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Fast Capitalism is an academic journal with a political intent. We publish reviewed scholarship and essays about the impact of rapid information and communication technologies on self, society and culture in the 21ˢᵗ century. We do not pretend an absolute objectivity; the work we publish is written from the vantages of viewpoint. Our authors examine how heretofore distinct social institutions, such as work and family, education and entertainment, have blurred to the point of near identity in an accelerated, post-Fordist stage of capitalism. This makes it difficult for people to shield themselves from subordination and surveillance. The working day has expanded; there is little down time anymore. People can 'office' anywhere, using laptops and cells to stay in touch. But these invasive technologies that tether us to capital and control can also help us resist these tendencies. People use the Internet as a public sphere in which they express and enlighten themselves and organize others; women, especially, manage their families and nurture children from the job site and on the road, perhaps even 'familizing' traditionally patriarchal and bureaucratic work relations; information technologies afford connection, mitigate isolation, and even make way for social movements. We are convinced that the best way to study an accelerated media culture and its various political economies and existential meanings is dialectically, with nuance, avoiding sheer condemnation and ebullient celebration. We seek to shape these new technologies and social structures in democratic ways.

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* We invite contributions on these and related issues. Some papers will stick close to the ground of daily life and politics; others will ascend the heights of theory in order to get the big picture. The work we publish is both disciplinary and interdisciplinary, bridging the social sciences and humanities. Culture and capital are keywords. We are also interested in cities, the built environment and nature, and we encourage people who theorize space to submit their work.

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The academic precariat post-COVID-19

Aidan Cornelius-Bell and Piper A Bell

Introduction

The nature of academic work has again shifted, this time as a result of the COVID-19 global health crisis disproportionately affecting the academic precariat. The continually accelerating conditions of global capitalism have created increasing precariatization in academic workers of the knowledge economy. Alongside issues of mental health, instability, and a denial of the possibility of a stable future, the precariat are also those who are "expected to have a level of education that is greater than the labour they are expected to perform or expect to obtain" (Standing 2014:10). The conditions for work have changed dramatically as a result of the pandemic with wide-ranging social and economic impacts. Global capitalism continues its destructive appetite for adaptation and subsumption of human energy and labor, pausing only briefly for localized lockdowns which, we argue, has created increasingly dangerous and tenuous working conditions for the academic precariat. From an initial lack of support for the precarious workforce to work *from home* through to a current emphasizing of "if you won't do it, we will find someone who will", the precarious worker in academia is under greater pressure than ever before1. The continued neoliberalising of and capitalist creep into global higher education has created conditions of extreme surplus labor; labor which is highly educated, capable, and anxious *to* work (Standing 2014). Alongside this slide into almost pre-Fordist employment (Betti 2016) conditions comes a polarization towards ideological extremism, a twisted commitment to managerialism, and a hyper-focus on "job ready graduates" has crept into the structures and core nature of higher education (Brett 2021; Giroux 2014; Norton 2020). An obsession of politicians-come-Vice Chancellors through the entire senior leadership of universities in a vain march towards "profit" through the production of flash buildings and fast-paced organizational change into a zombification of higher education. Amongst this corporate-political class, as Brabazon (2020:131) has characterized, "There is always another Key Performance Indicator, change management initiative, and restructure", a moving feast for academics, professionals, and students who work in the higher education sector, and a constant re-evaluation of conditions for employment. Gone is the period of academia as a secure source of employment, at least for wealthy white men, with its tenured positions to public appearance offering a cushy and relaxed life lent over a book or occasionally leading discussions with small groups of students. It is replaced now by "dualization" of academic work where "insiders [are] in secure, stable employment and outsiders [are] in fixed-term, precarious employment" (Afonso 2013). The promise of a rapid increase in doctoral "students" for an educated populous, strong democracy and knowledgeable pool for potential academic employment has instead resulted in a collapse of academic work into a cat fight for the highest outputs, contributions to journals and books, teaching evaluation results, and a continuous competition for more work (Rao, Hosein, and Raaper 2021).

COVID-19 added yet more vectors of insecurity, angst, and anger for the already precarious academics of the twenty-first-century university. In addition to changing working conditions, it highlighted the tragic fact that it is not just "management" academics who leverage the precariat, rather the entirety of academia, including beloved academic mentors who face increasing incentives to abuse their stable power. Rather than fight back, the secure working bloc turns on the precariat, not just out of fear for themselves, but because they have accepted new capitalist terms and are increasingly succumbing to university management hegemony (here taken in terms of Gramsci 1996). Below, we briefly explore the changes to the university system during the pandemic, explore our experiences of moving online and the changing pressures of working from home in insecure work, evaluate the disproportionate impact of insecure

pandemic affected work on academic women, and propose a re-centering of doctoral education and traineeship as a productive road to intervene in the desperate future of academia.

The global economy, a pandemic, and technological changes to academic work

During the COVID-19 global health crisis, the fundamental nature of work changed as countries around the world entered lockdown. These changes were disproportionate for the service industry, front line, and scientific workers whose work, in general terms, continued to operate in a pre-pandemic mode (Myers et al. 2020). Another subset of people lost their means of employment altogether, and already vulnerable people were at a particular disadvantage, including the working class and those in insecure work, as disproportionately affected (Williams 2020). Indeed, the effects of epidemics and pandemics on work has had a notable impact over time which, according to economists, cannot be fully measured (Keogh-Brown et al. 2010). With the recent pandemic, a rapid decentralization of knowledge work occurred, and in countries where the effects of COVID-19 lockdowns and behavioral modifications have continued, there has been a sustained exit of knowledge workers from cities and urban centers involving, in particular, the wealthy middle class. Notably, epidemiologists have highlighted the role of cities in the spread and sustain of COVID-19, in particular in the networked ways in which larger cities operate, with many shared services, spaces, and health systems (Lai et al. 2020). In this regard, those wealthy workers able to exit cities and work remotely are literally safer, both in terms of health conditions as well as their established economic positions, across the health crisis. During this rapid shift to "work from home", or perhaps realistically transition to *not working* for a great number of people, engagement with digital technology increased dramatically. Online meetings have proliferated and replaced much human-to-human contact across 2020 as a "safe" mode of communication (Hodder 2020). An emergence of new language has accompanied this shift of work online, in itself a quasi-marketing tactic, the rise of "Zoom Fatigue" (Wolf 2020) as a compliment to hyper-capitalism's burnout is a sad reality for many still able to engage with their workplace from home (Walker 1986).

The move to Zoom for work has also been mirrored in higher education globally with higher education workers – academic, professional and students alike – moving rapidly to online conferencing tools to replace face-to-face interactions (Serhan 2020). The move online, termed by many universities as "emergency remote teaching", or for international students "emergency remote offshore teaching," saw dramatic shifts to the pedagogy and mode of work for huge cohorts of students and staff. Quick to distinguishing between "emergency" and business as usual, universities justified their rapid curriculum adaptation, and in some instances dilapidation, as a necessary continuation of "essential" work (Hodges et al. 2020; Rahiem 2020). For many academic staff this transition heralded a newfound collaborative spirit around the teaching and learning process in the pressure-cooker of lockdown, and an engagement with technology – something which may have been previously less than prominent – became a necessity. Suddenly, those with skills in distance and online education became informal, networked leaders in the education space (Fernandez and Shaw 2020). Amongst the scientific community actively researching COVID-19 a rapid opening of research knowledge occurred through fast-paced publication and the use of open access knowledge dissemination networks (Lee and Haupt 2020). Broadly, this global health crisis has created significantly challenging conditions for those in precarious and insecure work. Even amongst knowledge workers with the capacity to *move online*, there are disproportionate economic effects on those with and without stable employment from people of color, women, and poorer communities (Clark et al. 2020; Dang, Huynh, and Nguyen 2020; Fortuna et al. 2020). For students of these backgrounds across the sector, the move to online learning and teaching had disproportionate impacts as students without access to relatively modern technology, high-speed internet access, or a stable home environment from which to work suffered a lack of socio-economic ability to engage. Respectively, precarious academic workers found themselves with the immediate need to adapt to working from home, teaching from home, and with increasing demand from their institutions to support students of diverse backgrounds. Significantly, this included international students who were dramatically impacted by travel restrictions and health conditions at home (Nguyen and Balakrishnan 2020; Paudel 2020; Supiani et al. 2020).

International students make up the economic lifeblood of many of Australia's eastern coast universities, with high numbers of Chinese students supporting the universities' dangerously ambitious research agendas. Amidst a struggling

university sector, the crisis of the pandemic has plunged many of Australia's universities into deep uncertainty (Doidge and Doyle 2020). Indeed, recent political conversations have emerged which would see conservative and liberal governments merging and combining universities in a misguided attempt to save, enhance or shuffle the institutions up the international rankings (Siebert 2020). With COVID-19, many international students were suddenly plunged into difficult financial conditions themselves and no longer in a position to pay their exorbitant tuition fees with no support from the government: "we were told by the Prime Minister to pack our bags and leave if we were not able to support ourselves financially" (Sivarajah 2020:35). A spattering of student support from foreign governments and local universities eventually emerged, which ensured select international students were able to either stay in Australia or return to their own country, though government support never came. At our university, international and disadvantaged students were supported through a tailored financial package which went some way towards providing aid for students in difficult economic conditions as a result of the initial lockdown (Our P&VC announced this package here: Stirling 2020). While student support locally emerged, the Liberal/National Coalition federal government in Australia refused to reasonably support the international students who pay their way to an education in the country (Nguyen and Balakrishnan 2020).

Universities in Australia, already in a difficult position and struggling for relevance, funding, and acting in increasingly cutthroat corporate forms of governance in a race to the bottom, took further hits with many institutions shedding "insider" permanent staff in "necessary" organizational downsizing (Universities Australia 2021). Claims that the government failed to bail out the university sector were ill-received by the public, whose conservative cultural conditioning has worked to position them against any form of "bailout" and a disposition of apathy towards the problems of the university sector. Complicated further by a general perception of universities as ivory towers where privileged professors reside, and an ongoing Liberal Party rhetoric of the university as a societal disservice meant only for the privileged minority destined to Liberal Party politics has created a broad culture of anti-intellectualism.

Moving online and precarious work

During South Australia's first lockdown, we were both teaching across multiple topics in a handful of disciplines as casual employees with heavy teaching loads. Both of us had fallen trap to the necessity of absorbing as much work as possible as the glimmer of hope for a permanent academic position flashed before our eyes. Just as the depiction of a Chinese epidemic was beginning to make its first appearances in Australian media, we were both in a struggle to take on work across bridging programs, the humanities, and education, balancing what we needed to pay our rent against how much we could manage to teach, mark and support in addition to working on our doctoral studies: the very image of precarious workers in higher education under piles of student papers and swimming through content for multi-disciplinary teaching (O'Connor 2020). While we are both experienced "casual academics," neither of us had ever been offered a contract, let alone a permanent position in the academy. Our contributions across a year equaled in the order of educating 300 students, marking some 1,800 assignments, and making substantial contributions as casual research assistants to a range of projects, including those funded by the prestigious Australian Research Council. The "glory" of working on these projects was an internal victory in ourselves, a kind of "I can do this" attitude to our own detriment.

Neither of us experienced "burnout", as there were certainly substantive crunch points across our working periods. Balanced with the dearth of work across the summer and winter breaks, we could rationalize the exceptional load between us as both a way to pay the bills, the privilege of teaching, and the glimmer of possibility of academic roles at the end of the tunnel. It was not long into our Semester 1, 2020 teaching that the sudden necessity to move online surfaced in the country. With almost no notice and a flurry of activity by insider academics and professional support staff on campus, we were teaching online. As casuals with no paid access to professional learning, and limited access to resources, support, and, honestly, time, there were no bona fide supports for casual tutors moving to online learning and teaching. Both being "young", relatively tech-savvy academics, we were able to stumble our way through using our university's online conferencing environment, collaborate, and with the influx of our students streaming in to collaborate with us, it felt like the sharp learning curve was happening together. Fortunately, our inexperienced students went easy on us, but amongst our casual colleagues there were many without adequate equipment, skills, and

support to engage with online teaching. In some instances, these peers lost their teaching contracts, easily rescinded by the university and delegated to other eager casuals who had rapidly developed a knack for talking at students for an hour tutorial online.

Balancing Collaborate, Microsoft Teams for our professional communication about the research work we were both managing, and a deluge of emails from students, this was one of the busiest times either of us have ever experienced. The immense stress of juggling this work with next to no human support and no financial support, with a requirement that we redevelop tutorial content and workshop activities *on the fly,* while the permanent "insider" academics languished with their two or three classes online, created an easily depressive environment *in our homes.* As with many of those working from home, particularly as a novel experience, having been recently evicted from a shared office in our then College, the boundaries between work and home life blurred. Both of us had experiences of working well into the early hours of the morning writing emails to students, contributing to publications, drafting reports, and revising teaching plans. The slide into "work as life" was, for us, nearly complete. Admittedly, we were taking on a lot of work – work we were capable of doing with a track record of "success", though we could not have predicted the timing of the pandemic and its wide-ranging impacts on our work. We both managed to successfully complete two semesters in 2020 of teaching, though with a substantially reduced load in Semester 2, with positive student evaluations of our teaching and high praise received for our commitment to our student's success, wellbeing, and engagement during the pandemic's lockdowns, though none of this is coming from the university's insider academics. The move online, however, was not the only dramatic change during the pandemic. Casual employment conditions shifted, and the responsibilities of caring for students shifted disproportionately, with student expectations increasing around "care," particularly from female academics (Kınıkoğlu and Can 2021; Nash and Churchill 2020). Across 2020 we both lost substantial amounts of work, partly due to natural attrition of research and teaching work in a pandemic, and in no small part due to changing workplace conditions in the academy and a marked increase in exploitation of precarious workers.

