the limiting of the kind of women who are accepted in the movement by narrowing the types of femininity that can be performed. If women fit into gender expectations and behave accordantly, they are accepted in the alt-right. The lines of these expectations seem to vary according to situations and the individuals involved in the matter, but their existence in the first place is to filter out the type of behavior that is unacceptable in the movement.

Notably, in the alt-right, the gatekeeping process tends to filter out women who do not conform with expectations of traditional femininity and submission. Based on beliefs of women's general lack of commitment to white-nationalism and their eagerness for attention, many male alt-right figures will direct harsh criticism to women who they see as diverting attention from important aspects of the movement. The process of gatekeeping per se is not a problem; it is common in many different groups to maintain internal cohesion and avoid the intrusion of undesirable behavior, i.e. what is not aligned to its main ideas. However, instead of criticizing specific behaviors, alt-right men associate unwanted behavior with women's nature, making it more ordinary for women not to be fit in the movement than the contrary. In this sense, the number of women who cannot be accepted in the alt-right will always be higher than the number of women who will. Exclusion is the rule, not the exception.

Regardless of their commitment to white-nationalism, only a fraction of white-nationalist women can be accepted in the alt-right. One example of gatekeeping can be seen in the following excerpt. As a response to alt-right's female pundits Lauren Southern and Tara McCarthy criticism of the persecution right-wing women face, Vincent Law (Law 2017b) has said:

“DO WOMEN BELONG IN THE ALT-RIGHT? Sure, but E-THOTs⁷ don’t. If you don’t know what THOT means, it’s a black Twitter thing so let me ape-splain it to you. It stands for ‘that ho over there’ and basically is the Current Year’s version of ‘skank’ or ‘non-ladylike woman’. Look, there are a lot of people on the Alt-Right that don’t like Lauren. Does that mean by extension they don’t like you, and don’t want you in the movement? That depends. Do you have a past career as a dress-up toy for nerdy men to take pictures with and jack off to later? Do you have some skeletons in the closet from your mudsharking days? Do you try to milk money out of needy beta males by reciting Alt-Right talking points while wearing a revealing tank top? If you identify with any one of these points, then the criticism directed at Lauren is also directed your way and you are right to be concerned. Your days THOTing around are over. You are about to get patrolled. But women in the West have adopted Feminist thinking patterns and identity as the Sisterhood of Traveling Skanks instead of as just White women. They think like an ethnic minority group and close ranks when one of their own is criticized, instead of standing with their husband, their father, their brother, etc. This kind of behavior leads Alt-Right men to question their loyalties. A genuinely ‘trad’ girl is loyal to her tribe, her people, her civilization and her man. She doesn’t think of herself as part of a political voting block or as part of a separate parallel society within a society.”

The type of women most likely to be accepted by the alt-right is one that aligns with traditional expressions of femininity and that negates solidarity to other women in favor of the men in their surroundings. The alt-right is not only more accepting but encouraging of solidarity between white men. Nonetheless, white women’s solidarity must be directed to the movement, and consequently, to the men in the movement. The only acceptable identities linked to women’s solidarity in the alt-right, expressed by most of its male pundits, are closely related to their devotion and submission to men as the natural path for women.

Under a similar argumentation, Forney (2016) says that “any woman who joins a non-mainstream movement or subculture should be looked at with deep skepticism at best”. That is because, while there might be few exceptions, “most girls’ number one fixation is grabbing the spotlight, and

⁷ A term used to describe women who use or are perceived as using their appearance to attract the attention of male audiences in online spaces. In the alt-right, it is commonly directed at women who either are not seen or are seriously upholding the movement’s values while publicly defending it.

there's a never-ending parade of chumps who will gladly let them have it". Therefore, for the alt-right to be successful, "you need to put the reins on any girl who begs you to let her in" (Forney 2016).

Likewise, Valizadeh (2016) defends that "if you have an anti-feminist movement with a high percentage of women in it, you don't have an anti-feminist movement". According to him, most women in the West do not possess the capacity to fight against "the female urge of sleeping with whomever they want and having complete control over their lives to pursue useless college degrees and degenerate behaviors" (2016). The only exception to this rule is women who are up to the task of living traditional lives. Those women, however, would be more interested in spending their time raising their families instead of "building a brand online", which is how many see alt-right women's enterprise when promoting the movement. True white-nationalist women seem to be, ideally, not visible.

Except for few cases, there is no overt support for the engagement of women in the movement nor the defense that their presence is, at this moment, vital for the success of the alt-right and of white-nationalism. This, however, seems to diverge more frequently from the opinions held by the female proponents of the group who see themselves as having an important role to play in its promotion. In the next chapter, the views of women in the alt-right are explored to unveil their motivations and expectations towards the movement, as well as how they deal with criticism from other members.

2 Women of the alt-right: an empirical analysis

In the previous chapter, I sought to elucidate some of the most popular positions on gender held by men in the alt-right. However, even though the movement is commonly portrayed as one led by men, who also are said to be the great majority of its supporters, it would be a mistake to exclude the roles of women in it. Whatever animosity women have found from their alt-right male peers, it has not pushed them away from the movement. On the contrary, most alt-right women believe they not only have a place in it but that their presence is necessary for the movement's success.

This chapter is focused solely on women's experiences in the alt-right. Each section will be dedicated to unraveling the expectations women place in the movement, what roles they see themselves playing, and how they deal with the issue of misogyny for which the alt-right is known. By its end, I expect the reader to be more familiar with women's perspectives on the movement, which tends to be relegated to matters of curiosity and oddity. This is especially true when their support for the alt-right is framed against some of the overtly contentious positions held by their male counterparts in terms of what is the place and the need for women in the movement. As was explained in the methodological section, to approach women's motivations and experiences, I conducted a netnography research on 25 profiles of alt-right women. I extracted data from women's social media accounts, interviews, podcasts, websites, and blogs. Their perspectives on general alt-right gender positions and particularly, on women's participation and relevance to the movement, are here analyzed.

To begin this analysis, it is necessary to reaffirm that even though women are sometimes represented as a quiet minority of their supporters, any investigation into the movement will show us they are thoroughly active and quite numerous. Treating their stances on the movement, especially when those diverge from what their male counterparts defend, as ideological anomalies are problematic in multiple ways. Firstly, it paints the alt-right as a coherent movement and one that is built solely on the contributions of men. Secondly, it ignores how women organize, cooperate, and help to further it, both ideologically and materially. And finally, it limits our understanding of how individuals go through different paths into extreme ideologies and how support for it can be manifested in distinct ways.

Broadly speaking, in terms of far-right ideologies, gender occupies not only a central place in most groups' imaginary but is also closely intertwined and as important as the issue of race. The same can be said of the alt-right. In its views on the intersection of gender and women, the alt-right does not greatly differ from other far-right and white-nationalist movements. Perhaps the biggest difference between the alt-right and its predecessors is that the former's presence in online spaces has facilitated women's engagement, while also exposing them to more criticism. In other instances, women have tended to perform roles further away from the spotlight, with some notable exceptions.

From the accounts of alt-right women, they are more numerous than what is usually portrayed. However, although the internet has given them the possibility to be more active in the movement while avoiding immediate risks to their safety, they still seem to be more private about their positions. This is because, according to them, the risks involved in publically defending alt-right ideas affect women more gravely than men. Some women say they cannot rely on the same social network of support that men do when they come forward as white-nationalists. And importantly, others tend to expect little support from members of the alt-right in case of need, even though the movement is often said to function as a refuge for individuals who espouse such views on society. On this subject, Wolfie James (2017) argues:

“A man’s risk in going public as a member of the Alt Right are mostly financial. [...] But a woman’s risks in going Alt Right are largely social, and without the availability of Standard Pool Parties to fall back on, a woman has no social safety net. A woman can lose everything by going public with her desire to avoid people and color and the fact of her preferring the company of whites, because her relationships with other people are a large part of her identity. If she is openly referred to as a racist, a traitor, or a doormat, it will hit her emotional well-being harder than it would a man. Her reaction may be weak compared to a guy’s, and the Alt Right doesn’t deal in propping others up when they demonstrate weakness or ineptitude. But as women thrive on a sense of community, it’s valid to acknowledge that the threat of having their social standing stripped from them in favor of a crusade that is still in its infancy is undoubtedly petrifying.”