Insecurity, pandemic, and academic women

The pandemic created employment insecurity across a range of categories, the effects of which were exacerbated for women, particularly those in insecure work (Churchill 2020; Wenham et al. 2020). Educational participation in Australia results in a high number of women "prepared" for skilled work, however, gender segregation leads to women being "more likely to be on the frontline as essential workers putting them even more at risk of being exposed to coronavirus" (Churchill 2020:3). With demands on women increasing for care obligations, be they responsible for their own family and children, or for labor which entails care for others, and labor in the "home workplace," women have been disproportionately disadvantaged in terms of additional unpaid work during the pandemic. Indeed, even amongst those essential researchers in academia, with a disproportionate gender balance *towards* women in the health professions, correspondence in *The Lancet* highlights that "at 30%, 28%, and 22%, women's shares of overall, first, and last authorship in COVID-19 papers decreased [in 2020] by 16%, 23%, and 16%, respectively" (Gabster et al. 2020:1969).

The exploitation of women's labor to support men's publishing, work, and academic careers mark a repeat of the patterns of the historical academy. While this phenomenon is far from new, as White (2001) highlighted, corporatization and managerialism have only accelerated the gap between men and women in the academy, and, importantly, even in the 1990s there had been ongoing issues of managerialism and "a negative impact on the work patterns and pay rates of Australian women academics" (White 2001:67). The damaging impacts of capitalist acceleration and a cultural replacement in university management towards managerialism have only amplified the challenges for women in academia. While under the guise of progress, or perhaps while they are ostensibly "in charge," there is a constructed "glass cliff" where academic women can be deliberately placed in positions where their progress is limited by design and their tenure is denied and ultimately reduced to administrative work as opposed to scholarly prestige (Peterson 2015). Moreover, these positions are the vast majority of high-level academic ranks for women (ranks D & E in Australia) and management are, themselves, an image of precarity, working on borrowed time and power (Stringer et al. 2018). In this space, as academic women begin to "move up" through a constructed

academic hierarchy – to which hegemonic men are not beholden – they inherit a credulous acceptance of, and even a dependence on, the extant institutional patriarchal systems which exploit women and their labor (Bone 2018). Here, women with "opportunity" to compete in the false labor market are converted to intense dependency, an *esprit de corps* with the patriarchs – the hegemonic ideal which in reality endlessly pits women against women, including senior academic women against junior academic women, in an exploitative relation which positions women from the beginning of their careers as the hard worker under the academic man and, in many instances, unable to lift other women, even to the point of deliberate sabotage.

In conjunction with the pandemic, the augmentation of the problems with "pipelines" for women through higher education, with the recent proliferation of doctoral students and reductions in total numbers of "insider" stable academic positions, they have always affected women beyond measure. While, in broad terms, educational participation by women in Australia is comparatively high, the pipeline, or pathway, through to stable "insider" work in the academy is still, as White (2001) asserted, leaky. Doctoral programs no longer automatically include high quality academic mentorship or internships into teaching and learning or research processes of the crumbling academy; both of us experienced a complete lack of support from our then supervisors during our shift to emergency remote teaching, both in supervisory capacity in our doctoral education and from our immediate supervisors in the teaching programs we worked in. Indeed, it was almost as though we had disappeared to the entire department. Later we learned about weekly check-ins between "insider" academics, an emanation of support from leadership, including the organization of forums to discuss strategies for online teaching, and several above-and-beyond support measures for those academics to whom a computer is still a scary technological object rather than a tool for educational ends. Our experiences of our then supervisors could certainly be characterized as "exploiter" (Brabazon 2016:15), and, in particular, shone a light back on the sexist relationship between male academics and their female students that is still rampant in academia.

Rather than the mentor-mentee relationship of promise, the female, indeed often feminist, precariat can still unknowingly be trapped in a sexist relationship in which she falls prey to the age-old *woman behind the academic man*, indeed, a white man of privilege posing himself as a feminist-sympathizer gaining favor and even flanked by his female colleagues for his apparent work for women. The female doctoral student will work hard to contribute substantially to her male academic's research, only for it to be claimed in his name. This accelerated through COVID-19 to the point where a female student could become literally invisible to the institution whilst working from home, enabling the exploitative relationship to expand and, like an eclipse, allowing a subsumption of "her" work into "his". The female junior researcher can easily become a literal *housewife to academia* if the academy does not protect her or recognize her status as a contributing citizen of the academy (O'Keefe and Courtois 2019). The invisibility of female work in the pandemic meant that women may be unable to take any credit, or be acknowledged in any way, for the work they meaningfully contributed, perhaps due to a toxic male of academic "prowess" that feeds on the labor and flanking of female junior academics, which, critically, must remain junior by necessity for his success. Any glimmer of hope for the future of an academic career that the female precariat might have had was seriously threatened during COVID-19 lockdown, when sexist, white, male academics could not be called out in a *see something say something* on campus that, at very least, enabled the calling out of exploitation – even if it never resulted in action. Keeping the *woman at home* made it such that the academy needed to do nothing about the oppression which had been occurring since before the pandemic. The female junior researchers' presence, standing behind the white, able-bodied, heterosexual, academic man rendered them literally invisible to the machinery of the university. Maximizing on the ability to exploit, and scrambling to highlight significance in the academy, now mobilized through the invisibility of the female junior, enabled a vainglorious exploitative male academic to profit, through inaction, from the work of a female precarious "outsider".

Doctoral education and traineeship against the storm

In late capitalism, university qualifications are aggressively repositioned towards market objectives, from political rhetoric through to university advertising campaigns (Brett 2021; Connell 2013; Gottschall and Saltmarsh 2017). Including an obsessive and accelerating focus on the use of emergent technologies, including virtual reality,

blockchain, and big data, made to fit with teaching and learning in undergraduate, science, technology, engineering, math, humanities, arts, social sciences, education, law, government, medicine and nursing qualifications – regardless of authentic benefit or even relevance (for example: Eijnatten, Pieters, and Verheul 2013; Kaplan 2015; Kitchin 2014; Rooksby and Dimitrov 2019; Skiba 2017). A subsequent adaptation of teaching and learning towards convenience, a "McDonaldization" of degrees (Nadolny and Ryan 2015), and the decaying value of a qualification for learning or as a fundamental pillar of engaged, critical democracy erodes the very purpose and nature of the scholarly promise in universities. Australian universities find themselves trapped in a self-harm cycle, managerial university executive driving itself towards rapid technological and educational change, driving the cost of the "campus" up, chasing enhanced research outcomes that ignore any actual cultural, social, health, or political benefit, and a federal political system which continues to catastrophically cut, reimagine and redistribute funding and models of higher education. An endless cut, shift, restructure, recreate, move and divide between the soft sciences and hard sciences, the pitting of academics against one another2, an increasing scarcity of jobs, and an endlessly unstable and increasingly mentally draining and damaging university landscape have emerged. This is a scary world for future academics. While it is important to acknowledge that not all students will not necessarily continue beyond an undergraduate or masters qualification, those that do are increasingly taking what is of *value* from the research process and exporting it into private enterprise to produce more private profit, as the only space with the possibility of stability for the factory production line of quantitative skill Ph.D. holders (Brabazon 2016). The promise of higher education as an institution of learning, sharing knowledge, and democratization briefly realized in the 1970s and 1980s after the dramatic social upheaval and student power movements of the 1960s are but a flash in the historical pan as universities give up on democracy and possibility in favor of corporatization, market competition, deregulation, mergers and fee hikes. The university suffers in an era of students seen singularly as consumers, valued for their market use-value (Brown 2015). The cultural shift in the contemporary capitalist university, itself a bifurcation of academy-as-institution and academy-as-tradition, has seen a departure from the academic community towards use-value profit. Here, an exploitative academic model has been allowed to thrive, enabling a collective *value extraction* from the precarious worker, often incredibly skilled intellectual laborers, under the banner of attracting research funding and appealing to management hegemony. The secure academic pivots from a scholar to a sales front as their presidents and vice-chancellors had only a few years before. Here, the scant few who fight back for equitable working conditions and a return to the 'golden era' of universities voices are drowned out, and while the 1960s image of a university was far from an egalitarian class, race, and gender utopia, it stands starkly as an image against the modern academic malaise or exploitative marketing-man.

A reconceptualization, then, is necessary in order to reposition education and universities in contemporary culture; a move towards a *new way* that acknowledges the problems, exploitations, and failures of the university institution of the past, which allows for a radical, yet necessary, new university. This need not be implemented in the hallowed halls of Loxbridge, nor the Ivy American university; those that wish to build a new way *can*. Starting with a relatively weakened, yet employment-stable position of academics of rebellious interest, and through the creation of communities around practice and knowledge sharing the academy *qua* tradition can find its way back to its purpose as a public good. While leading from the bottom, itself a monumental task, provides its own challenges, the resultant 'metric' uplift, which meshes with fresh modes of being in higher education, is possible together. By casting down the *marketing-man* in an allegiance of Ph.D., precariat, and tenured activist-scholar, new spaces and ways of working become clearer, though they require a severe commitment to action. This initiative, possible only through a unification of those inside and out of the academy, creates conditions for a shared consciousness of Gramscian tradition. Therefore, in this section, we pose four recommendations to re-center doctoral education as a pathway to change universities for the better.

1. Research support for Ph.D. students and mentored pathways to research active positions

Universities have the opportunity to provide support for students who have an identified interest in pursuing a research trajectory. By tailoring mentoring and support programs, universities can re-value doctoral students' contributions, *with pay,* which would enable thorough research engagement across disciplines. By tailoring a stream in doctoral programs to research-focused students, through a combination of intensified funding for research support

and training and through new mentorship pathways and incentives for students in the discipline, the possibility that Ph.D. students will "succeed", by metric success, increases dramatically. Valuing contributions and facilitating meaningful learning through research traineeships which, based on evidence and track record, eventuate in contract-pathway to permanent research-focused roles for successful participants uniquely solves the problems of immediate tenure and the precariousness of working in academia: the loss of talented researchers under a mountain of marking. Accompanying this must be an incentive structure which encourages research dissemination through community and open access channels. Alongside such a mentorship pathway would come an equal opportunity policy and a gender quota – a still strong mode of encouraging equal gender engagement.

2. Rebuild teaching internships for Ph.D. students

Academia has a track record of providing strong mentorship for teaching-focused future academics. While this support has largely evaporated in the massification of doctoral education, there is real potential to reintroduce teaching internships amongst Ph.D. candidates. By providing equal support for research-interested and teaching-interested students, and an inherent ability for students to choose a "stream" or a mandate to complete one year of each offers *support* for teaching trajectory students in doctoral programs while equipping them with the research skills that come with quality supervision and support. Through new mentoring and training designed specifically for doctoral students and funding avenues for doctoral students to enter into a peer-supervised "teaching academy" which incentivize teaching-focused staff to support doctoral students' development of good pedagogic strategies in their discipline, the cycle of research support and teaching support can be complete. Such an approach, though not entirely novel, gives Ph.D. students support networks, enables collegiality, and creates opportunities for them to experiment in their teaching and research process at a meta-level. Pragmatically, universities would likely use these programs as a filtering system to determine who is able to enter into teaching or research work. While not the purpose of these proposed support schemes, with appropriate and peer-reviewed mechanisms, there is no reason mentoring and pathways to teaching and research could not act as a constructive education toward permanent employment. Indeed, ensuring that students in these pathways were either teaching or researching, being given appropriate financial compensation and scholarly recognition for their work, and having a program designed to support students to develop and deliver their own research as they work would create arguably better working conditions than "insider" academics already have. Importantly, by enabling and facilitating higher degree student's contributions, and counting them in meaningful ways, presents an incentive for both the institution and the *rebuilt* academic community. In this sense, the universities can count more output, the tenured academic has more access to diversity, and the student embarks on their career *visibly* sooner without substantive fear of loss of income, reputation or revenue.

3. Incentivize Ph.D. supervisors to co-publish with students

Research is valued based on its impact, rank, or the funding it secured. In this regard, funding bodies and universities alike should prioritize and incentivize those grants and publications which are co-authored or supported by doctoral students. Ensuring a partnership plan for working with d octoral students is in place to prevent possible exploitation and rewarding publication, and other research output that works *with* students is a meaningful way towards ensuring students are part of the culture of the university. This would require the configuration of balanced and research-focused roles such that academics are in a position to be rewarded for co-publishing with their Ph.D. students. Moreover, this supports and protects the fundamental "freedom" provided through academic integrity, one amongst the most significant of the academic *tradition's* values.

4. Students in Governance

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, give students a seat at the table in governance dialogue. Valuing students' contributions in their research and teaching work by providing secure pathways to permanent work goes a long way towards building a sustainable culture. However, ensuring *everyone* has a voice in governance requires a radical rethink of the way that university governance is currently operated in Australia. There is a deep need to identify students' views on areas for innovation, improvement, and change. In this vein, universities have, distressingly, progressed

towards increasingly consumer-focused market research tactics in a marketing and market research head spin (Batabyal 2006; Gottschall and Saltmarsh 2017). In order to meaningfully direct higher education for the future, the students must be included in meaningful ways in the strategic decision-making of the university. Vice-Chancellors, Deans, teaching program directors, and teaching staff should use every opportunity to listen to student views, but also to involve students before strategic decisions are made in decisions that affect them – nothing about them without them (Cornelius-Bell and Bell 2020). Rather than focusing on reporting on the "good job" the university has been doing politically and in its research agenda, it should create a culture of ownership amongst undergraduate, graduate, and post-doctoral students and workers. If everyone can feel responsible, secure, and valuable to the institution, the culture of the institution will rocket forward. Students, and precarious workers, are *equal stakeholders* in academic institutions. Not only do we contribute to a web of knowledge in most of the anglosphere, but students also pay for the opportunity. If education is to run as a business, a fundamental acceptance which seems to have held to the core of many anglophone countries, then students must be considered as critical stakeholders, and their robust engagement must be encouraged. Importantly, however, this cannot be taken problematically; conscious, analytical, and meaningful grassroots education is required to ensure that the dream of a *new academy* – no longer separated as institution and community – can be achieved together for the benefit of humanity and our planet.