Another reason, and perhaps the most common among alt-right women, is the fear of violence being directed at them and their families when they come publicly about their support for the movement. Women, in this case, claim that they are more likely to place their safety and the safety of their children as a priority, which would consequently push them to show their support in more private ways. Lana Lokteff (2017) has explained the issue of violence as so:

“There is a reason why few women attend these conferences and as you will see in American NPI: commies wait out front. It is the violence and I have told journalists this all the time when they say ‘why don’t women come?’ Violence! They harass people coming in, even if you are a woman, because, I have heard this before myself, fascist women deserve to be raped and beaten. I cannot tell you how many emails I have gotten from ‘lefties’ telling me I am gonna be raped and hung in the town square one day. Most women cannot handle threats of assault, nor do they

want to be publicly shamed. They prefer to watch live streams from the comfort of their home with their families. But we are their invested in numbers. [...] Just because we are not protesting, does not mean we do not exist. We have more class and creative ideas than that.”

Based on this situation, some alt-right women will defend that women, in general, should not be pressured into publicly avowing the movement. They claim that they can still contribute to the alt-right by supporting the men in their lives who can be upfront about their opinions. They also claim for themselves the important role of bringing other women into the movement and raising children who will be racially conscious about the “struggle” of white populations in modern society. Nevertheless, for other women, this presents an opportunity for men to support women in their path into white-nationalism:

“There aren’t enough women who publicly align with the Alt Right at present in order for the newly awoken to find that new community. A man can thrive as a lone wolf, but a woman will wither from loneliness. So while many in the Alt Right want to keep it a goy’s club, the women around them will suffer if they’re not given some meaningful way to interact with or participate in the movement. Supporting them as they learn the lingo and how to properly troll could mean all the difference as they lament the likely loss of numerous long-standing relationships. I may sound trite, but for a movement as important as White Nationalism, there is strength in numbers, as whites are a rare breed as it is. Turning away women because of their emotionality is reckless and shortsighted” (James 2017).

Although there are reasons for women to remain in the “shadows” of the alt-right, many still are openly vocal about their support for the movement and are actively engaging in its promotion. The main explanation given is that the current state of modern society imposes such a risk to the future of the white race in the West that it is required of them to take more risks. In the following section, I explore women’s contributions to the alt-right’s understanding of gender by how they reinforce or reject ideas such as gender roles, gender equality, and women’s empowerment.

2.1 Gender essentialism and feminism: how women reinforce or reject it?

Much like most men, alt-right women tend to, in its majority, support positions that reinforce notions of gender essentialism. Those positions reaffirm the existence of inherent features to men

and women and their functioning in complementarity. As a consequence, this group is also likely to defend strict gender roles, although, as it will be explored further in this analysis, it is quite common for women to be more flexible in terms of how this affects their participation in the movement. For this group, the alt-right and white-nationalism as a whole are deeply connected with realigning expectations and behaviors of men and women to traditionalistic ideals of gender to fulfill a natural path designed by nature.

A popular position among alt-right women is that white men have built Western civilization and all that it entails as a gift for women, which has been noticed by Ashley Mattheis (2018). Every aspect of this society has been created to fulfill people's needs and especially, white women's needs, which are "beauty, family, and home" (Lokteff 2017). In this ideal world, women are free from the constraints of modern society that deviate and deceive women into believing that female empowerment and happiness are to be found in negating traditionalism. Through white-nationalism, women can voice their true desires, which are "to be beautiful, attract the best mate possible and be protected and provided for until death" (Lokteff 2017). Women who say that they have different expectations in life have either been profoundly misled by modern society, e.g. feminism or are actively lying. The position that Western civilization was built by men for white women is not an argument voiced by alt-right men. It seems to be a narrative alt-right women use to attract new female supporters into the movement.

One interesting point is how alt-right women tend to frame discourses of female empowerment. For many of them, modern society has diverted both men and women from their natural paths. Women are especially targeted by feminist discourses that they claim are emasculating women as the only way of making them feel truly empowered. For alt-right women, there is empowerment in tradition, and women who follow such path should be celebrated for their nurturing and caretaking characteristics. As said by Lauren Chen (2019):

"While women (and men for that matter) succeeding in their fields is always something to be celebrated, I've noticed that somewhere along the line, our culture has decided that women have to follow a pretty specific path in order to be recognized as powerful and independent. It seems like we only celebrate women for being strong when they're acting like men, or at least when they're conforming to traditionally masculine traits and preferences. And don't get me wrong, I, of course, recognize that historically, it was extremely challenging (and sometimes even illegal

or impossible) for women to break into majority male professions. But in today's egalitarian society, is a woman who chooses to be a CEO really any more empowered than a woman who chooses to be a homemaker? And if so, why? Is it possible for a woman to be considered "strong" while embodying feminine archetypes, not masculine ones?"

Among alt-right women, the rejection of feminism is open and very strong. In their critique, feminism fails to consider that traditionally feminine characteristics can be as valuable to society as traditional masculine traits. For this group, feminists are failing to deliver community and support for women who choose to follow traditionalism. Alt-right women commonly defend this position by saying that feminism is a hypocritical ideology because the sorority it promotes is only directed to women who conform to a specific type of femininity, one that is inherently negated by most alt-right women, while traditional women are mocked and excluded.

But the rejection of feminism in terms of its divergence from gender roles is only part of the reason why alt-right women dismiss it. For them, feminism is especially detrimental to white women and the white race. The reasoning behind this type of argumentation is that women are misled by feminism to enable practices and policies that are detrimental to the wellbeing of white populations. For Ayla Stewart (Stewart, *À La Modest* 2016) "throughout time and history, Caucasians and fair-skinned 'white' people have been pushed out and bred out of nearly every land they have originated in" and the way through which this is done is "predominately feminism (women's willingness to destroy the family unit by rebelling against God's plan)".

In Stewart's argument, women are inherently emotional creatures and navigate the world through an emotional perspective. Feminism, in turn, is used as a method by groups that seek to destroy white populations in the West. By adhering to feminist ideology, she argues, white women are more likely to uphold progressive political views, and among those are opening borders and increasing welfare programs (Stewart 2016). Both of those policies are said to be aimed specifically at non-white migrants and their posterior generations, and in the long-term, contribute to the decrease of quality of life for white populations and more importantly, to a demographic change that favors non-whites over white individuals.

How white women can help stop this trend is turning away from feminism and embracing white nationalism. The alt-right is then framed as an expression of in-group loyalty among white individuals who are aware of the dangers faced by their population in modern society. White

women place themselves in this discourse as central figures in helping to turn the tides away from population replacement by assuming the roles of nurturing and caretaking in the nuclear family. This requires women to ideally marry young and have as many white children as possible. As was seen in the previous chapter, alt-right men have placed white women in the position of securing the future of the white race by not leading the movement ideologically but by helping white-nationalists families to reproduce at a rate that will guarantee their primacy in numbers over non-white populations in the West. Once this primacy is reached, a white ethnostate is a more feasible reality to be achieved. For Irma Hinojosa (2017):

“Right now, especially, we are at a time where we need to be having as many children as possible, especially here in the West. We are being replaced. [...] It is designed that we are being replaced by these Third-World immigrants, by Muslims, by all of these people who do not hold our values, who are absolutely barbaric in mentality. And we, more than ever, need to build these nuclear families, we need to be having more children, and the mainstream media wants nothing more than to stop that. They want to replace you, especially white people; they want to replace you.”