Concluding thoughts

Higher education globally is in a grim state. Successive attacks of corporate governance structures, neoliberal managerialism, economic rationalism, and metric chasing have left the university sector in ruins. The COVID-19 global pandemic accelerated the exploitation and damage of the university sector to students and workers alike, and as long as it continues to affect the nature of work, the damage will continue. Students still speak to the mental damage of social distance, the global insecurity of health, the inability to access healthcare, the insecure workplaces, worries about the climate and planet, and the world they are inheriting. Alongside students, academics, particularly early career and female academics, struggle with insecurity and anxiety over their work, taking on too much, never knowing if they might lose their job or be exploited by a supervisor or colleague. To make a meaningful difference in late-capitalism, serious intervention into the governance, priorities, and pathways in universities are needed. Across the political economy, the degradation of the nature of work, the boundaries between work and leisure, the security of employment, the access to adequate mental and physical resources, failure of rapid technological advancement to solve societal problems, wealth concentration, and climate change pose significant and wide-ranging problems for students and scholars. There are hopeful ways towards the future, but they require a serious and sustained rethink of what higher education is and does, how culture and representation work, and the nature and future of work in a global era of insecurity, anxiety, and disruption.

We hope to have started another conversation about the nature and value of doctoral education and insecure work in the, hopefully soon, post-COVID age. Our optimistic suggestions here are designed to be improved, interrogated, and adapted. We hope only for attention to be given to the state of higher education globally before it falls into obscurity, collapses into the void of for-profit micro-credentialling, or is altogether shut down by the collapse of the global climate.

Endnotes

1. Front-line workers, health care professionals and service industry workers are also under enormous pressures of a similar nature, in a competition to survive, and enable survival, through work.

2. This is constructed within a false labor market where hegemonic necessity breeds competition.

As the hegemonic university leader drives towards ever increasing ranking gains the establishment of hierarchical and extremely competitive spaces are established. Here competition is established as a basic principle of participation in the Civil society of the university (Gramsci 1996).

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Precarious Labor in COVID Times: The Case of Musicians

David Arditi

Introduction

While the coronavirus pandemic continues to wreak havoc on employment opportunities throughout the world, workers who earn a living through precarious employment activities have faced unique barriers to securing wages. The "gig economy" that professed to provide workers with flexibility and fast cash (Ravenelle 2019; Schor 2020) suddenly left these independent contractors without work and without income. When many governments around the world shut down all gatherings of 10 or more people in 2020, the impact was devastating on musicians' lives and many supporting workers in the entertainment industry. The structural insecurity of gig work was amplified as music venues were forced to cancel performances for a year or more. "The 'gig' in the term 'gig economy' refers back to the short-term arrangements typical of a musical event. An aspiring musician might celebrate getting a gig, or tell a friend that they have got a gig in the back room of a pub. This is of course no guarantee that they will get to perform regularly" (Woodcock and Graham 2020:3). Musicians' livelihoods have been exacerbated by their lack of employment contracts and requisite employment protections during the pandemic.

The impact of the pandemic shutdown devastated the live music industry. According to Billboard, between November 1, 2019 and October 31, 2020 ticket sales "fell by $5 billion, down to $1.7 billion in sales from $6.7 billion" the year before (Brooks 2020:101). Note here that the COVID closure of music venues only covers about half of the year reported, but the closure occurred during the most important part of the year for gigging musicians: the summer touring season. However, the $5 billion loss of revenue in ticket sales is just the surface. First, "Billboard estimates, the concert industry generates about $25 billion, with about 68% of that generated in the second half of the year" including merchandise, concessions, fees, etc. (Brooks 2020:101). Second, the estimate here is only for the major venues of all sizes that report information to Billboard. This figure does not come close to estimating lost revenue and income for musicians playing at bars, restaurants, parties, and other events across the world. When Billboard tries to estimate lost jobs by claiming "the shutdowns eliminated 75,000-100,000 full-time jobs in live music, and over 12 million positions were affected or eliminated in the events business as a whole" (Brooks 2020:101).1 The problem is the main reported numbers include big music promoters like Live Nation, but not small businesses that book their own talent. While their data are staggering, I do not think a data model exists that can truly estimate the impact on musicians because of the precarious nature of musician employment.

In this paper I argue the COVID-19 pandemic devastated musicians because their precarious labor position made it difficult for them to earn a living without live performances. The current phase of capitalism relies on precarious labor to produce large quantities of cultural goods and experiences while neglecting the living conditions of workers. While most musicians suffered from their precarity, superstar musicians, corporations and businesses found ways to turn the crisis into an opportunity. The COVID-19 pandemic accentuated disparities baked into the current phase of capitalism. To examine the problem, I deploy immanent critique to consider the impact COVID induced shutdown

has had on musicians. Robert Antonio uses immanent critique "as a means to detecting societal contradictions which offer the most determinate possibilities for emancipatory change" (Antonio 1981:332). While famous musicians sit in an admired position in American society, the reality is most musicians depend on steady gigging to meet their basic and social needs. By highlighting musicians' precarious labor, I demonstrate the way instability characterizes their employment opportunities. While the pandemic shutdown crushed opportunity for most musicians, the top stars continued to use their celebrity status to continue generating income. The contradiction between those with the ability to continue generating income by deploying their stardom and those unable to because of their obscurity builds inequity.

While workers across sectors experienced the effects of being precariously employed, interruptions in the entertainment industries devastated cultural workers. In turn the hardships experienced by musicians is a product of hundreds of years of precariousness musicians have experienced in the capitalist economy.

In this paper, I explore the impact the COVID music closures had on gigging musicians. How did the closure of the live music industry amplify the precariousness of musicians' working situations? First, I develop a theory of the current mode of capitalism. Second, I discuss musicians as precarious ("gig") workers by exploring the way record contracts establish inequity in the recording industry. Finally, I argue the COVID crisis for musicians was largely an effect of their precarious employment situation.

Capitalism Now

Capitalism is the endless accumulation of capital achieved by two means: 1) increased consumption and 2) exploitation of labor. Capitalism has passed through a series of phases. In each phase, the organization of the social relations of production shifts without fundamentally changing. In other words, capitalism remains the economic system in which workers sell their labor for access to the means of production (owned by capital) in return for a wage. However, the types of jobs, their pay, and the relations of the commodities produced keep changing. The current phase, which I describe here, helps to explain why the COVID-19 pandemic inflicted so much pain on musicians and other workers in the cultural and service industries from their proximity to consumers. In the current moment, capitalism depends on precarious workers and unending consumption.

While musicians have long been subjected to gig work throughout capitalism, the 1970s marked a moment when more labor became subsumed by precarious work as industrial labor retreated and capital began to emphasize "flexible" labor. Beginning in the early 1970s, it became clear that new production systems would increase the production of commodities by a large unionized working class (Braverman 1998). This working class, itself a product of the American war effort in World War II, saw gains in productivity and standards of living. At the time, the productive and consumptive capacity of the working class seemed limitless. This was a product as much of the Fordist phase of capitalism that emphasized paying an amount to workers that enabled them to purchase the products they made. If Ford workers earned enough to buy cars, then Ford would sell more cars. But the logic faded in the 1970s as wage stagnation and inflation slowed the consumptive processes. Capitalists blamed unions and workers as corporations demanded "flexible" labor unencumbered by unions (Gottfried 1995). Then unions and corporations made a bargain for workers to make sacrifices (ex. giving up pensions and wage increases) in return for a reduction in layoffs.

At the same time, capitalism came to operate on increased consumption. Michel Aglietta argued that the emphasis of capitalism shifted from expanding the means of production to the means of consumption (Aglietta 2001). Rather than a capitalism that emphasized producing more of the *same* commodities and expanding the market, capitalism shifted to allow the same consumers to buy *more* commodities. For example, the production of phonograph record players would only go so far. Once every household with the financial means to purchase a phonograph owned a phonograph, they no longer had a reason to purchase a new one. Instead, the emphasis came to be selling records to play on the phonograph. Later, there was a correlative planned obsolescence of the phonograph to encourage consumers to replace their old players. Paul Smith contends the increase in "activity-commodities (such as travel, tourism, and sports) and the massive expansion in the catchment of the electronic and print media . . . constitute just

one component in capital's response to the crises of the postwar period" (Smith 1997:48). The expansion of the means of consumption hinges on giving a smaller group of consumers more goods or activities to consume.

Ben Agger introduced the term "fast capitalism" as a way to address the expansion of media texts under a new phase of capitalism (Agger 1988). The speed of production characterized fast capitalism as cultural producers produced more texts than any person could consume. This accelerated production created a ubiquity of cultural texts that does not allow people to read, watch or consume them nonetheless think about them. In the Frankfurt School tradition, Agger views reason and critical thinking as a key element to overcoming domination, but the rate of production does not permit the careful reading and contemplation of these texts. This phase of capitalism expanded the means of consumption beyond the point where consumers could read, watch, or consume the texts they purchased. People would buy books they would never read or buy VHS tapes of movies they would never watch. When they would read or watch these books or movies, they would move on to the next without much thought and certainly without discussing the texts with others. The expansion of the means of consumption accelerated the production of cultural texts at a time when workers most needed to come together in solidarity to resist the corporate changes to labor safety nets. Since the system demands more goods, people see a constant opportunity to work. However, more people working in a particular area stifles wages.

In Blog Theory (Dean 2013), Jodi Dean sees a sped up capitalism similar to Ben Agger (2004). Dean contends "the temporal take-over of theory displaces sustained critical thought, replacing it with the sense that there isn't time for thinking, that there are only emergencies to which one must react, that one can't keep up and might as well not try" (Dean 2013:2). Here the pace at which we cannot comprehend what is happening not only kills critical thought, but also drives revenue among a distracted mass of web-surfers who distractedly click their ways through content. For Dean, "communicative capitalism" is the idea that "contemporary communications media capture their users in intensive and extensive networks of enjoyment, production, and surveillance" (Dean 2013:3–4). We enjoy falling down click holes or feel like we're resisting capitalism by posting things on Twitter—often called "slacktivism" (Fuchs 2013).

In the current phase of capitalism, unending consumption characterizes the expansion of the means of consumption. We rarely buy our media and cultural texts, but rather subscribe. This has changed consumers from owners to renters and transformed the fundamental logic of many commodities, especially where it comes to streaming (Arditi 2021). In the Spotify model of retail remuneration to musicians, subscribers pay roughly $10/month, but their payment goes to the most streamed artists, not necessarily the ones any given user listens to. Furthermore, labels earn money in the aggregate from their artists even when those artists do not receive pay (Arditi 2018). The aggregate benefits felt by labels come from corporate strategies to implement favorable policies. "Even as some media forms eclipse others, global conglomerates profit from the innovations while pernicious arrangements of state power benefit from a diverted populace" (Dean 2013:39). Corporate conglomerates institute changes to the economy that increase profits, while these shifts endanger the livelihoods of people throughout society.

Just as shifts in the consumption side of capitalism occurs periodically, shifts occur on the labor side, too. Today this shift is characterized by precarious employment. Harry Braverman saw a previous "upheaval" in which the majority of the US population transformed from farm work to industrial labor. As recently as the 1960s, "we still thought of the farming population as one of the great classes of modern society. Now, it's a mere remnant of its former self, dominated . . . by great corporate farms and embracing a total workforce that is far exceeded even by the number of college students" (Braverman 1994:19). Braverman's classification of this shift as an "upheaval" is accurate insofar as the shift changed many people's relationship to the means of production. However, we see an equally monumental shift away from industrial labor since the 1970s. Today's shift away from industrial labor is not a shift away from the working class, but rather an ideological shift away from who we view as workers.

If Fordism was characterized by labor stability supported by union power, then unending consumption is characterized by labor precarity and "flexibility." In Karl Marx's critique of capitalism, he asserted the price of labor equaled the average necessary cost to reproduce the worker (Marx 2000). The cost to reproduce the worker included

the basic and social needs for the worker and the next generation of workers. Alongside, there was an ever-present underclass that was often underemployed and generally outside of the capitalist working class, which did not receive wages that allowed for the reproduction of the class. However, in contemporary capitalism, few jobs pay for the cost of the reproduction of the worker. As people lost their union jobs, they were forced into the secondary labor market, "providing workers with low pay, few benefits, and a level of economic insecurity in which work today doesn't necessarily mean work tomorrow—the very definition of gig employment" (Ravenelle 2019:37). With platforms such as TaskRabbit (Schor 2020), the labor market of flexible precarious workers becomes an on-demand commodity available to complete any task for very low wages. Platform-based companies use "algorithmic exploitation" (Jiménez González 2021) to place the right number of workers to earn revenue at a wage unlikely to benefit the workers themselves. This "platform capitalism" (Srnicek 2017) obscures the position of platforms as employers by making computer platforms appear to provide a service that connects independent contractors to consumers; meanwhile the independent contractors work fulltime for these companies.

Gig workers are set-up as independent contractors and independent contractors are not employees. In the American labor system, employers must pay employees a minimum wage; hourly employees may not work over 40 hours without overtime pay (in most cases); there are specific work conditions mandated by federal and state law; employers above a certain size must pay for their employees' health insurance. However, contract law supersedes labor laws (Arditi 2020:11). As long as people sign contracts that identify themselves as independent contractors, labor law does not apply. Independent contractors are little capitalists (i.e., petite bourgeoisie) or small business owners. These little capitalists now pervade the gig economy. Part of this stems from the logic of neoliberalism where the state subcontracts its functions to private business (Harvey 2005:160). When the state privatizes functions, it does so to avoid paying the more generous benefits and salaries of the state, while private businesses pocket surplus value derived from paying workers less. In the case of private business subcontracting labor as opposed to paying employees and providing them with benefits, it is with the goal of avoiding labor laws entirely. From Uber drivers to freelance journalists and adjunct professors to house cleaners, corporations and state entities use independent contractors to cut labor costs.