Of the calls for women to join white-nationalism, one of the most popular movements among the alt-right is the Tradlife/Tradwife movement. The movement per se is not white-nationalist; it focuses on individuals, especially women, returning to traditional gender roles. Its relation to white-nationalism, however, cannot be ignored, as the number of alt-right women who also identify as tradwives is considerably high. Its most known proponent is the already mentioned Ayla Stewart. Creator of the blog “Wife with a Purpose”, Stewart defines “Tradlife” in it as “the restoration and preservation of traditional family values”. She no longer does political and social commentary, which she has abandoned in 2019, stating that her retirement from political analyses was a divined guided decision after years of persecution by the Left. However, her decision coincided with news of her membership on the white-supremacist group Identity Evropa. Stewart claims that her “most major crime was claiming white people as being an equal part of humanity” (Stewart 2019).

Stewart has expressed that the need for women to join the Tradlife movement lies in women’s historical instrumentalization in the destruction of society. By living a traditional life, i.e. living according to traditionally feminine roles, women will be contributing to the securing of the

family, which for many Tradlife supporters also means the success of white families. In her words:

“Rebellious women have always been the key to destroying society, ever since Eve in the Garden. That’s not to say men don’t have their weaknesses as well such as their desire to be sexual with many women or their easier ability to abandon their children, and those are tools that Satan will use against society as well, but women have a rebellious nature that when married to a man’s desire to please women can lead to destruction. Therefore any negative cultural force will target women first. Satan, Marxism, materialism, etc. will all go after the cornerstone of civilization - the family. And the best way to attack the family is to incite women to rebellion against their God-given roles” (Stewart, *À La Modest* 2016).

However, not all alt-right women agree on the path of strict traditionalism. There is a contention between women who adhere to Tradlife and women who, despite believing and reinforcing notions of gender essentialism, do not act accordingly. In those cases, women will express that they are unfairly judged by other members of the movement when they take more flexible expressions of traditionalism. One alt-right woman who on different occasions has voiced her concern for an unquestioned push for Tradlife is the white-nationalist PhilosophiCat (real name unknown). In an interesting exchange with alt-right male supporters on a podcast episode about whether men should defend ring-wing women from online attacks, PhilosophiCat has questioned the type of traditionalism that is expected of women in the alt-right and how attacks on women are counterproductive in attracting this group into the movement.

The case discussed was that of Lauren Southern, a woman who despite not openly identifying as alt-right and as a white-nationalist but rather as a civic-nationalist, has collaborated numerous times with alt-right figures and defends many of their viewpoints. In this exchange, PhilosophiCat stated that although Southern has aligned herself with alt-right figures and defended some of the movement’s key points, she was constantly criticized for not being traditional enough. The comments received by Southern accused her of being hypocritical in defending traditionalism as she was unmarried and childless. At the time, Southern defended herself saying that she was still too young to be married and have kids and that choosing a partner is a process that takes time. She also said that not all women must strictly follow the path of traditionalism.

While many advocates accused Southern of aligning herself with the alt-right out of personal interest (for visibility), PhilosophiCat was more open to recognizing Southern's role as a useful tool for the alt-right without necessarily being part of it or adhering to all of its ideas. About it PhilosophiCat said:

“Well, I am just curious because this is a criticism that is often thrown at women ‘oh, you are not trad enough’ and it is like, no one ever really defines what that is. By your definition, I fit that pretty well and I still get those criticisms leveled at me. But criticizing women for not being trad enough is like, why does it really matter? As long as the message is getting out to people that need to hear it. If every single woman was a trad-housewife, we would not really be able to make inroads with women who do not identify with that. So, when I am talking to normie⁸ women, you know, I need to present a message that is relatable to them and if I am coming across as living a completely foreign lifestyle to them, promoting completely foreign values to them, they are just gonna switch off. They are not gonna listen and I am not gonna be an effective messenger” (McLaren, Dulny [no date]).

It seems that women in the alt-right tend to be more questioned about their commitment to traditionalism than their male counterparts, and that, very often, they should not expect much sympathy when subjected to attacks by either their male peers and from outsiders. Despite the hostility that many women face in the movement, they are still in its ranks and provide important support for furthering the alt-right ideologically and in bringing new supporters. There is a wide network of women who cooperate and support each other, especially online. Their expectations towards the movement and the roles they play are equally important to understand the movement as are those of their male counterparts. In the next section, I address what aspects of the alt-right attract women to the movement and what expectations they have from it.

2.2 Women's motivations to join and their expectations towards the alt-right

I begin this analysis by pointing out that there are both push and pull factors for women regarding their involvement in the alt-right. By “push” factors I refer to positions women defend that

⁸ Normie is a slang used by the alt-right to describe people who are not in the movement.

consequently bring them closer to the movement and by “pull” factors, I refer to positions that women see as attractive in the alt-right. The main “push” factors have been explored in the previous section regarding the defense of gender essentialism and anti-feminism. For alt-right women, liberalism and feminism do not serve their interests and are especially detrimental for white women and white populations. White-nationalism is then presented as the only alternative that can satisfy women’s needs and protect them from the malicious intentions of modern society. In the alt-right, women will align their real wishes and needs with a more secure and fulfilling life that is offered in the movement’s idealization of society. The alt-right presents itself to women as “a refuge where white women can embrace their femininity and their racial heritage without shame” (Darby 2017).

The foreseen advantages of women’s support for the alt-right motivates them to face all the hardships involved in coming publically as members of the movement. Women might need to distance themselves from family and friends and endure the persecution associated with upholding such views in a modern liberal society. But they do so because white women are seeking the true sisterhood and belonging into a community that they do not have outside of the alt-right. On this Lana Lokteff (2017) says:

“[...] with the rise of the alt-right a group formed practically overnight in America and that attracted many young guys and gals, and guys with girlfriends, it created an arena where like-minded girls could meet, and vent, and say what they wanted without fear of criticism. They stopped caring about their old friends because they met new ones. White women in particular are starving for a true sisterhood. Blacks have it, Mexicans have it, Jews have it. White women need to have it again. They found too that these relationships that they are forging with other white women who are nationalists are fiercely loyal and better than ever before. None of the catty bullshit, because we know that this is our survival at stake”.

Lokteff additionally says that white-nationalist women are constantly told that they are defending a movement that is hostile to their interests, but that they are not usually asked what their interests are. She then proceeds to ask other white-nationalist women the following question about the alt-right: “as a woman, what are your interests in this movement?” Those would be the “pull” factors mentioned previously. For PhilosophiCat, there is not a major difference between what men and women want from the movement. She mentions that “we all want to be happy, we all want to

have security from having our homelands invaded, we do not want to pay these high taxes that go to groups that are detrimental to our society” (Lokteff, Stewart, Faucheux, Lauryn, PhilosophiCat 2017).

The interviewees Bre Faucheux and Ayla Stewart gave Lokteff similar answers. Both women placed a bigger importance on guaranteeing the conditions to raise their children as the main interest of women in the alt-right. Faucheux argued that her priority is securing the existence of her future generations against the threats of migrants. About it she said, “I am going to need to get a loving husband and I am going to need to have some babies, and that is in my best interests to protect myself and my future lineage” (Lokteff, Stewart, Faucheux, Lauryn, PhilosophiCat 2017). For Stewart, she needs both the material conditions to raise her children, which include a house and access to medical care, but also safety from immigrants. In this sense, she says “I need my kid to be able to walk to the library or something like this, without fear of them being assaulted and attacked because they have to walk through the ‘bad neighborhood’ which is usually full of immigrants and things like that” (Lokteff, Stewart, Faucheux, Lauryn, PhilosophiCat 2017). The only systems Stewart sees as meeting her expectations are traditionalistic ones, i.e. white-nationalists.

For Lokteff, her priority is to maintain a white-majority society, which she equated to Western civilization. She argued that had society been ruled by African or Islamic men, white women would be subjugated into conditions where they would constantly fear for their lives. She also agreed with Stewart in terms of needing the material conditions to raise her children and claimed that only white-nationalism could provide women with “First World things”. Lokteff claims that she needs:

“peace, safety, order, first world conditions, we want things to work. And then we can actually have time to expand our minds and be carefree with our children, and we do not have to worry about violence, and we can have running water and electricity, and first-world things. These are things that white men and white majority, Western civilization provides for us. That is a huge interest for us, and really nationalism wants to secure those things” (Lokteff, Stewart, Faucheux, Lauryn, PhilosophiCat 2017).

On this same exchange, Lana Lokteff asked the interviewees how do they see themselves fitting in their ideal vision of society. Stewart said that her place should be that of a wife and a mother.

She wants to be able to teach her daughters and granddaughters the traditions and values of her culture so that they can honor their ancestors and pass this on to their children in the future. Lokteff reacted to this answer by saying that she too would love to be able to concentrate on her motherhood, on her house, and her creative interests, but that, unfortunately, was not possible. She argued that, in the present time, “we are all called to say something against this system, and speak out and be loud about it because the system, this anti-white system, wants to come after our children, wants to destroy our children” (Lokteff, Stewart, Faucheux, Lauryn, PhilosophiCat 2017).

An interesting answer to the posed question came from PhilosophiCat, who highlighted that although she wants to live in a world where women who want to become mothers can do so and are supported through it, she does not feel attracted to the idea of home caring and motherhood. She stated that:

“[...] I guess I would like for there to be some acceptance as well of women who are exceptional and who want to make a significant contribution outside of the home. I do not think that just because there are fewer women at the genius levels of IQ that they should be excluded just because there are not many of them. If they want to go out and make some significant contributions, cure some disease or discover some amazing things, they should be supported and appreciated for their contribution as well. So, I do not like this idea of boxing women into one thing or another, like ‘every woman needs to be a homemaker and a mother’ or ‘every woman needs to have a career’” (Lokteff, Stewart, Faucheux, Lauryn, PhilosophiCat 2017).

In her view, there should be a space for individuals to choose to live life according to their interests, be that motherhood or not, and that the community should appreciate their ability to do so, as well as people’s different forms of contribution to society. About women, she said that “if there are women who do not want children or who want children but who also want to do other things, they should feel part of our community as well” (Lokteff, Stewart, Faucheux, Lauryn, PhilosophiCat 2017).

In the following exchange, PhilosophiCat and Lokteff agreed that the life of a white-nationalist woman does not have to revolve around “cooking, and cleaning and changing diapers all day” (Lokteff, Stewart, Faucheux, Lauryn, PhilosophiCat 2017). Women who do not necessarily want

to get married and have children, or have missed the opportunity to do so, should not be excluded from the white-nationalist movement. On this, PhilosophiCat defended that:

“We should not tie people’s worth as individuals to whether or not they had X number of children or because they have a certain type of career. You are valuable because you are part of our race, you are part of our community, whatever your unique talents are, whatever your interests lie. I do not think that it is good for our community to start trying to exclude people or push them into boxes” (Lokteff, Stewart, Faucheux, Lauryn, PhilosophiCat 2017).

Adding to the discussion, Bre Faucheux claimed that she too agrees that in her ideal society, women should have the freedom to pursue what they want. She interestingly complemented it by dismissing any arguments that this is a feminist position, to what Lokteff agreed, saying women having the freedom to pursue their interests is a “Western civilization, ancient European thing”. In the women’s argument, feminism has cooptated the idea that in non-feminist societies, women cannot act according to their desires. Faucheux then acknowledged that, despite defending women’s rights to choose their paths, individuals should be aware that, realistically, “our bodies have a biological clock and that the good men kind of gets scooped up rather quickly, same with the good women, gets scooped up really quickly” (Lokteff, Stewart, Faucheux, Lauryn, PhilosophiCat 2017). This is something that should be in the minds of both men and women, she said, but that women, in particular, should not believe that they can have it all.

This section summarized some of the reasons given by alt-right women for their support for the movement, as well as how they view their place in a white-nationalist society. As a result of the urgency with which they see white people needing to step up to protect their civilization from disappearing, women believe they can also have a place in the alt-right. In the following section, I explore which roles women claim they have in the advancement of the alt-right.

2.3 How women think they can help the movement?

Having established that alt-right women possess particular interests in the furthering of the movement, in this section, I assess the roles women want to play in this process. I also discuss how women argue that, particularly because of their gender, their presence in the movement contributes to the alt-right’s success. I begin by assessing how alt-right women express their

desires of participation and if their engagement should be that of supporters or leaders of the movement.

From this research, it was not possible to identify any major support for women's leadership in the movement coming from the individuals themselves. The basis for this phenomenon seems to be the belief that women are generally not fit for politics, let alone for leadership. Most women defend their right for a political opinion but this does not entail that they also defend that they should be actively involved in political matters. Alt-right women also argue that their political opinions are very much aligned with that of alt-right men, so as long as those can further the movement, their major desires will also be fulfilled.

On this topic, Stewart (2018) has voiced a very clear position:

“I don't want to be considered the leader of the alt-right, I've said it since the beginning. I'm not a leader, I'm not a leader of any political movement whatsoever. I'm a woman and don't really believe we should be involved in politics. I believe we're free to have political opinions, obviously, and we're free to voice them. But we're not leaders in politics, I don't think that we ought to be leaders. I don't think that that's a woman's place, and my place again: I'm advocating for traditionalism and ethnic European sovereignty.”

Arguing for the exceptionality of the current times, Lokteff says female nationalists ought to be loud, even though she agrees that women are still too emotional for politics or leadership. The main contribution women can give to white-nationalism is inspiring and motivating men to fight. In her view, women are men's true inspiration for safeguarding Western civilization. In her words, “women have a special power to inspire and motivate men, to give them a reason to fight. The woman makes the men. Contrary to what feminists say, the reason why European men built society is for the women and children” (Lokteff 2017). This is a recurring argument in Lokteff's call for women to step up and join the movement.

Other alt-right women have put forward the argument that women who engage in white-nationalism are an “anomaly”. Politics is and should be a male-dominated field, but some women seem to take more interest in it than others, though always at very few numbers. In this sense, Faucheux says that for white women to see the danger of the present times, it does not require of them a “male brain or a high IQ” (Faucheux, Lokteff 2018). What Faucheux calls the truth,

recognizing the threat to white populations, is available to any person and “will come out in any vessel that really wants to channel that”, be that a man or a woman (Faucheux, Lokteff 2018). Women like her and other female white-nationalists are argued to be a historical minority in politics but one that will always exist because even women “have a bit of a male brain in themselves” (Faucheux, Lokteff 2018), which explains why some feel more driven to voice their positions.

For Brittany Pettibone, women’s engagement in politics is more of “duty rather than a desire” (2018). She argues that, for the time being, her commitment is to safeguarding the West, but as a woman, she has made the choice of marriage and family. For Pettibone, as for other women in the alt-right, there is a choice to be made between family and politics, and even though hers is the former, it does not mean that she will be abandoning the cause of white-nationalism entirely. On that, she says that “I will still be fighting the battle, but I will have changed my position in the battlefield” (Pettibone 2018).

When asked about the alt-right’s view on women in American society, and if it encourages their participation and leadership in the movement, Cecilia Davenport claimed that there is not a single answer to this question, that “not everyone has exactly the same views on the value and role of women in society” (Davenport 2017a). For Davenport, most alt-right supporters agree that women possess a “unique ability to have children and affinity for child-rearing is nature’s highest role” and that they should have the option to “stay home and raise a family if that’s what they want to do” (Davenport 2017a). She disagreed with arguments that there are few women in the alt-right and mentioned that, although women are less likely than men to join such “vanguard” movements, they are still present. She then explained how women can be not so visible while still playing a role in furthering the movement. On that, she said:

“Think of it this way: just as the polls in England couldn’t encompass the Brexit vote, and just as the polls in America couldn’t pick up Trump voters, the usual methods for looking for women on the alt-right don’t work. I’m a bit unusual with my blogging, twitter presence, and conference attendance. You see alt-right women a lot more at private gatherings. Most women keep to the shadows a lot more, which is to be expected, I think. Married women especially want to shield their children from the harm that could befall them if their political views were known. Men are,

by nature, more likely to take risks: and there are real risks involved in being active in this cause” (Davenport 2017a).

Through this excerpt, we can gather that Davenport normalizes the fact women will not always be playing the same roles that men do in the movement and that most women do not have a problem with it. For her, we can hardly expect women to be loud about their support because there are security implications for them. Additionally, if men and women naturally function in complementarity, it would not be much different in the alt-right. Women are numerous and active in the movement but how they express it will be different from the way men do.