Furthermore, contemporary capitalism thrives on a conspicuous consumption in which people live beyond their means through the credit system. Workers do not earn enough to pay for their basic and social needs, but rather pay for these needs within a system of debt. When workers can no longer pay their debts and the economy goes into crisis, governments bail-out the credit providers instead of the debtors as most clearly evidenced by the 2009 Great Recession. Since precarious employees never know when, where, or how much their next paycheck is, they have no option but to live beyond their means. Since they are always on-demand, their labor exists within unending consumption.

Musician Precarity

Musicians occupy a position in society that seems both superfluous and fundamental to our everyday lives. On the one hand, music does not provide us with a material good that serves our basic needs. On the other hand, would we want to live in a world without music? Since we do not need music to survive, the labor of musicians has often been negated as important; often contemptuously called unproductive labor (a misreading of Marx). People celebrate a handful of musicians while deriding other musicians as needing to get a "real" job. This is the societal love-hate relationship with musicians. However, their position as non-essential (in the COVID-19 parlance) makes us blame musicians for the hardships they face. As such, musicians have long lived under a regime of precarity.

Jacques Attali argues the political economy of the music industry presages the overall organization of the means of production in society (Attali 1985). While Attali emphasized new shifts in musical production in his work, it is just as significant to highlight old forms of organization of the means of production that never changed in the music industry and the way these forms have proliferated in society. For instance, romantic ideals about "the artist" that have existed since the Romantic Era in the 19th century persist throughout the economy writ large (Marshall 2005). In the mythos of entrepreneurialship in makerspaces, the 19th century ideal of artistic and artisanal production that

correlated with Romanticism becomes reappropriated as opportunity. But Attali's larger point contends we can learn a lot about the political economy of society if we look to music. In this moment, the gig economy, which places the risks of capitalism on the workers (Ravenelle 2019), can be seen in the organization of labor in the music industry since the early 20th century. This is the reality of most musicians and it precedes the move of the economy writ-large to gig work.

From garage bands to pop stars, most musicians are self-employed. Musicians earn money through gigs, sales of recordings and merchandise, and licensing their music and likeness, but they rarely earn a salary. They tend to work as independent contractors regardless of income and/or celebrity status whether they tour, play weddings, record sessions in studios, or sign a record label. "Perhaps more so than any other creative worker, musicians struggle with the possibilities and the perils of freelance labor and technological change. These struggles may be a common feature in the growing gig economy today, but they have long been enduring features of life for music artists" (Watkins 2019:70–71). Being a freelance worker means musicians ostensibly work as their own boss, but it also means the burden to find sources of income remains on the musicians themselves.

When a musician signs a record contract, they sign away their copyrights in exchange for an advance on royalties. That advance needs to be paid back from the musician's royalties before they ever see a dime from the sale of their music. After signing with a label, musicians lose autonomy and they must follow the creative and business suggestions of the label or risk the label's refusal to distribute their music. For all intents and purposes, they work for their record label, but they are not considered workers: they are contractors. Musicians remain independent small businesses who contract with labels to provide a service; they agree to record and sell their music for the label in exchange for an advance on record sales, but record labels do not pay them for their labor. This amounts to a "winner-takes-all culture of creativity centered on the acquisition of intellectual property" (Ross 2008:39). In other words, labels sign musicians to control their copyrights. Under this system, labels do not owe musicians anything as workers. It is up to recording artists to market themselves and generate sales. Many recording artists have described the system as akin to sharecropping (Love 2000; Slichter 2004). Still, musicians desire to sign record contracts, the ideology of getting signed (Arditi 2020), a mechanism used to exploit musicians by acquiring their copyrights.

Since some musicians only see their production as a fun hobby where they do not intend to earn money and any earnings is seen as "extra money" (Naulin and Jourdain 2020:2), musicians who depend on revenue from their music to survive become increasingly exploited. When one person is willing to do something for free, it lowers the money available to everyone. Ioannis Tsioulakis and Ali Fitzgibbon stress "this practice risks normalising the widespread idea that artists are performing a free service to which 'consumers' are entitled" (Tsioulakis and Fitzgibbon 2020). For instance, if a wedding band is just getting started and agrees to play a friend's wedding for free, then it eliminates a gig for an established band and they have to lower their prices as the new band begins undercutting their revenue.

Since there is always an excess of musicians trying to make it in the music industry or play gigs on the local level, musician labor is always a reserve army of labor. When recording music became the dominant aspect of the music industry, it threw a large number of musicians into this reserve army. Before recorded music became the dominant mode of music distribution and consumption, there was heavy demand for musicians everywhere. For instance, when the film industry took off with silent films, they needed musicians to play in pit orchestras across the world. Theaters hired local musicians to perform in these groups to provide auditory stimulation to moviegoers. However, as films became "talkies," there was increased demand to record music for the films in recording studios in Los Angeles. This resulted in a major conflict within the American Federation of Musicians (AFM), the musician's union (Zinn, Kelley, and Frank 2002). Live music performers would not allow studio musicians to join AFM because they viewed studio musicians as a way of undercutting their work through machines—this is similar to the German Luddites resisting machines (Mueller 2021). Over time, the live musicians lost their battle and their jobs. It turns out pit orchestra musicians were right: recorded music means films require fewer musicians.

Over the past century, live music performers have seen an array of entrants into their spheres. Before the advent of the jukebox, bars and restaurants had to have live music for musical entertainment; with the jukebox, fewer

musicians were necessary to entertain guests. With the popularization of DJs in the disco era, bars could pay less for music than bands and have a more consistent product; whereas a band may need $100 per band member, a DJ could earn $100 for a night. A similar phenomenon happened for wedding and party gigs where a DJ could be hired for less than a cover band. Now, even DJs are undercut by the ability for people to make their own playlists using Spotify or Apple Music. New technology in the studio also led to more work being done by the producer, eliminating the need for session musicians (Arditi 2014). It is not my place to judge the aesthetic impact of such technological shifts, but rather to demonstrate the shifts impact the labor of musicians.

Because of the low pay and precarious employment situation for musicians, there is a popular trope for them to have a "day job." While these day jobs occur across the labor sector, musicians who identify their primary work as musicians cluster in various service positions. Musicians often work in the service industry because these jobs are flexible and relatively easy to quit if a music gig interferes with their work schedule. Common day jobs for musicians include working in restaurants, teaching music lessons, working at a music retail store, driving for Uber and Lyft, or in any number of gig economy jobs. What we see is that musicians often work in the gig economy because of the flexibility that allows them to play gigs without interfering with work.

While it is fairly easy to book gigs at local venues, it is precisely the low barrier to entry that drives down wages. When disruptions to gigs occur, there is little in the form of a social safety net to catch musicians. Next, I look at the impact of COVID on musicians' lives.

Musicians During COVID

A conversation I had with a bass player, Victor,2 is exemplary of the problems faced by musicians during COVID. At the time we spoke, Victor was 21 and had gigged locally around Dallas for 3 years. In early February 2020, Victor quit his day job as a bartender to prepare for a tour with his up-and-coming band in April 2020. This would be the first time Victor committed himself 100% to a career in music. Of course, in April the COVID pandemic prompted local officials to close virtually all music venues in the United States for the foreseeable future. "For working musicians who rely primarily on the incomes generated from live performances, sheltering-at-home is not only financially catastrophic, but it also presents a real challenge in thinking about how to interact with their audiences" (Lee and Kao 2021). Even though the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, signed into law on March 27, 2020 had relief for gigging musicians, Victor feared that he missed the criteria to qualify. Congress passed the CARES Act as a way to provide welfare for people who lost income as a result of COVID 19, but much of it depended on demonstrating previous income earned. Since Victor never claimed his music earnings on his taxes, he feared that he was ineligible for relief and since he quit his job as a bartender, he did not qualify for unemployment. The precarity of musicians during good times became amplified by the pandemic shutdown of live performance venues. While alternatives and patches were available for performers, the vast majority of musicians had to reconsider their career as or dreams of becoming a professional musician. When a disruption of any sort occurs in a musician's life, it can have the effect of limiting their income and making it difficult for them to meet their needs; COVID created the perfect storm for musicians.

Not having the ability to play shows affects musicians in both the short-term and long-term. Clearly, in the short-term, many musicians lacked the means to meet their basic needs, but in the long-term their careers could take a hit. It takes time for musicians to build a following, and musicians must constantly sustain their fan base in order to continue their careers. Kagey Parrish of The Honey Dewdrops described it the following way to ABC News:

> "In fact, we were on tour in California on March 12, 2020, the day the national lockdown was announced and travel bans were issued," Parrish said. "The gig economy fell apart overnight. It took us 11 years to get to that point where we could schedule multiple international tours in a year and continue to build audiences across the U.S. Everything went into limbo pretty quickly. The financial side of things is hard even in normal times" (Haworth 2021).

Parrish and his wife and bandmate Laura Wortman were 3,000 miles from home when the lockdown hit facing an uncertainty about their careers and future. Musicians cannot replace the work they did over 11 years through digital networks. Plenty of musicians I spoke with complained that they cannot take off from touring or they risk losing their fan base. The harm done to touring musicians is incalculable. "One key consideration for artists during the course of the pandemic thus far has been maintaining some sort of relevance" (Frenneaux and Bennett 2021:71). Digital platforms allow for the construction of a virtual scene whereby musicians can maintain connections and try to weather the pandemic. However, the uncertainty of the future of live performance industry does not quell musicians' anxieties or immediate material needs.

Pandemic unemployment for musicians was not limited to independent artists. Some of the best jobs for musicians are in ancillary industries like the cruise industry. Cruise ship musicians work on short-term contracts, usually 3-6 months, but can make a decent living with room and board included (Cashman and Hayward 2020). However, during a crisis like the COVID pandemic, their careers are particularly precarious as the cruise industry has closed for over a year at the time of writing. Other music jobs such as Broadway freelance musicians have enviable gigs compared to other musicians. In a Billboard interview, Meg Toohey, a Broadway guitarist playing for the hit Waitress at the time of the lockdown, described the privilege of being on Broadway as the following:

> Broadway is the one gig that musicians look at as a sure [thing] – it's a constant cycling of work, you're in a union. I had great health insurance, I had a regular paycheck that was a great paycheck because of the union, I had vacation days and a 401(k). As far as making a living as a musician, that was the way. You can support a family on a Broadway gig (Havens 2020:34).

Toohey's emphasis on the union's role in Broadway being a great gig is noteworthy because she no doubt received support from the union, show, and the CARES Act. However, like Wortman and Parrish, Toohey tried to learn to survive in a digital environment (more below). She sums up the collective experience of Broadway musicians as "So many people I know finally got to that level of, 'I'm making a living as an artist,' and then all of a sudden it's gone. It's all gone" (Havens 2020:34). Each type of musician faced a different set of circumstances when music venues closed, but they all had to figure out ways to earn a living.

Live streaming and social media appeared at first glance to be the solution for musicians to continue performing and distributing music to fans from home. "Live streaming refers to audio and visual information that is transmitted over the Internet and received simultaneously" (Zhang and Negus 2021). The techno-utopian impulse that the Internet will save everyone became the dominant perspective from the outset of the lockdown across the economy. While many people across the world became conversant in Zoom and Microsoft Teams meeting platforms, musicians devised ways to live stream their music to fans. My point is not to question the aesthetic or cultural value of these platforms, something others are wrestling with (Hanrahan 2018, 2019; Hesmondhalgh 2021), but rather to draw attention to the inequity in their uses. As mentioned above, The Honey Dewdrops tried to maintain their connection with fans by learning to use streaming. Some musicians went to social media platforms (Instagram Live, Facebook Live, Twitter Live), other went with mainstream streaming platforms (Twitch and YouTube), but many found ways to live stream concerts using new streaming start-ups specifically designed for live music performances. And many musicians streamed their performances free of charge (Tsioulakis and Fitzgibbon 2020). These platforms enabled what James Rendell labels "portal shows" – shows "that are both live music events and screen media texts, where the portalisation of shows are performed live to predominantly, if not entirely, online audiences across a digital threshold" (Rendell 2020:6). These portal shows became the dominant way to experience simultaneous music performance. In 2021 "livestreaming transformed from a niche business to an essential, eight-figure industry amid the coronavirus pandemic, spurring the launch of over a dozen new platforms in a market that now looks pretty crowded" (Cirisano 2021:21). However, the live streaming infrastructure developed primarily for established artists to engage fans, often leaving behind the majority of precariously situated musicians.

Live stream platform startups saw an overnight boom when the live performance industry shuttered from the COVID pandemic. This made them valuable businesses for live music companies like Live Nation to purchase. Live

Nation sees the future as a hybrid where venues stream live performances to people who for one reason or another do not want to attend in-person. Live Nation buttressed this approach by purchasing Veeps an established platform that launched in 2017 (Millman 2021). After the acquisition of Veeps, Live Nation's stock hit "a new all-time high of $77.02 per share, even though the company's revenue has dropped to about 5% of its prepandemic intake" (Cirisano 2021:22). Other novelties the live music industry hopes to cash-in on include Mandolin Parties, which allows fans to host live streaming parties at their homes (Cirisano 2021). Mandolin Parties present a concert-in-a-box with access to the platform, food, drinks, and merchandise available at your home. The aim of these new live stream events is to create a "sharing" platform through which people can host live streamed events at houses or venues the same way Airbnb or Uber shift the costs onto gig workers at the same time cutting the money paid to performers. In the era of unending consumption, businesses explore ways to commodify everything, but this has the tendency to hurt gig workers more than other forms. Imagine a musician coming to set-up a Mandolin Party with a special sound system, food, drinks, and your pre-ordered merchandise. This musician would earn a low wage for setting up and tearing down the party, but would have earned more if people would have attended their show instead. New corporate live streaming platforms present opportunities to generate more surplus value from fewer shows.