In a similar vein, Wolfie James (pseudonym for Anna Vuckovic), argued in her piece “A place for women in the alt-right” that men’s natural characteristic has given them the abilities to “lead and conquer”, while women have historically been “empathetic supporting characters who provide vital biological services” (James 2017). This is a process that works well in nature and also in the alt-right; the movement defends and recognizes women’s contribution to the wellbeing of the family. But James also claims that women can go further in the movement, as there might be a space for “woke women in the Alt Right, despite widespread opposition to an open-armed welcome” (James 2017). Therefore, there is a possibility that women who are motivated to engage in the movement can do so, but this will likely be done with reservation as to not turn the alt-right into a “feminized or co-opted” movement (James 2017).

At this point, it is possible to see that, in most women’s arguments, they claim to be stepping up to the cause solely because the current time requires this position from them and that women generally do not desire to occupy roles of leadership in the group. Women usually agree that it is natural for there to exist an imbalance of roles in the movement and that this is explained by the natural and inherent gender roles individuals play. Alt-right women are, however, more supportive and positive about their participation in the movement. In their views, therefore, what should be women’s roles in the movement?

Firstly, women claim their presence gives the alt-right a more serious image. For Davenport (2017b), “women around the country are actively joining the Alt-Right: networking online, meeting IRL, forming smaller regional cohorts and being plugged into the national network. They are coming in numbers never before seen in this movement”. This, in turn, is a phenomenon that

cannot be ignored by the Left. In her words, “once a threshold of female involvement is reached, there’s no going back for the Alt-Right. It’s real. It’s here. And it cannot be called a fringe movement of disenfranchised or sexually frustrated white males anymore” (Davenport 2017b). With women’s presence filling in the ranks of the alt-right, especially when their support is visible, progressives can no longer take it as a non-serious movement. For Lana Lokteff (2017), “the Left knows that when women get involved, a movement becomes a serious threat”.

The second main contribution of women to the movement would be attracting more supporters, both men and women, but the latter is special. For Lokteff, women have been flocking into the alt-right’s side; in her years leading one of the most visible platforms producing alt-right content, RedIce TV, she claims to have seen a turning of tides in that women are more numerous and more vocal about their positions. Women joining the alt-right might be, in her view, connected to a bigger representation of women in the movement. The reasons that bring women into the alt-right are multifaceted, but certainly one of the main advantages to their presence is that they have been attracting other women.

There seems to be an understanding among many alt-right women that the message promoted by them is especially more interesting to other women. This could be one of the main explanations for why, when talking about alt-right issues, women tend to be so evocative of specific female roles and issues. On an exchange between Faucheux and Lokteff, the former asked about what men can do to help bring women into white-nationalism. Lokteff then endorses this idea saying “I think when it comes to women it can’t come from a man, it almost has to come from another woman when you’re talking about woman’s issues” (Faucheux, Lokteff 2018).

The third main advantage of having women in the alt-right is that there is a belief women can get away with saying more heinous things than men. In this sense, women would contribute to the normalization of extreme ideas. In Lokteff’s words, “a soft woman saying hard things can create repercussions throughout society” (Lokteff 2017). The reason behind this is that, because women are commonly perceived as not physically intimidating, they can get away with being more confrontational than men. In Faucheux’s view, having exclusively men talking about alt-right issues can push women away from the movement because they will more hardly relate to the topics men speak about, nor will they relate easily to how they are framed. However, when those issues are presented by a woman, their images and approaches tend to soften the message being

delivered. She evokes Mark Collett's description of women's messages as a "hammer in a silk glove" (Fauchaux, Lokteff 2018).

PhilosophiCat seems to also agree with the view that women normalize white-nationalist talking points and that they entice other women to join the alt-right. She claims that "it looks so much better to have all of these women out there talking about these same things because it kind of gives the social 'ok' for other women to come onboard" (Lokteff, PhilosophiCat 2017). The same could not be said of having exclusively men defending the alt-right. She goes further to say that women will naturally receive more attention than men when talking about these issues, which is not a bad thing. She defends that "women who speak out about those things are kind of a gateway and if you can listen to the women talk, who tend to talk a little less deep than the men do, then you can kind of move on to the men who are really digging deep into this stuff and go further down the rabbit hole" (Lokteff, PhilosophiCat 2017). Again, in her argument, women's messages are a pathway for individuals to further radicalize. The alt-right should not, therefore, ignore the importance and potential of women's contributions.

It seems quite clear that alt-right women's desire to participate and wish to find a space favorable for their contributions in the movement. Women believe the future of the white race also lies on their shoulders, both in terms of the reproduction of people and ideas. Their participation and voices are perceived as important for the success of the movement. With this in mind, I address the following question: how do women deal with resistance or overt opposition to their participation coming from their male peers? How do women view the claims that the alt-right is an inherently misogynistic movement?

2.4 How do women view resistance regarding their involvement?

Accusations of misogyny directed to the alt-right are well known. The movement does not enjoy a good reputation when it comes to its treatment of women. However, those accusations do not only arise from the movement's treatment of women from outside of the group, but also to those inserted in it. From some of the excerpts analyzed in the theoretical framework section of this research, we have been able to see that there is a rampant hostility and charged language directed

at women. If alt-right women insist that this is a movement that speaks to their interests and they want to play a role in it, how do they perceive such attacks and this contentious environment?

From my analysis of the profiles, the majority of alt-right women deny being subjected to the levels of abuse and misogyny that outsiders claim happens in the movement. Women do recognize that they are attacked constantly, but they argue that these attacks come 1) from men, and especially women, from outside of the movement and 2) from men who are not actual white-nationalists.

On a discussion about accusations of abuse in the alt-right, Bre Faucheux commented that she does not understand why people believe alt-right men hate women, saying that she has never felt this way and that the majority of her supporters are men (Faucheux, Lokteff 2018). However, she recognized that many women from the movement have claimed to have been subjected to attacks. She then proceeded to ask Lana Lokteff what was her position on the subject and if this is just an opinion from outsiders looking in. Lokteff said that different women experience attacks in different ways. She did not claim that the attacks do not exist. She argued that married and single women are targeted and tend to respond to attacks differently.

In Lokteff's view, "most of the women that might be vulnerable to these things might be single, maybe not in a long-term relationship" (Faucheux, Lokteff 2018). And the attacks they suffer are not in person; those come usually from anonymous accounts on social media. This should not lead people to think that all alt-right and identitarian men act in such a way. Additionally, she argued that many of those accounts probably belong to people from outside of the movement who want to create division in the alt-right by putting men against women. In this sense, she said, "people need to realize that there are people who make up accounts and make things up, who pretend to be in our side, they say things, they want to start division, they want women out of it" (Faucheux, Lokteff 2018).

Both Faucheux and Lokteff further argued that they have never encountered any type of hostility from alt-right men in the offline world. Most men have been "a gentleman, they've always been supportive, they support everything that we do" (Faucheux, Lokteff 2018). Lokteff concluded by saying that she cannot believe that alt-right men are opposed to women's participation in the movement or are abusive towards them, because it does not match with her experience. She

added how there might be men online who identify as nationalists and who behave in such a way, but that they are a minority and do not represent at all alt-right men. The women also claimed that most of the abuse they face comes from women outside of the movement, so their recommendation is for women not to engage in “social media wars”, especially because they do not know who is on the other side of the screen.

On a podcast episode titled “Debunking the Claim that Nationalism is Hostile Towards Women” with the participation of Lana Lokteff, Bre Faucheux, Ayla Stewart, Kirsten Lauryn, and PhilosophiCat, the participants discussed media pieces accusing the alt-right of being a movement hostile to their interests as women. PhilosophiCat started by saying that the idea that the alt-right is hostile to women is spread by a vocal minority of women. She believed that most men tend to be respectful towards women and there are only a few men who, belonging to the fringe of the movement, perpetrate attacks against them. She, however, disagreed with even categorizing those as real nationalists because “if you hate half your race, how can you say that you are pro-white?” (Lokteff, Stewart, Faucheux, Lauryn, PhilosophiCat 2017). She believes that, when the alt-right starts to become a more mainstream movement, those men will be left behind, adding that “you are not going to gain any ground as a nationalist promoting hatred of half of your race” (Lokteff, Stewart, Faucheux, Lauryn, PhilosophiCat 2017).