While streaming technology is widely available, gaps remain between independent artists and pop stars and they only expanded during the COVID shutdown. The marginalization of groups and the gaps between rich and poor expanded as a result of access to networks willing to stream. Toohey states, "Everything musical went to social media. So on top of this game of, 'Can you get your song on a TikTok?,'' every five minutes somebody enormous is doing the same thing you used to do on Instagram where people might actually watch. Now, all of a sudden, you go live and Miley Cyrus is on with Kamala Harris. With the oversaturation in media, it's kind of impossible to compete" (Havens 2020:34). While megastars played shows on television from their homes, lesser-known musicians struggled to get fans, friends, and family to tune-in to live streams. Disney produced two Disney Singalongs that featured stars from Donald Glover to Arianna Grande and Michael Bublé to John Legend. Trisha Yearwood and Garth Brooks hosted a television special from their home studio on CBS. There was even a charity event for the World Health Organization to celebrate frontline health workers, entitled One World: Together at Home; despite its altruistic goals it helped increase streams for established celebrities (McIntosh 2021). Billboard kept a running list of these television specials and live streams, but the limited list emphasized music stars (Staff 2021). But each live stream show lacks exclusivity, there is nothing to distinguish one show from the next. If a band performs in Geneva, Switzerland, only people in and around Geneva can see the performance. A tour inspires fans to go out and see a band when they visit a city, but a Tuesday night live stream does not differentiate from a Wednesday night show. While streaming platforms can earn a great deal of revenue on the aggregate from any performances, most gigging musicians struggle to make money. Furthermore, the biggest acts in music support large crews. These crew members, from touring musicians to bus drivers, depend on touring to earn income. With two seasons of tour interruptions, the rescheduled shows are turning to canceled shows forcing crew members to find new careers (Edgers 2021). Streaming and televised shows do little to change the dynamics of gig work.

For major record labels, live streaming represents a long-term opportunity to increase consumption. "What started as mostly free virtual bedroom performances early on in the touring shutdown have evolved into costly, ticketed productions that keep growing bigger and bolder" (Cirisano 2021:21). Where concerts were limited to specific places, major music corporations see live streaming as a way to bring concerts everywhere. The problem in this description lies in the inequity between those who benefit from live streaming and those who suffer from it. At the heart of almost every news article I read about the hardships musicians faced during the pandemic was a silver lining: musicians could live stream their music to fans. The reporters always interviewed popular musicians who found success in the medium. Rarely did these reporters discuss the widespread failures of live streaming. Few people really want to watch a live streamed performance. At first it felt like something novel that could deliver us from our boredom, but quickly we realized it is not the same thing as going to a show. It lacks the collective effervescence that brings together people through cultural practice (Durkheim 2008). When we attend concerts, collective effervescence is the feeling you gain from being around other people when the experience feels great. The feeling is not the same watching performances on a computer or television screen. Bandsintown's data demonstrates the lackluster reception of live streaming as the website went from a pandemic high of "2,700 concerts per week in May [2020] to under 900"

by January 2021 (Cirisano 2021:22). However, big business sees big money beyond the novelty. Super fans of superstar musicians will pay for the experience and others will continue to pay to say they were part of something. But this does not translate to the local and independent music scenes. Live streaming recreates the inequality in the music industry.

The federal response to coronavirus demonstrates the power of big businesses to receive support while gigging musicians suffered from the shutdown. Independent music venues banded together to create the National Independent Venue Association (NIVA) early during the pandemic (Brooks 2021). The result of this newly-founded trade organization was the Save Our Stages Act. Championed by Senators Amy Klobuchar (D-Minnesota) and John Cornyn (R-Texas), the Act aimed to provide much needed relief to independent venues shuttered during the COVID crisis. They argued that music venues would be the "first to close, last to reopen" (Brooks 2021:32). Since many Americans love live music, this was an easy sell and it ultimately became a part of the December 27, 2020 COVID relief package—garnering $15 billion for live music venues, zoos, and museums. This was crucial money for these (mostly) small businesses—it is important to note that while many independent venues are small, some are in fact very large. However, there was no parallel effort for independent musicians. Yes, musicians play at venues, but there is no mechanism for this money to "trickle down" to musicians. The argument for the venues is that venues will need to be around after the pandemic for musicians to perform, but what do musicians do as they await the reopening of music venues? When the petite bourgeoisie start their businesses, isn't this the risk they take in capitalism? Why should the state look out for businesses, but not workers? This model of capitalism places all risk on the most vulnerable people: the workers.

As I discussed earlier, the precarity and inconsistency of paying gigs for musicians leads them to have a day job or a side-gig. However, jobs across the gig economy dried up with the COVID lockdown. Since musicians fill other gig roles, COVID killed musicians' side-hustle, amplifying their problems. Musicians embody the hustle, which Craig Watkins defines as "an improvisational and creative assertion of agency in the face of uncertain circumstances" (Watkins 2019:11). In Alexandrea Ravenelle's terms, people hustle to become "success stories," but more often than not they are "strugglers" (Ravenelle 2019:10–11). One way musicians hustle is by working multiple gig jobs—what is known as portfolio work (Tsioulakis and Fitzgibbon 2020). Musicians often supplement their income with flexible employment in the food industry. They work as bartenders, servers, or line-cooks in restaurants where they can easily take a night off for a gig. Or they work in the so-called gig economy as drivers, deliverers, or doing odd-jobs. In my research, I came across multiple Uber drivers who were musicians or musicians who discussed driving for Uber or Lyft. When COVID-19 decimated live music performance it also crushed these side-hustles. "As a result, the multiple income streams on which performing artists rely have all disappeared" (Tsioulakis and Fitzgibbon 2020). Juliet Schor discusses the way many gig workers don't think of their work as their main job, and instead view it as their side-gig (Schor 2020). The problem is that many of these workers are also precariously employed in their main work. A theme I noticed in my research is many musicians drive Uber and Lyft when they are not playing music. They view driving for a rideshare company as the side-gig, but it is no less precarious than their main job as a musician (and it often provides more income). But with the COVID lockdowns, Uber drivers had a difficult time finding riders because people stopped leaving their homes. A musician who drives Uber or worked part-time at a bar, no longer had their side-hustle, either. The COVID lockdown harmed gig work for musicians across the gig economy.

Conclusion

We will not know the full impact of COVID on musicians. It is doubtless that while many musicians canceled tours, many also stopped playing music altogether. Rhetoric about struggling artists only goes so far. At the same time, businesses developed new ways to profit from the lockdown as live streaming platforms convinced many musicians that live streaming would solve all of their problems.

The key point is the problems faced by musicians during COVID cannot be separated from the moment of capitalism. Precarity leads gig workers to find alternatives. Capital offers solutions to these workers by selling them false hope, but the false hope is another form of profit generation through exploitation of workers. Musicians, like all other gig workers, live through precarious employment situations. Furthermore, many musicians have other gig jobs

like driving for Uber or working as restaurant servers, making them that much more vulnerable to the problems of the lockdown. The system must change and the effects of the COVID lockdown are merely a symptom of the current era of capitalism.

Endnotes

1. Other studies have tried to quantify the harm. According to a study by Michael Seman and Richard Florida, musicians were hit especially hard by the pandemic. From April 1 through July 31, 2020, they "estimate losses of 2.7 million jobs and more than $150 billion in sales of goods and services for creative industries nationwide, representing nearly a third of all jobs in those industries and 9% of annual sales" (Seman and Florida 2020). These heavy losses are only for a 4-month period—unfortunately, the stoppages for music performance continue 18 months into the pandemic. During the period, Seman and Florida estimated 253,349 musicians (or 10.9%) lost their jobs (Seman and Florida 2020).

2. All names in this essay are pseudonyms. .

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Homoterrorism: Definition, Application, Subversion

Angelos Bollas

Introduction

On Friday, September 21, 2018, news reports on Greek corporate media announced the death of a man who had allegedly attempted to rob a jewellery store. The media announcement was accompanied by video footage in which two civilians were shown violently attacking the alleged thief while the latter was attempting to escape the jewellery store. A little later, the alleged thief was announced dead. This is the case of Zak Kostopoulos who was lynched in his attempt to escape a jewellery shop where he had found shelter from a threat that, to this day, remains unknown. Zak was lynched literally and figuratively by the jewellery shop owner and his associate, by the bystanders, and by all corporate media. In this paper, *homoterrorism* is proposed as a construct that can describe hegemonic attempts to portray certain domestic non-heterosexual identities, practices, and cultures as abject in an attempt to (re)define a society's national sociodicy. The argument is that *homoterrorism* provides an understanding of extreme acts of violence against the non-heterosexual Other, such as in the case of Zak Kostopoulos's murder, especially when such acts are framed as essential to the precipitation of national cohesion. Further to this, the paper draws on theories about social media and their potential for political and social change, and it argues that Twitter activism can become a way to challenge *homoterrorism*.

From Homonationalism to Homoterrorism

Initially coined by Jasbir Puar (2007), *homonationalism* refers to the political practice by which supporting LGBTQI+ rights functions as a tactic to enforce nationalist pride, and supposed progress in relation to LGBTQI+ matters is used to alienate a people against the backward Other, the countries which do not support LGBTQI+ individuals and their rights. "Images of exuberant gay sexuality and celebration have been enlisted as icons of the kind of freedom the so-called 'West' has to offer, to contrast with the "backwardness" and repression that are attributed to Easter Europe, the Islamic world, and immigrants" (Drucker 2016). So, *homonationalism* is yet another political means through which a people's pride of their national, religious, and racial identity is confirmed, but it has also been used as reason to encourage and promote racist ideologies. As a theoretical tool, *homonationalism*, drawing on Duggan's (2003) concept of homonormativity, highlights not only the conflation of nationalist ideologies and LGBTQI+ rights, but it allows an understanding of the processes whereby LGBTQI+ people are led to ascribe to such ideologies. As an effect of neoliberal politics, homonormativity contributes to the success of capitalism. On the one hand, it ensures fewer people are marginalised and, therefore, more people are actively contributing to the market. On the other hand, though, it also contributes to the stigmatisation of those who might disrupt social order and cohesion which, in turn, might result in a reduction of market profits.

At the same time when Puar (2007) observes homonationalist tendencies and practices in the US foreign policy, Francoeur (2007) observes increased surveillance and punishment of LGBTQI+ immigrant activists in places such as New York and other US metropolitan areas. He argues that the federal government uses post-9/11 strict policies against illegal immigrants as a "[...] deliberate attempt to leverage terrorism as the new ideological exclusion and LGBT immigrants as terrorists" (p. 72). *Homoterrorism* is used by Francoeur (ibid.) to describe internal policies that aim to literally get rid of those immigrant individuals or groups who challenge normative notions of family, marriage, and society. A different use of the term is offered by Plonecka (2017) who explains that in the Polish parliament *homoterrorism* is used to describe LGBTQI+ activists who are seen as terrorists for trying to defile Polish society by advocating equal rights for LGBTQI+ citizens.

In this paper, I wish to propose *homoterrorism* as a variant term to *homonationalism* in that rather than being used as a means to further alienate foreign individuals, societies and cultures, *homoterrorism* describes a hegemonic attempt to portray certain domestic non-heterosexual identities, practices, and cultures as abject in an attempt to (re)define its national sociodicy. As such, *homoterrorism* is both causative and symptomatic of heteronormative and homonormative politics and culture. Thus, *homoterrorism* is not relevant to all those who identify as non-heterosexual. Rather, it relates to those whose non-heterosexual identities and practices are perceived to be disrupting social order. In other words, so long as one has the potential to be a beneficial and contributing member to a society's market-production activities, they are not potential subjects of *homoterrorist* concerns. At the same time, it is important to consider the relationship between social cohesion and market growth which, for neoliberal ideologies, is a twofold one. On the one hand, social cohesion is viewed as an opportunity for people to recover from the demands of capitalism and recharge so that they can return afresh in production mode (Jenson 1998). On the other hand, social cohesion and economic development are presented as intertwined with the former being portrayed as a factor for the latter and vice versa (Jaffe and Quark 2006). It is, therefore, within a neoliberal nation's best interests to promote national cohesion. As a phenomenon, *homoterrorism* does not only describe processes of Othering, but it aims to provide an understanding of extreme acts of violence against the non-heterosexual Other, especially when such acts are framed as essential to the precipitation of national cohesion. Here, the non-heterosexual Other is not perceived as threatening to a person's - or the society's, for that matter - beliefs, values, norms or symbols. Therefore, an act of violence enabled by the fear of *homoterrorism* is not to be understood as similar to a hate crime. Here, the non-heterosexual Other is perceived as a threat to a nation's social cohesion. So, *homoterrorism* enables the framing of an act of violence as inevitable and heroic.

Further to that, it is important to clarify that *homoterrorism* does not refer to instances of homophobic behaviour, nor does it refer to absolute discrimination of non-heterosexual identities and practices. Rather, it aims to explain extreme acts of violence against specific non-heterosexuals in societies and countries which have made constitutional and legal progress in recognising, fully or in part, equal rights for LGBTQI+ individuals. Also, *homoterrorism* is not proposed as a term to describe the act of violence *per se*, but it aims to provide a framework within which this act is presented as justified. Therefore, the proposed locus of *homoterrorism* is corporate media and, in particular, news reports. However, even though *homoterrorism* encourages social cohesion by framing certain identities and practices as threatening to a nation's sociodicy, this paper does not aim to endorse an **a priori** link between media and the creation or promotion of a collective identity. Schlesinger (1991) argues that such a linkage has to be demonstrated "[...] through detailed conjunctural analysis and comparison both diachronically and synchronically" (p. 307). Such a demonstration, although important, is beyond the scope of this paper.