During the discussion, the women agreed that it is not the majority of men who espouse misogynistic ideas in the alt-right and that women are supported by their male peers, who are also most of the people who consume their content. On the contrary, they claimed that the most virulent attacks they suffer are from other women. For Lokteff, the reason why women are reluctant and afraid of joining the alt-right is not that it is an anti-woman movement, but because of the violence that people have to endure from outside members, such as doxing and campaigns against their reputation. She said that alt-right women constantly receive death and rape threats and that those are not from alt-right men, who are accused of misogyny, but from leftists and women, who are making these accusations in the first place.

On the issue, Lokteff asked another white-nationalist that goes by the name of Cathedral Princess on what her opinion was on the topic of accusations of “woman-hating” in the alt-right. Voicing similar positions, the interviewee said that she has never experienced anything that could be considered “woman-hating” from alt-right men. She argued that “overall, all the guys that I have

interacted with have always been more than kind, more than nice, and more than accepting of me as a woman being a bit more outspoken and a bit of more sort of activity in the alt-right. So, I never ever had any issues” (Lokteff, Cathedral Princess 2016). She did acknowledge, however, that there are some men in online forums advocating for alt-right women to be out of the spotlight, but she did not consider this a general trend among the men in the movement.

In some instances, nevertheless, women do recognize that there is abuse directed at alt-right women. Commenting on discussions of white-sharia⁹ being promoted by alt-right men, Lokteff dismissed such ideas saying “you need women to have a future in the movement because you need to make babies with these women. So, doing things to scare off women coming in is a really retarded and suicidal thing to do” (Lokteff, PhilosophiCat 2017). In a series of tweets in 2017, Tara McCarthy denounced how women were being targeted by alt-right men who wanted to push them out of the movement. The fact gained notoriety and drew more attention to the issue of misogyny in the alt-right. She said that alt-right men were trying to bully women out of the internet and that they were attacking them regardless of their ages or whether they had children. She went on to say that “men in the Alt-Right are going to have to decide whether they will continue to passively/actively endorse this behavior, or speak out against it. If you want more women speaking publicly about ethnonationalism, I suggest you choose the latter” (Leah 2017).

McCarthy not only denouncing men who conducted such attacks, but also the men who did not stand up for the targeted women. She defended that “the problem I’m stating here is not that ‘there are trolls on the internet’ but that people who proclaim to be on our side are trying to tear down women in our in-group” and added that “if you can’t see why this is dysfunctional, I can’t help you” (Leah 2017). McCarthy concluded her denouncing of abuse by saying that if the alt-right was to be understood as a strictly male-space, she

⁹ White sharia is a concept that, although for many is just an alt-right meme, has been publicly defended by white-nationalist men in terms of how women should be treated in an ethnostate. It makes use of fundamentalist gender laws of certain Islamic traditions and reapplies it into a white-nationalist context for the subjugation of women under men.

would be happy to leave it since she had no desire to be part of a movement where she was unwanted (Holt 2017).

Finally, on a podcast episode on “Right-wing women: to defend or not to defend?”, the participants, including PhilosophiCat (the only woman in the panel), discussed Tara McCarthy and Lauren Southern’s criticisms of abuse by alt-right men. It appeared that all participants agreed that women do receive attacks by their male peers. However, they had different stances on whether other men should actively defend women. PhilosophiCat’s position diverted from those of the men in the panel. She began by saying that there seems to be a type of woman in the alt-right that is more targeted than others and that is the woman who does not talk much on issues of traditional values nor does virtue signaling in this sense. In her opinion, women who claim to be tradwives and who constantly say that they are not interested in politics are spared more often from attacks (McLaren, Dulny [no date]).

PhilosophiCat argued that there is an influx of social media accounts seemingly run by men that target women and that it is hard to take them as nationalists. She wondered why would white-nationalist men try to demoralize and exclude women from the discussion just because they do not conform to their ideals of gender roles. Here, it is relevant to point out that PhilosophiCat has argued in different occasions not to be much interested in the issues of motherhood and marriage, saying that she would rather support a system that would allow women to follow this path but that would also permit others to choose to live their lives according to their best interests. She could, in our understanding, empathize more easily with the group of women being attacked.

She added that attacks on women are and have always been a recurring thing and that there is hardly an alt-right woman who puts out content online and does not receive comments such as “she needs to go back in the kitchen and shouldn’t be in politics” (McLaren, Dulny [no date]). She claimed that she mostly ignores these individuals but that, when this becomes a recurring issue, there is something wrong taking place. To conclude her thoughts on the matter, she defended how in the past years there have been a great number of women contributing to forwarding the message of white-nationalism. She argued that these women have been doing an amazing job at promoting the movement and questions why would there be people on their side who actively try to belittle them and make them quit. Attacks on women, when coming from alt-right men, would then be entirely counterproductive to the movement.

3 Discussion

Based on the empirical analysis conducted in the previous chapter, in this segment, I draw general conclusions and expand the discussion on women's motivations and experiences in the alt-right. Here, I address the positions that are solely defended by women and which ones are generally not discussed by them. In this last case, I compare women's positions to that of alt-right men, in special to the latter's most extreme ideas regarding women's nature and their negative impact on the movement. Additionally, I address how we can debate alt-right women's desire for more prominence in the movement without framing it in feminist terms. Finally, I conclude with a discussion on whether is correct to claim that the alt-right has a "woman problem", referring to an inherent inability of the movement to adequately incorporate women into its ranks.

In the alt-right, women take their participation and relevance more seriously than men. They are more accepting and flexible in terms of opening a space for women to join the movement and defend that they have an important role to play in it. This recognition, however, comes with signaling that the reason why they have taken more active roles in politics is due to the exceptionality of times. Aligned to the movement's view, alt-right women claim that the need to protect the white race is so urgent that women are called into engaging more, even if this means relinquishing temporarily stricter roles associated with their gender. Once the future of the white race is secured, alt-right women, in general, agree with falling back into traditional roles, such as marriage and motherhood. Alt-right women do not see themselves as stepping away from those roles while fighting for the movement but claim that, ideally, women should not engage in politics. If the idea of women taking up active roles seems contradictory to notions of traditional femininity, they justify their actions based on the uniqueness of the situation. Women's participation is a historical exception, not the rule, and they constantly signal this.

The idea that politics is not a space to be occupied by women is related to a set of gender beliefs defended by alt-right supporters. Women, in this case, tend to reinforce and hold these same beliefs which can be summarized into three main ideas: gender essentialism and the complementarity of the sexes, white-nationalism' success being connected to individuals performing strict gender roles, and the rejection of feminism. Gender essentialism is the idea that gender informs individuals' preferences and behavior. People are born with certain inherent and

non-mutable characteristics that influence their experiences in life and what roles they will more comfortably perform.

For the alt-right, men and women function each under an archetype of gender; women are more connected to their emotional side, which gives them the preference and advantage in occupying roles involved in nurturing and care-taking. Men, on the contrary, are more in touch with their rational side, which combined with their physical strength, entails that they are more fit for politics and leadership, while also bearing the responsibility of the community's safety. Both archetypes, the nurturer and the protector, are central to the alt-right's vision of an ideal society. The importance of individuals performing their expected roles for white-nationalism's main goal, the protection of the white race, is that it creates harmony between men and women, alleviating possible antagonisms between them which, in the movement's view, happens when men and women's roles overlap. By sedimenting expectations of roles that women and men should perform, the alt-right gives individuals a pre-determined path in life, which is seen as contributing to the wellbeing at the personal, familial, and societal levels. To achieve this, however, alt-right men, and especially women, have to recognize the pervasiveness of feminism's deviation of individuals' envisioned roles. In a step to re-establish a white-majority society in the West, the alt-right must reject feminism and all it entails for women's rights and empowerment.

What the alt-right proposes as an alternative to feminism, however, is based on the very same logic that explains their rejection of the position, which is enforcing women to follow a single path in life. As was addressed in the netnography research, alt-right women's position is that feminism negates and is hostile to women's choices of performing traditionally feminine roles. In turn, this group argues that it is only through traditionalism that women can live a fulfilling life. Women who chose otherwise are denying their nature and are contributing to a state of modern degeneracy that leads to the destruction of the nuclear family and society. Those who defend feminism are said to be in a state of denial of the reality of gender essentialism, and with time, will suffer the consequences of their choices, which are linked to personal and societal degeneracy. In this sense, at the same time that alt-right women embrace traditionalism to break the cycle of deception that comes with feminism, they frame traditionalism as an ideal form of existence, and the only one that can offer women with a happy life. In the end, the problem with feminism for

the alt-right does not seem to be a pressure to follow a specific path in life, but what type of path is offered by it.

Continuing on the topic of feminism, it is important to address how some pieces on the alt-right's hostility towards women have framed women's criticism of the attacks as "hidden, unrecognized feminism" (Leah 2017; Kasana 2017). This claim is problematic in different ways. Alt-right women do not espouse positive feelings towards feminism. What they advocate as women's empowerment, which is even hardly how they frame it, is entirely different from what is promoted by any emancipatory movement. Only if feminism strictly means equality of opportunities could alt-right women be remotely associated with it. What most alt-right women advocate for is the opportunity to speak up to advance an anti-women ideology, one that subjugates non-white, non-heteronormative, and non-Western women in its core. Cases of women fighting for a place in the alt-right do not require analysts the avail of feminist language to understand their desire for participation and prominence in the movement. Therefore, such descriptions should be avoided.

Having addressed some of the ideas on gender defended by alt-right women, I turn to a discussion on their experiences inside the movement. From the information gathered during the netnography research, women tend to be more private than men about their support for the alt-right and tend to prioritize their safety and that of their children over showing overt support for the movement. This is directly connected to alt-right women's fear of violence from non-white-nationalist individuals. Fear of reprimands, therefore, seems to be relevant for women's consideration of whether or how they will come forth publicly about their support for the movement. Women are quite vocal about their anxieties and fears and this is usually framed in terms of gender stereotypes as well, in which women portray themselves as being more fragile than men and as always prioritizing their family over other matters. Many alt-right women claim that, for this reason, women should not feel pressured to express support for the movement and that they can still help it by supporting their husbands and raising their children under white-nationalist ideas. This is, after all, women's main roles in a white-nationalist society.

Another issue mentioned by some alt-right women, and similar to what was said by Latif et al. (2019) on their analysis of exit and disillusionment of white-supremacist women, is the "lack of networks of support", which would play a role in their participation and abandonment of the

movement. This is special for women who are more public about their positions. For them, women will likely find little support from their peers in case they must step out of the public eye, and this is both from their family and friends, many of which they have lost contact upon aligning with the movement, and also from other alt-right members. What we can gather is that these women have little trust in the supportive capabilities of the movement, despite claiming that it is a space where true sisterhood and belonging can be found by white individuals.

Fear and lack of support, nevertheless, have not pushed women away from the movement. They have sought safer ways to express it and the main one is through online spaces. Online spaces, combined with the decentralization of the alt-right, have also provided women with visibility and an opportunity to contribute to the movement more freely, which in many traditional organized extremist groups, might not have been possible. Having established this, I address what ideas are solely or majorly held by women.

Alt-right women broadly defend that they have a role to play in the protection of the white race and the success of the alt-right. In women's perspectives, their presence and visibility per se help forward the alt-right as women's presence makes the movement more credible and serious. Women also claim that their presence contributes to the softening of the movement's image since 1) women are perceived to be not as threatening as men are and, for this reason, 2) they believe they can get away with saying harsher things than men can. In this last case, women's messages would function as a gateway into the movement through the normalization of extreme ideas that, if defended by men or not framed in terms of individual and familial security, which women usually do, would not resonate with the targeted audience. Therefore, alt-right women uphold that having women defending alt-right ideas greatly contributes to attracting new members, especially other women.

Some other positions are majorly defended by women and are not commonly discussed by alt-right men and these relate to how the alt-right benefits women in particular. On this topic, I highlight the idea that the movement is a bastion of white women's sisterhood. Alt-right women claim quite often that, by rejecting modern society and feminism, they can find solace and a true community with other alt-right, white-nationalist women. This is broadly advertised as a factor that would attract non-alt-right women into the movement. Alt-right men, however, do not seem to address nor defend this position. Another position defended by alt-right women but not popular

among men is that Western society is a gift from white men to white women, who in turn, should honor men and their sacrifices through the support of white-nationalism. As was analyzed by Mattheis (2018), this narrative has been used as a recruitment tool of women into the alt-right. Alt-right men, in turn, justify the defense of Western civilization and Western values by saying that those are superior to that of other communities and this claim is usually based on the superiority of white persons and the fundamental contributions of men to create such legacy. Women are not generally portrayed by alt-right men as having made any significant contributions to the construction of what they understand and defend as the West.

There are other positions held by men concerning women that are not commonly discussed by alt-right women. One is that they are naturally less trustworthy and therefore less capable to commit to white-nationalism, which affects how many men see women's presence in the movement as not only unnecessary but also as a disadvantage. Another is that most women in white-nationalist groups are seeking personal gains and commonly cause infighting. During the netnography research, I have not observed women referring to themselves as being less capable to uphold white-nationalist positions nor to their presence as a disturbance to the movement. Women, generally, do not engage with these arguments.

Finally, on the positions mostly rejected by alt-right women, the main one is regarding the accusation that the alt-right is a misogynistic movement. Alt-right women in general, do not agree with this affirmation and claim that, despite suffering considerable abuse, it comes mainly from infiltrators and outsiders. They claim that it is illogical for there to exist white-nationalist men who are abusive towards their female peers because that would mean they are hostile to half of their race. The majority of women defend that, according to their experiences, alt-right men have been nothing but supportive of women. However, in some instances, alt-right women have recognized that there have been cases of mistreatment of women, especially in online spaces. In those cases, women have more vocally denounced such behavior, although, at the same time, arguing that it comes from an insignificant minority of men and that women should not engage with said abusers. Despite those denouncements, there is still a trend among alt-right women to normalize the abuse they receive as something expected, be that from outsiders or misogynistic alt-right men.

Connected to the rejection of abuse, alt-right women also deny accusations of defending a movement that works against their interests as women. They claim that the alt-right represents and protects their interests and addresses their worries as white women. They also argue that most of their expectations towards the movement are aligned to that of men, so it is untrue that the alt-right is not sympathetic to their perspectives. Additionally, women reject the idea that there is no space for them in the alt-right, especially in terms of leadership. This does not come from them defending that women can assume leadership positions but from women claiming that they do not want to be in such positions. Commonly, alt-right women argue that they are unfit to lead the movement, which should be the task of white-nationalist men. Women, in this context, claim to be contributing by support, even when the work they do is the same as that carried out by men. It appears that alt-right men and women are engaged in very similar activities, especially online, but that there is a considerable difference in regards to how they frame their support, in which women will hardly do so in terms of leadership. This is likely a mechanism used to align the work they do with broad narratives and archetypes of gender defended by the movement.

Having considered these observations, is it correct to claim that the alt-right has a “woman problem”? I defend that it depends on our framing of the issue, particularly if we choose to analyze it through an insider or outsider perspective. Our framing choice has its advantages and disadvantages. If we observe and judge the matter as outsiders, the alt-right will inherently have a woman problem for we observe with expectations of gender equality as an ideal goal to be reached and women’s participation to be valued by its members, even if we disagree with their ultimate objective.

However, we are referring to white-nationalism, an ideology that in its core is constructed on gender inequality by any progressive and feminist point of view. In this case, women will never have a comfortable and secure place in the alt-right because for that to happen, the ideology which it is based (gender essentialism and gender roles) would have to be reformed or abandoned completely to accommodate their more active participation. This is the most comfortable position to be held by those who study the movement because it does not require the observer to make use of the movement’s lenses on gender, in special to see through alt-right women’s perspectives how they can be accepting of the treatment they receive in the group.