Situating *homoterrorism* in media practices and news report discourse echoes Herman and Chomsky's (1988) propaganda model in that it links systemically biased discourses (re)produced in news reports with the political and economic interests of those in power. Media's reach enables them to contribute to the construction and promotion of a national image (Samoilenko 2020). In addition, news reports communicate an agenda of legitimate concerns that the citizens of a particular nation should have. Botan (2018) observes "[...] when a group of public reaches consensus on a shared image, that image can serve both as a kind of shorthand interpretation that facilitates common decisions and a binding agent that allows large groups of people to become [...] **interpretive communities**" (p. 90, emphasis in original). According to this, *homoterrorism* refers both to the framing of a particular image as threatening and to the facilitation of decision-making with regards to how citizens of a nation should feel and act in response to such

an image. In other words, *homoterrorism* enables citizens to recognise all non-conforming non-heterosexual identities and practices as potentially threatening and, in turn, all violent acts against such identities and practices as justified.

To illustrate how *homoterrorism* as a frame is used by corporate media as a means through which a national image is (re)defined and extreme acts of violence toward non-heterosexual individuals are justified, the following section analyses as case study the literal and figurative lynching of Zak Kostopoulos in Athens, Greece. In what follows, I examine the case of Zak's murder as it was presented in news reports by all corporate media in Greece. This explains why at the early parts of the examination that follows, one reads 'death' rather than 'murder' or 'lynching' when it comes to describing what happened on September 21, 2018 in Athens, Greece. The focus of the following section is not to reproduce facts about the murder of Zak in a journalistic manner. Rather, the section aims to illustrate *homoterrorism* at work, showing both how through *homoterrorism* Greek society redefines what it means to be Greek, what is the acceptable Greek identity, as well as how fear of queers (here 'queers' is used to refer to non-conforming non-heterosexual individuals and practices) was used to support extenuating circumstances for the perpetrators in the eyes of the society. At the time of writing this paper, the case has not reached the courts of justice.

Homoterrorism and the Case of Zak Kostopoulos's Lynching

On Friday, September 21, 2018, Greek news media announced the death of a man who had allegedly attempted to rob a jewellery store. The media announcement was accompanied by video footage in which two civilians were shown violently attacking the alleged thief while the latter was attempting to escape the jewellery store. A little later, the alleged thief was announced dead. The next day, the identity of the victim was made public. Along with his name, Zak Kostopoulos, the following characteristics were being communicated by the media to describe him: LGBTQI+ activist, HIV activist, HIV positive, and drag queen, Zackie Oh!. Further to the identification of the victim as LGBTQI+ and HIV positive, Greek media also characterised the victim as drug addict, and they emphasised the fact that he attempted to rob the jewellery shop with a knife, suggesting that he was not only about to rob a store, but he could have caused more serious damage. Words that were often used to describe him by all major TV news outlets in Greece included "faggot", "AIDS-patient", "junkie" who was "trying to break in and steal" so "he was asking for it" and "it served him right to die like this" (Poulopoulou 2019).

News reports did not focus at all on the fact that an alleged robber, though still a human, was beaten to death in the city centre of the country's capital. The incident took place in the middle of a working day with pedestrians recording the scene on their phones. Nobody helped. Nobody asked the two men who beat Zak to death to stop. This did not make the news, though. The video that shows, as graphically as possible, Zak's death was being broadcasted on loop for days. In that video, we can see two men beating violently an already unconscious man, Zak, and we can also see those bystanders who watch the incident not with terror, but curiosity. The coverage of the incident went out of proportion when, instead of reporting on developments with the case, lifestyle-type of shows started publishing polls asking the public whether they would rather have as their neighbour an ex-criminal or an LGBTQI+ person.

To understand how this incident illustrates *homoterrorism* instead of, for example, a violent murder of someone who was believed to attempt armed robbery, one must examine the way Zak, the alleged armed robber, was framed in relation to the jewellery shop owner, as well as the bystanders. In doing so, it becomes clear that visual evidence contradicts narrative description, and yet no news report commented on that. The visual evidence broadcasted by all news reports show a man, Zak, being in a jewellery shop. We do not see him carrying a knife, and we do not see him touching, let alone stealing, anything from the shop. A few seconds later, we see people having gathered outside the shop, staring at Zak. He seems distressed, unable to open the main door to leave the shop; instead, he tries to break the shop window to escape. To do so, he attempts to use a fire extinguisher which he found in the shop. However, he is evidently too weak to even hold the fire extinguisher. He continues to try to escape through the shop window and, at that point, two men approach the shop window, and they start kicking it until it breaks. What follows includes them dragging Zak out of the shop through the half-broken window and beating him to death. Needless to say, Zak does not fight back, not once.

Anyone watching the scene could see a helpless skinny man with no strength or willingness to hurt anyone being brutally beaten by two big guys outside a shop in a busy Athenian street. However, from the moment this footage was broadcasted by the Greek media, a different picture was painted. Zak was not referred to by name. Instead, he was referred to as 'robber', 'armed', 'junkie', 'queer' and 'dangerous'. The jewellery owner, who was one of the two men who beat Zak to death, was also not referred to by name. He was referred to as **νοικοκύρης** [/noikokúres/], literally translated in English as homemaker or landlord, but ordinarily used to describe a traditional and respectable man who is devoted to family life, who minds his own business, and whose actions are driven in relation to providing for and protecting his own family and his people. While the footage was playing on repeat and more and more people saw that Zak was not a threat to anyone, that he could not even defend himself, and that the two men could have just held him and let the police take over, the media started making further revelations with regard to Zak's identity. In particular, they highlighted that he was gay, HIV positive, and a drag queen. These characteristics were not used to represent him as a victim. Rather, they were presented as justifications for his victimisation. Not only was he presented as insufficiently masculine and, therefore, less able to contribute to the nation's production; but also, being HIV positive meant that he was contributing to the stagnation of the country's resources by receiving disability benefits. In other words, Zak was framed to be a double threat to the nation. Neither did he fit the norm as to what a man should be and act like, nor did he contribute to the country's economy.

Further to that, Zak's identity was presented in opposing terms to the identity of the jewellery owner. However, a closer examination of the footage allows us to see that Zak was also framed in relation to the bystanders to the scene. This was not overtly discussed by news media, but all footage presents the beating of Zak as a spectacle for the bystanders' appetite. In each video, we see about 20 people gathered around and recording the scene on their phones. Other than illustrating the inhumane nature of our generation, this is significant in that arguably the crowd's inaction suggests endorsement. The beating of Zak is not challenged by the crowd. His beating becomes lynching, and part of society is there to bear witness. Watching this video on the news, then, does not leave much room to question the actions of the two men. If there are so many people present in the scene and nobody does anything to help Zak or stop the two men, it must be that these two men are right, and that the helpless man on the floor must have done something so wrong that justifies the brutality of his beating.

To further understand this through the lens of *homoterrorism*, one needs to consider the sociocultural context of the incident. In August 2018, Greece exited the final bailout programme, which - at least in theory - marked the conclusion of a financial crisis the onset of which is traced to 2007 by some and to 1974 by others (CFR n.d.). At the time of the incident, Greek society was devasted financially with each major and minor social institution being on the verge of collapse. This does not stand as justification for the perpetrators' actions. Rather, it allows us to understand the significance of the connotations attached to the label **νοικοκύρης** with which the jewellery owner was being presented. A **νοικοκύρης** is now more than a traditional and respectable man who is devoted to family life, who minds his own business, and whose actions are driven in relation to providing for his own family. At that point in time, a **νοικοκύρης** symbolised at once both the longing for a lost Greek society and the attempt to re-establish such a society along with a restored national identity and national pride.

This is significant because Zak was not presented as a homosexual who insulted core heteronormative ideals. This would not have been possible with a government that adopted homonormative politics by means of conservative but seemingly progressive legislations protective of - some - gay rights such as, recognition of civil partnership for gay and lesbian couples. Zak was not framed as a gay man. Rather, he was framed as a bad queer, the worst type of gay man. For a society like the Greek one, his HIV positive status was translated in terms of sexual promiscuity, reckless behaviour, and a possible threat to others. His being a drag queen was translated in terms of mental disorder. One cannot but wonder what relevance his HIV positive status, his art as a drag queen, and his preoccupation with HIV/AIDS activism had in relation to the alleged robbery, other than to portray him as a threat not only to the jewellery owner, but to core Greek ideals. Defining Zak as a threat to Greek ideals enabled the (re)definition of what these ideals were. The framing of Zak as *homoterrorist* did not only serve as an extenuating circumstance that justified the brutality with which he was attacked, but it also served as an excuse to redefine and strengthen core national, in this case Greek, ideals. The unfathomable effects of *homoterrorism* as a phenomenon and a practice are concentrated in

Zak's literal and figurative lynching.

Days following his murder, Zak remained the main interest of corporate media productions. However, it is not his murder that preoccupied lifestyle-type of TV shows; it was him as a person. In a TV show that fashions itself after The Oprah Winfrey Show, the host published a poll asking her audience to decide whether they would prefer to have as a neighbour someone like Zak to a convicted criminal. Days after Zak's murder and before there was any kind of evidence confirming that Zak indeed attempted to rob the jewellery shop, that he was indeed carrying a knife or that he was indeed a threat, corporate media took the case to their hands but rather than focusing on analysing the footage they had, they focused on identifying who is and who is not a threat to Greek society. After days upon days of continuous framing of Zak as a national and social threat, the results of the polls were not surprising: Greeks - or at least those who responded to the poll - were definitely determined not to have someone like Zak as a neighbour. However, it is not the results of the poll that really matter. What matters is that this kind of a poll actually happened. Whether people had chosen Zak or a convicted criminal as their preferred type of neighbour is of minor importance. What is of importance, if not terror, is that the incident with Zak was seen as reason for Greek society to define who is acceptable as neighbour and, by extension, who is acceptable as citizen of the Greek state. *Homoterrorism* allows a people to fear those whose sexual identities and practices differ from the norm, and through fear, it enables them to construct a sense of similarity among them, leading to the emergence of definitions about who is the accepted citizen and who is not (Phelan 2001). The remaining part of this paper examines the possibility of social media to challenge *homoterrorism* and queer neoliberal understandings of citizenship.

At the same time when corporate media were using *homoterrorism* to frame the case of Zak's murder, Zak's fellow activists and drag queens started the #justice4zakzackie campaign (initially as #justiceforzak) on social media as a means of challenging what was broadcasted by corporate media, generating a counternarrative. As a result of the success of this campaign, the Greek Minister of Citizen Protection, Amnesty International, the Prosecutor of the Greek Supreme Court, the Greek Ombudsman's mechanism, and the Greek Prime Minister were mobilised, and they ordered further and thorough investigations. To date, the investigations have proven that Zak was not intoxicated and that, based on evidence from CCTV cameras, he had taken the knife from a café he had been prior to the incident in question in order for him to protect himself from a possible attack by another person in that café. He, then, left the café and took shelter in the jewellery store; he did not break in to steal anything. He broke in because he was scared. The police officers and the two individuals who beat Zak up to his death are still free.

The case of Zak Kostopoulos presented above aims to illustrate how *homoterrorism* enables acts of extreme violence to happen and to be justified by a society. The discussion that follows uses the #justice4zakzackie campaign as an example that illustrates Papacharissi's (2015) argument about the facilitation of new forms of political activism by digitally networked technologies. In doing so, I suggest that activism enabled through social media can challenge phenomena such as *homoterrorism* by enabling an alternative to corporate media narrative to emerge and circulate among a big proportion of the population. As such, this form of communication renders possible not only the subversion of corporate media narratives, but also of hegemonic phenomena that contribute to the Othering of individuals, situations, and contexts that do not serve neoliberal political agendas. First, I discuss Papacharissi's argument and then, I apply her theories on the #justice4zakzackie campaign justifying its success and using it as an example of a way to challenge *homoterrorism*.

Twitter Activism as Subversion of Homoterrorism

Digital networks have allowed the emergence of hybrid forms of news to occur, initially because of users' mobile autonomy. This refers to having the ability to choose with whom, from where, and how to connect to what is happening around the world (Hay 2003), and, most importantly one could argue, because they encourage the production of user-generated arguments which, in turn, become social conversations on what becomes news by enabling people to both talk back to and challenge corporate media accounts (Papacharissi 2014). Schonfield (2010) examines the role of platforms like Twitter in producing collaborative storytelling and news co-creation and curation, and Bruns and Highfield (2012) argue that these affordances have transformed these platforms into an alternative

to corporate/dominant news media. In situations of social or political crises, corporate/dominant media broadcast news generated by online users who not only report but also discuss what is happening with a particular situation (Howard 2011). It has been observed that platforms like Twitter, for example, are not only used to report news but, more importantly, they are used to ensure that news are being reported by dominant media accurately and when this is not happening, these platforms are used to separate rumours from facts (Vis 2013). Often-marginalised voices are given the opportunity to report, follow, or correct information that is being broadcasted which enables them not only to influence the dynamics of a particular crisis but also to influence the way history is written (Hamdy 2010).

News streams generated collaboratively by online users through social platforms combine traditional broadcasting conventions and storytelling practices (Papacharissi 2014). This results in streams where objectively reported news and interpersonal conversation are combined and produce emotionally charged news reports. These streams are not produced so that they replace dominant media; they "[...] reconcile the more deliberate and self-conscious storytelling [...] with the additive and participatory nature of [...] storytelling practices, producing a form [...] we might understand as digital" (p. 5). Papacharissi (ibid.) employs affect – subjectively experienced emotion - as a way of understanding and examining these co-generated streams of news on digital platforms such as Twitter.

> "If we understand affective news streams not just as informative, but as collectively-generated, pluralistic arguments on what should be news, and how news stories should be told, we may interpret affective news gestures as indicative of political statements of dissent with a mainstream news culture, and the agendas that culture cultivates" (p. 7).

It is important to note that affect is not an exclusive characteristic of digital platforms. Rather, it is present in news produced by corporate media, as well. Furthermore, corporate media employ tactics that imitate aspects of digital platforms, such as polling audiences. However, the two differ in that in digital platforms, affective news streams do not undergo scrutiny like corporate media news do. Instead, they tend to emerge as responses to what is presented, or silenced, by corporate media. Digital networks, in other works, not only allow users to become reporters and co-create news, engage with the news while they are reported, and correct the way facts are being reported by dominant news; they also provide users with space and power for political influence and social change. Colleoni (2013 cited in Papacharissi 2015) discusses many such stories whereby digital networks have provided a platform for affective engagement with the news in a manner that invites social change. Papacharissi (2015) argues that hashtags of campaigns linked to major movements are "[...] signifiers [...] open to definition, redefinition, and re-appropriation" (p. 2). This process is what allows people to create collaboratively generated stories and, as a result, make them transform from crowds to networked publics. These publics, she argues, "[...] assemble around media and platforms that invite affective attunement, support affective investment, and propagate affectively charged expression, like Twitter" (ibid.). Such digital media, though, do not encourage revolutions; they only provide crowds with a space where they can form publics. These public formations are unique to each situation. In other words, what drives those formations is not always the same. What unites them, though, is "[...] a public display of affect" (ibid.).

Papacharissi (ibid.) examines the concepts of pre-mediation, homophyli, Twitter's role in uprisings, and locality in order to further understand the ways in which the platform is used by publics and how this has affected political activism. Grusin (2010) used the term pre-mediation to explain "[...] the form that events take, before they turn into stories" (p. 3). Pre-mediation, according to Papacharissi (2015: 3), is an important feature of platforms like Twitter in that it encourages a drive for instantaneity in news reporting which often does not add substance but intensity. Homophyli refers to the tendency of people following like-minded others online (Weller et al. 2013). As a result, public awareness on issues of public affairs and of social nature is increased (Erickson, 2010) which, in turn, challenges political hierarchies, and it makes redistribution of power possible (Chadwick 2013). Jansen et al. (2009) discuss the role of Twitter as the electronic word of mouth news sharing which allows marginalised publics – and marginalised issues – to be heard. Finally, Yardi and Boyd (2010) argue that social connectivity is being enhanced by engagement with hashtags about local events. "In conversations around controversial topics, replies between like-minded individuals tend to strengthen group identity, whereas replies between different-minded individuals reinforce in-group and out-group affiliation" (Yardi and Boyd 2010, in Papacharissi 2015).

The discussion so far focuses on the characteristics of platforms like Twitter that promote feelings of engagement (Van Dijck 2013). It is these feelings that encourage crowds, who would otherwise be disconnected from one another, to form networked publics (Howard and Hussain 2013). Such an online activity followed by offline mobilisation of these publics can "[...] bring about disruptions to the stability of powerful hierarchies [and] grant a movement momentum, which may accumulate over time" (Papacharissi 2015: 4). After the incident on Friday, September 21, corporate media portrayed Zak as a dangerous, homosexual, and HIV positive junkie who broke into a jewellery store and did not only attempt to rob it but, perhaps most importantly, as they reported, his presence alone could corrupt the Greek society as a whole (The Press Project 2018). By deploying affective means of engaging audiences, enabled through *homoterrorism*, corporate media engage in promoting a collective identity in response to Zak's identity. If it weren't for the #justice4zakzackie hashtag, the case would have closed, the perpetrators would have been free, Greeks would have believed that they got rid of a miasma of perversion and moral corruption and that their national identity and pride has been restored.

The hashtag started off by members of the LGBTQI+ community who knew Zak and were willing to share their version of who he was and what he was capable and not capable of doing. The popularity of the hashtag grew, and more individuals joined the discussion. Some of them started sharing video footage they had recorded from their mobile phones while at the incident. Those videos became viral because they showed a very different scene to the one that was painted by corporate media. The result was that Ministers, the Prime Minister, and international organisations got involved and started monitoring the investigations closer. Online mobilisation was soon followed by protests on the streets and peaceful marches which added to the pressure on the authorities to examine the incident carefully and in a less biased manner. Since then, more videos and more facts have been released by the authorities all of which contradict the initial portrait of Zak painted by corporate media.

It appears that Zak was more than three noun phrases. Zak was a real human with family, friends, pets, dreams, aspirations, and rights. The #justice4zakzakie hashtag campaign brought to light video footage from the bystanders which reveals a very different case to the one promoted by corporate news reports. Zak appears to be beaten by those two men without being able - or willing - to fight back and protect himself. When the police arrive, he does not resist. Yes, he is treated violently by the police, something that might have contributed to his death. Anny Paparousou, lawyer of Zak's family, reports to the Irish Times "He is clearly only half-alive but they cuff him from behind, making any attempt at resuscitation impossible" (Smith, 2020). Further to this, reports about the failure of authorities to properly seal the crime scene, as well as claims about a cover-up are continuously being reported on the #justice4zakzakie hashtag. Zak's fingerprints were not found on the knife, and toxicological reports confirm that there were no traces of drugs in his body. None of this was reported on corporate news reports. For these media, Zak remains a threat to the social and national cohesion of Greek society.

The emergence and development of the #justice4zakzakie hashtag illustrates what Papacharissi (2015) described as characteristics of online activity that can make a hashtag/movement having a significant political effect, namely serving pre-mediation, gaining popularity because of homophily and because of sharing patterns that resemble word of mouth sharing, and the fact that it is about an incident of national, yet local, interest. At the time of writing, "six people, including the two shop owners and four policemen, stand accused of inflicting fatal bodily harm, a charge all deny" (Smith 2020). The trial was originally scheduled for late 2020, but given concerns over public health, it is put on hold. The #justice4zakzakie hashtag remains active, and it is now used to report instances of homophobic bullying, racism, as well as discriminations against LGBTQI+ individuals and groups.

Through this paper, I proposed *homoterrorism* as a construct that can provide an understanding of extreme acts of violence against the non-heterosexual Other, especially when such acts are framed as essential to the precipitation of national cohesion. I provided the case of Zak Kostopoulos as an example of applying *homoterrorism* as an analytical tool, and I also suggested Twitter activism as a possible way to challenge and subvert it. It is, however, evident that *homoterrorism* needs to be studied further. Possible foci include defining its parameters, presenting a systematic analysis of its characteristics, and providing a rigid framework that enables scholars to apply it when analysing cases similar to the one of Zak Kostopoulos's incident. I encourage further scholarship in relation to defining homoterrorism further,

and I argue that it is a productive construct in that it sheds light not only on the violent acts themselves, but most importantly on systemic processes that justify such crimes as inevitable.

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The Rise of Police Robots: Technocapitalism and the Policing of Race

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Introduction

At a TED conference in 2017, Marc Raibert, the founder of Boston Dynamics and the former Carnegie Mellon and MIT professor of engineering, computer science, and robotics, gave a talk that featured a live demonstration of their quadruped, remote-controlled robot named Spot (Figure 1). In this talk, Raibert showcased a range of Spot's capabilities, including making it dance and fetching a soda with its robotic arm, to which the audience repeatedly responded with laughter and applause, clearly amused by the robot's antics. While indeed entertaining, Raibert's demonstration obfuscates some of the more consequential issues that are implicated in the potential use of robots like Spot in urban spaces, and particularly by repressive state apparatuses (RSAs) like the police. As Louis Althusser (2001) demonstrated, these RSAs include a range of apparatuses such as the government, police, military, and the criminal justice system, all of which operate according to an ideology of violence. One such issue comes to the fore near the end of Raibert's talk, where Helen Walters, the head of curation, poses the following question: "[s]o what about the dark side? What about the military? Are they interested?" (2017: min. 13:58). To Walters' question, Raibert responds: "[s]ure, the military has been a big funder of robotics. I don't think the military is the dark side myself, but I think, as with all advanced technology, it can be used for all kinds of things" (2017: min. 14:04).

Figure 1: Spot (Boston Dynamics)

Raibert's dismissive response of the military's influence and funding of private sector robotics programs, including those previously developed at Carnegie Mellon University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and Boston Dynamics, fails to address the serious implications that such partnerships generate in the domains of security and policing. One of the real dangers that emerge between the collaborative efforts of post-secondary institutions, the military, and technology companies are the detrimental and life-changing consequences they can have on people and communities of color (Muhammed 2010; Maynard 2017), who have long been targeted by RSAs and, more specifically, by the militarized police since the late 1990s.

The militarization of the police gained momentum in 1997 when the Clinton administration introduced the 1033 program under the National Defense Authorization Act. As David Brancaccio, Rose Conlon, and Candace M. Wrenn (2020) observe, the 1033 program allowed the Department of Defense (DoD) to distribute excess military equipment, which would have otherwise been destroyed, to local police agencies across the United States (US). Since the program's

inception, the DoD has distributed over seven billion dollars of military and tactical equipment to more than eight thousand local police agencies (Brancaccio, Conlon, and Wrenn 2020). The militarization of law enforcement across the US, which includes weaponizing police officers with a range of firearms, tactical gear, armored vehicles, grenade launchers, and explosives (Edmondson 2020), has almost certainly contributed to the disproportionate use of deadly police force against, predominantly, Black people (Lowery 2015; Khan 2019).

Protests against the exorbitant police killings of Black people in the US, often organized by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, have been frequently met with heavily militarized police responses. Not only was this evident with the 2014 protests that erupted in Ferguson, Missouri, following the fatal police shooting of Michael Brown, it was also evident more recently with the police's militarized response to the protests and demonstrations against the police killing of George Floyd (Gross 2020). These police responses and others stand in stark contrast to the attacks on the US Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, on January 6, 2021. Not only did the mob that breached the Capitol consist of white supremacists, but some members of the Capitol Police were also suspended and investigated for their roles in the attack (Ray 2021).

While the Obama administration placed some restrictions on the 1033 program in 2015, the Trump administration rescinded those limitations in 2017, arguing that military-grade equipment and vehicles were necessary for the protection of police officers (Edmondson 2020). With the 1033 program in place, acquiring military-grade equipment and robot technology is a far cheaper alternative for law enforcement than purchasing them directly from companies or manufacturers. While the 1033 program does not permit the transfer of armed military robots to local or state law enforcement agencies, there are no legal obstacles in place that prevent the police from turning around and arming robots that are obtained through the 1033 program (Tucker 2016), or those which may be otherwise acquired by any other means.

One early example of the misuse of police robots occurred as early as 2016, when the Dallas Police used a bomb disposal robot to directly deliver and detonate an explosive device that killed Micah Xavier Johnson before he could be arrested, charged, and tried in criminal court (Sullivan, Jackman, and Fung 2016). During a BLM protest, Johnson, a former Army Reserve, shot and killed five Dallas police officers and subsequently engaged the police in a two-hour-long standoff (Sullivan, Jackman, and Fung 2016). As one of six incidents that intentionally targeted law enforcement with violence since Brown's fatal shooting in 2014, Johnson's shooting of Dallas police officers was used to bolster the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) surveillance and policing of what they called the "Black Identity Extremist" (BIE), now referred to as "Racially Motivated Violent Extremism" (Klippenstein 2019). In 2017, the FBI determined that it was "very likely incidents of alleged police abuse against African Americans since [2014] have continued to feed the resurgence in ideologically motivated, violent criminal activity within the BIE movement," which has "spurred an increase in premeditated, retaliatory lethal violence against law enforcement" (FBI Counterterrorism Division 2017: 2). However, the FBI's assessment of the BIE has also led to more aggressive surveillance and policing of the BLM movement (Winter and Weinberger 2017), evident with the sheer incidents and footage of police responding to many BLM protests and demonstrations with the use of rubber bullets, armored vehicles, tear gas and, in some cases, rounds of live ammunition (Hubler and Bosman 2021). Since police robots, including the use of drones, are becoming far more common with law enforcement across the globe, I argue that the inevitable adoption of police robots will perpetuate the technocapitalist conditions under which racist and discriminatory policing thrive.

The Influence of Technocapitalism on Race

According to Luis Suarez-Villa, technocapitalism is "a new form of capitalism that is heavily grounded on corporate power and its exploitation of technological creativity" (2009: 7). Through technocapitalism, the powerful influence of corporatism over technological agendas is used to exploit and commodify human creativity and innovation (Suarez-Villa 2009). Importantly, the approach that Suarez-Villa takes with technocapitalism is that it is neither entirely functionalist or culturalist, since "the values of corporatism are embedded in the research agendas and design of technology" (2009: 7). Instead, technological rationality is bound up in the "social, political, economic, and cultural, and it represents the power, the values, and interests of the dominant power: technocapitalist corporatism"

(Suarez-Villa 2009: 7). As a result, the technological rationality of technocapitalism "combines technique (the rational character of technology) with social domination (the ideological character of corporatism)" (Suarez-Villa 2009: 7). This combination is critically important in understanding how technocapitalism, particularly as a mode of social domination, reinforces notions and practices of inferiority and disposability as they pertain to race and technology.