The disadvantage of such framing is the observer's inability to comprehend how individuals, in this case, women, make sense of their motivations in participating in the movement, particularly when those do not match with our expectations of women's interests and behavior. This can be understood in terms of Blee's methodological bridge (2007). There would not be only a barrier to be surpassed concerning the intent of analysts to engage with the group but also a barrier in making use of the movement's perspectives to understand the phenomenon observed when those do not align with the analysts' ethical parameters. A possible solution to this methodological puzzle is the usage of insiders' framing.

In an insider's framing, the analyst recognizes that for comprehending the phenomenon observed, they must avail, even if partially, of its internal logic. For the study of alt-right women's motivations and expectations in the movement, this would mean that the researcher would adopt the position that gender equality is not a feature nor goal in the alt-right. Consequently, defending that the alt-right has a "women problem" might not be the position most adequately held. From what was shown through the netnography research, alt-right women do not engage in the movement despite its positions on gender but recurringly because of them. Most women are attracted to the alt-right because of such positions and they actively help to construct and sediment those. With women's normalization of their "auxiliary roles" and occasional abuse from their male peers, women seek to shed the image that they face barriers in supporting the movement.

This framing is not to excuse the alt-right of any of the criticisms it receives in terms of its treatment of women and the issue of gender; abusive behavior continues to exist within the movement regardless of how neglected or dismissed it is. The choice for an insider's framing that does not focus on insisting that there is a woman problem in the alt-right is not an ethical position on the analysts' side but a methodological tool of the temporary lifting of moral judgments that would inhibit analysts of perceiving women's perspectives with the goal of better understanding their positions and motivations. This framing advantage is addressing women's experiences in women's terms without forcing external pressure's on them to view their circumstances through the analysts' lenses.

4 Conclusion

The popularization of the alt-right in the past years has inspired discussions around how far-right ideologies still find a place in modern society. Many discussions on this subject seek to explore personal and group interests for joining such movements and how those address individual's anxieties and expectations. Most pieces of research concerning the alt-right, however, tend to focus on men's motivations and experiences, as they are popularly perceived as being the great majority of supporters. Although women do support the movement, discussions on their perspectives tend to be framed almost exclusively in two issues that are closely related: cases of misogynistic attacks and women's support for a movement that works against their interests as a group.

This is not a new problem in the research of women and the far-right. As a common practice, greatly due to the lack of substantial research focusing on far-right women's motivations, many researchers tend to project into the subjects their interests and values. This, in turn, creates a methodological barrier that hampers analysts' abilities to grasp women's real experiences and perspectives and consequently, affects negatively how knowledge on women's radicalization is produced.

Rather than assuming women's motivations and experiences, which leads to affirmations such as that alt-right women take part in a movement that is contrary to their interests, there are both opportunities and need for research that will advance knowledge on this phenomenon. This observation has motivated the design and conducting of this research. While focusing on women's perspectives through netnographic methods, I was able to delve into women's particular motivations for joining the movement and how they make sense of their experiences in it. There were numerous reasons given by women for supporting the alt-right and those are fairly distant from what is expected by observers unfamiliar with women's narratives.

This research has engaged with how women are not solely reactive and passive alt-right supporters, following the movement uncritically, but contribute avidly to the construction of far-right ideology. Such a process takes place through women's reinforcement, negation, and reinterpretation of the movement's beliefs, which at times align to that of their male peers, but often distance itself from the latter's views. As I concluded from my observations of women's

narratives, regardless of their support for gender traditionalism that ideally draws women into the domestic realm through the performance of nurturing and caretaking roles, they generally are more accepting and supportive of women's engagement in the movement. More importantly, women not only support their peers' participation but also insist vehemently that having women publicly defending the movement has direct benefits in terms of attracting new members and bettering its public image.

Therefore, although the majority of alt-right members, at least publicly, are men, we must be careful to not characterize the movement and the ideology in which it is based, only in terms of men's perspectives. Understanding the alt-right exclusively through men's perspectives might produce portrayals of the movement as one that is ideologically homogenous and consequently, analyses that do not consider how women see themselves as promoters of white-nationalism. Therefore, researches that engage directly with the alt-right, and generally with far-right individuals, but that are not sensitive to the particular experiences and perspectives of women will fall short on providing a concrete and useful analysis of their navigation through those movements.

In practice, this entails that even if misogyny is a rampant problem in the movement, researchers must acknowledge that alt-right women either do not frame abuses similarly to outsiders or simply deny their existence. Despite gender-based violence and lack of space to perform relevant roles being known factors for women's disengagement, physically and ideologically, other factors contribute to their permanence in the group. White-nationalism has and will always count on women's support and from what was gathered from this analysis, they are interested and engaged in its promotion. Men do not have the monopoly of the movement as women provide a vital contribution to the perpetuation of white-nationalism. This must be reflected in discussions on women's participation in far-right groups.

This, however, does not mean that there should be no efforts put in place to disengage women from far-right groups. Instead, what should be avoided while doing so is the expectation and treatment of gender abuse as the definitive factor for women's disengagement from the alt-right or any other extremist movement that promotes strictly traditional views on gender. Women are engaged for a multitude of reasons and gender, although highly important, cannot be treated as the ultimate prediction of women's behavior. Additionally, gender strict roles and conflictual

relationships with peers might affect women more often and strongly in organized far-right groups than in groups with looser ties and lack of hierarchical structures, as is the case of the alt-right. The movement's organization, or lack thereof, combined with a strong online presence allows for women's engagement to happen more freely, which might ease feelings of dissatisfaction. Although still receiving abuse in such environments, the online domain provides women with a space to voice their positions and perspectives, which might not be a common feature of organized racist groups.

The previous observations on women's experiences and motivations, if incorporated into this field of research, will likely further academic and practical understanding of women's radicalization into right-wing extremism. Additionally, they may also serve in guiding future policy-making decisions, informing interested actors and key stakeholders in their formulation of strategies to tackle women's radicalization, as well as presenting affected individuals with safe paths of exit from those groups.

5 Summary

In the Master's Thesis "Roles Women Play in the Alt-Right: Aspirations and Limitations", I sought to answer how alt-right women explain their motivations in becoming and being involved in the movement, their expectations when joining in, and how those are matched once they are engaged. The motives for conducting this analysis were 1) the gap in research focused exclusively on women's experiences and narratives in the alt-right and 2) the existence of methodological barriers in the assessment of alt-right women's interests, which commonly distance their behaviors from that of non-alt-right women.

The Thesis was divided into four chapters. Chapter One, "Theory and Methodology", begins with a literature review on works concerning women's support and experiences with far-right ideology. It follows with a section on the research's methodology, which was a non-participative netnography research of 25 profiles of alt-right women. Finally, the chapter presents the research's theoretical framework addressing some of the movement's concepts and beliefs on the topics of feminism, women as race traitors, and the place of women in the alt-right.

Chapter Two contains the empirical analysis of women's experiences and narratives, which are analyzed in more depth in Chapter 3 ("Discussion"). From this analysis, I observed that anti-feminist and the belief in gender essentialism and complementarity are strong factors in pushing women into the movement, which are similar positions held by alt-right men. Additionally, despite idealizing women's roles as those connected to the domestic realm of care-taking, alt-right women see in the "threat of replacement of white populations" an urgent push into performing more active roles in the support of the movement.

Consequently, women believe there are space and need for them in the alt-right. Most roles women expect to play, in their view, provide a special advantage to the movement. First, women believe they can attract new members, especially other women, which in higher numbers could contribute to the alt-right being perceived more seriously by outsiders. Secondly, women act as normalizers of extreme ideas and discourse because of their "non-threatening" guise. I conclude my analysis highlighting the need for women-focused research, which reveals their relevance in the construction of far-right ideology and addresses common misunderstandings in terms of their motivations and expectations towards the alt-right.

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