The inseparability of both racial capitalism and technocapitalism from advancements in technology is certainly not a new phenomenon. As Cedric Robinson (1983) has argued, traditional Marxism informs us that the degradation of labor has always occurred alongside the acceleration of technological development. Yet, when we reframe this dynamic within the technocapitalist system of modern policing, a slightly different paradigm takes shape, one that makes racial injustice necessary features of both policing and technocapitalism. While Suarez-Villa's (2009) definition of technocapitalism encompasses a broad spectrum of networks under which corporate power exerts its influence over society, his analysis of technocapitalism does not address, in any significant detail, the long-standing relationship between the US government, corporations, the military, law enforcement and advancements in technology. By narrowing Suarez-Villa's view of technocapitalism, my framework situates the attributes of technocapital, social domination within law enforcement's use of technology and robots, and its connection to corporatism through the military as a way of illustrating how this form of social domination is invariably linked to racial violence and injustice.

The 1033 program allows us to take note of how it facilitates a process by which surplus military equipment is sent from the military to different police agencies across the US. However, it also creates a perpetual deficit of military equipment and technology for the military that is, in turn, replenished through additional government funding and corporate partnerships. The Pentagon and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) have actively participated and funded numerous military projects, which have found their way from overseas battlefields into urban spaces, including the development and use of robotic and autonomous vehicles by law enforcement (Graham 2011). These projects have also involved universities and corporations, seen, for instance, with DARPA's Urban Challenge, a robotized vehicle competition that brought together Carnegie Mellon University and General Motors in what Stephen Graham describes as "the take-over of engineering science in the university and the local economy by military-robotics research in the service of the military-industrial-academic complex" (2011: 369). Since these corporate, military, and university partnerships lead to the development of weapons, technologies, and autonomous robotic systems that cross over into urban environments through police organizations, it is not merely a question of who bears moral responsibility, as Graham (2011) poses, but, more importantly, who is targeted by the use of these systems and technologies?

From Marx to Amazon to the Police: The Rise of the Robot

In the <u>Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy</u>, Karl Marx's (1973) essay on "The Fragments on Machines" describes how many of the conditions of technocapitalist exploitation were set long ago. For Marx, one of the main sites of critique of machinery was that which was often touted by economists as a benefit to human labor; namely, the capacity of machinery to "leap to the aid of the individual worker" (1973: 567). Rather than view machines as replacing labor-power where labor-power was lacking, machines were seen as a means of "reduc[ing] massively available labour power to its necessary measure" (Marx 1973: 567), thereby reinforcing the capitalist narrative that the fundamental purpose of machines was to ease or emancipate the labor of the worker. In order to foster this narrative and facilitate the conditions under which human labor became replaceable by machines, it was first imperative for big industry and science to collaborate and create mechanical labor that machines could more easily replace (Marx 1973).

In <u>Inhuman Power: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Capitalism</u>, Nick Dyer-Witherford, Atle M. Kjøsen, and James Steinhoff (2019) bring Marx's essay to life, perhaps most notably with their critique of Amazon. As they note, "Marx's thesis that capital's machinery intensifies rather than diminishes exploitation" (Dyer-Witherford, Kjøsen, and Steinhof 2019: 84) is brought to light through Amazon's deployment of automated robots in many of its fulfillment centers. Despite their operational limitations, the use of computer-driven and motion sensor-based robots have reduced order times, increased warehouse space that has allowed for fifty percent more inventory in the areas in which robots are used, and has saved Amazon additional power costs by working in the dark and without air

conditioning (Dyer-Witherford, Kjøsen, and Steinhof 2019). In these ways, robots have replaced the mechanical and routinized labor that was previously taken on by human labor-power, doing so in ways that are deemed to be more cost-effective and efficient.

The exploitative and precarious conditions that have been brought about by Amazon's warehouse automation are also spilling outside of the warehouse. Ever since Amazon's first drone delivery in the United Kingdom in 2016, the Prime Air drone program has picked up momentum, making its foray into autonomous robot delivery service an inevitable reality. On August 29, 2020, Amazon received approval from the Federal Aviation Administration to operate its drones in US airspace (De León 2020). As with the robotization of its warehouses, the Prime Air program will result in the loss of jobs for human delivery drivers. The program is expected to save Amazon billions of dollars in costs by reducing the number of delivery vehicles, drivers, and use of fuel (Bowman 2020). The future precarity of their labor comes amidst working conditions that are already precarious, including a lack of overtime pay, missing wages, and strict time constraints, which force drivers to miss meals and bathroom breaks (Peterson 2020).

Law enforcement agencies have also turned to drones as a means of further increasing their already expansive powers of automated surveillance while decreasing the associated costs. Like Amazon, the use of police drones saves cities and police departments money, particularly as more cost-effective alternatives for aerial surveillance, providing cheaper, quieter, and more expansive forms of surveillance than police helicopters (Sexton 2016; Berkowitz 2018). Recent evidence of their use by the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for aerial surveillance was seen with the monitoring of BLM demonstrators during the Floyd protests in 2020, in which police drones were deployed in "over 15 cities…logging at least 270 hours of surveillance" (Kanno-Youngs 2020). The use of these drones to provide surveillance of demonstrators who protested the grave police injustices committed against Floyd and other unarmed Black people demonstrates the tendency of both racial capitalism and technocapitalism "not to homogenize but to differentiate" (Robinson 1983: 26).

Not resembling the labor and exploitation of Amazon's unskilled workers in any significant way, the police have long used their power and technology to exploit those outside its institution and workforce. The institution of policing largely evolved out of the more informal slave patrols in the American South during the late seventeenth century, in which these patrols controlled and regulated the movement of slaves according to plantation boundaries (Wilder-Bonner 2014). One of the first formal state policing apparatuses was established by the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, where a federal police organization was created to capture and return runaway enslaved people to slaveowners and plantations (Campbell 1970; Maynard 2017). By the 1880s, following the abolition of slavery, Black people migrated across cities in the South in search of paid work; however, by the early 1900s, police departments had expanded across the US and were used to primarily enforce Jim Crow laws (Bass 2001). As Sandra Bass argues, although police organizations "were responsible for upholding the formal and informal social order" (2001: 161) embedded in Jim Crow, white supremacist ideology was also upheld by ordinary citizens, where "every white person was expected to participate in policing the racial lines" (2001: 161). In these ways, the police and the policing of race have always been integral components of racial capitalism, seen through the plantation system and the constantly evolving spectrum of technocapitalism, where weapon technologies that were harnessed by the police were used to enforce the system of racial capitalism.

The Racial Violence of Technocapitalism

Unlike the exploitation of workers evident in Amazon warehouses, the exploitative dynamics involved in robotic policing are reversed. In other words, it is not so much the worker who is exploited but, rather, the citizen. Beginning with the enforcement of a system that facilitated the buying, trading, and selling of slaves as commodities (Browne 2015), the police have used the full scope of the technocapitalist system to continue to reinforce racial capitalism through an increasingly automated policing system that is "disproportionately harmful to the most vulnerable and the least powerful" (Noble 2018: 65). In the US, we can clearly observe how racial capitalism is ingrained in technocapitalism with law enforcement's use of drones and other technology to police and monitor racialized groups and activists. In fact, since law enforcement has always targeted people and communities of color with and without

technology (Browne 2015; Maynard 2017; Eubanks 2019), the use of many police technologies including robots renders these populations more superfluous than others. In the relationship between policing, race, and disposability, human lives that are subjected to increased forms of policing and surveillance are lives that are likely to become more expendable than others (Shaw 2016). The logic of disposability that is anchored to technocapitalism is also anchored to the policing of race, in which the police continue to be seen by many Black people and communities "as agents of a repressive social order" (Wilder-Bonner 2014: 128).

Understanding the police as a repressive social order does not dissipate with emergent technology. While the technology itself may not be subjected to claims of classic racism, since, as Didier Bigo has argued, technology lacks "the human defect of classifying some rather than others according to the color of their skin" (2006: 60), the use of technology by the police attempts to disassociate technocapitalism from claims of racial discrimination by concealing them behind misguided notions of technical neutrality. For instance, we know that police technology, databases and algorithms are not race-neutral (Gandy 2011; Joh 2017; Ferguson 2017; Noble 2018; Eubanks 2019). They require that police engage in acts of policing, surveillance, and data collection methods that make visible the types of people and crimes they want to see, especially those which tend to flag people of color (Joh 2017). As Oscar H. Gandy (2011) has shown, information technologies that make use of statistical analysis are often not subjected to any form of critical assessment or regulatory control, which police make repeated use of in order to justify further acts of racial discrimination. This mode of technology and information-based policing ensures "an endless surveillance loop" (Joh 2016: 136), which, as Elizabeth E. Joh explains, constitutes "monitoring that results in data that justifies even more monitoring" (2016: 136).

The type of watching and surveillance that police technologies harness go far beyond more conventional approaches to surveillance. The deployment of these technologies and others creates an expansive form of watching that includes both the surveillance of bodies and their data doubles. As Kevin D. Haggerty and Richard V. Ericson contend, the data double creates "a new type of body, a form of becoming which transcends human corporeality and reduces flesh to pure information" (2000: 613). This form of disembodied, data-based surveillance allows for a type of discriminatory pragmatics that provides various institutions, including the police, with information to discriminate against certain groups in different ways (Haggerty and Ericson 2000; Lyon 2003). For example, we have seen Black people and communities targeted by a range of new and automated police technologies such as ShotSpotter, an acoustics gun detection technology used by multiple cities across the US in an attempt to reduce gun violence. However, because street-level crimes like gun violence are perceived by police as Black (Tanovich 2004), technologies like ShotSpotter are often placed in non-white neighborhoods. The same can be said for a data-driven police technology known as risk terrain modeling (RTM), used in cities affected by gun violence like Newark, Kansas City, Glendale, and Chicago (Ferguson 2017). In these cities, police use RTM to predict the likelihood of future shooting locations by isolating different sets of geographical-based data, which are obtained from narcotics arrests, gas stations, liquor stores, schools, and bars (Ferguson 2017). These data are fed into predictive computer software that is used to create a risk terrain map, pointing to geographic locations where shootings may more likely occur in the future (Ferguson 2017).

The use of police robots to conduct everyday policing activities will likely draw on similar police databases and software. Since the police already rely on a technological infrastructure that draws on racialized knowledge production for the purpose of watching, surveilling, and policing, the deployment of police robots will also likely draw on these same knowledge and information systems. So, although robot technology itself may not be biased, that does not eliminate the racial bias that can be built into the technology itself or the way in which racially biased police officers can deploy the technology. For instance, if police robots are used to conduct traffic stops in ways that are deemed safer, "enabling the officer and the motorist to communicate with one another without leaving their vehicles" (Jeffrey-Wilensky and Freeman 2019), then how does this alter the deep-seated issues of racial bias and discrimination that are involved in the disproportionate number of traffic stops that single out Black people (Willingham 2019)?

Fundamentally, the main objective of police robots is to reduce the exposure of officers to potentially dangerous situations (Sharkey 2008). According to Noel Sharkey, current trends in police robots signal a future in which different

types of robots will work in unison to not only share "information and images using swarm intelligence techniques" (2008: 2), but will also "have access to totally integrated databases of all information about citizens including bank accounts, tax, motoring, shopping, criminal records and movements" (2008: 2). While current iterations of police robots are certainly not close to that stage of technological development, Sharkey (2008) contends that robots will make police work safer. As we saw when the Dallas police used a bomb disposal robot to kill Johnson in 2016, the robot accomplished just that: it made the work of police officers safer by sending in a machine to kill the suspect, rather than placing the lives of human police officers in additional risk (Berreby 2020). While the lives of the responding police officers were certainly made safer in the process, the life of the suspect was not; instead, his life was deemed to be far less worthy and more expendable than those of the police officers involved. In fact, the police robot killing of Johnson resonates profoundly with Giorgio Agamben's (1998) description of the bandit. For Agamben (1998), the bandit exists outside the legal boundaries and parameters of the law, and so killing the bandit did not constitute an act of murder as defined by the law. Effectively, in breaking the law, the bandit loses any protections afforded by the law. In the case of Johnson, this act of dehumanization was further magnified. His life was not only deemed to be so unworthy that the law no longer applied but his life was deemed so unworthy that a machine was used to take it away.

The use of police robots must be understood in the same context as other police technology, including weapons technology, even if the robots themselves are not technically weaponized. Police technology is designed with the intention to protect the lives of police officers, whether we consider police armor, non-lethal weapons such as tasers and pepper spray, or lethal weapons like firearms. These are technologies that make the lives of police officers safer, as well as some members of the community, while, at the same time, making the mere occupation of public space for Black people extremely precarious (Hogarth and Fletcher 2018) in the presence of police officers equipped with these technologies. In fact, police killings have become the sixth leading cause of death for young Black men in the US (Khan 2019). Robot technology will intensify the police's reliance on technology to buttress what David M. Tanovich calls the "self-fulfilling prophecy" (Tanovich 2004: 916). For Tanovich, "[t]he more that a group is targeted, the greater the likelihood that criminality will be discovered" (2004: 916). In other words, if police robots are used in the same way that other police technology is used, including predictive policing technology like ShotSpotter, which prioritizes the policing of marginalized or working-class communities over more affluent ones, then the likely outcome is that police will find what they keep looking for with robot technology, however biased and subjective their methods may be. The inhuman and continuous means of watching and monitoring that is enabled through robot technology, will only magnify the racial disparity involved in both how and who the police choose to aggressively watch, investigate, and police.

Despite claims that contend robots will by some means reduce or eliminate racial bias in policing, these technologies will exacerbate racial bias in more intrusive and dangerous ways. Unlike human operators, robot technology possesses the capacity to engage in forms of pervasive monitoring that include facial and voice recognition to constantly scan, record, and process information of individuals (Calo 2012). As Ryan M. Calo suggests, this "may even violate the First Amendment's prohibition on the interference with speech and assembly" (2012: 190). Moreover, their different sizes, enhanced mobility, "and sheer, inhuman patience" (Calo 2012: 191), permits robots to perform techniques of surveillance, monitoring, and policing that are simply not achievable by human bodies, including working for longer hours and without breaks (Calo 2012). At the current moment, there are no laws in the US that prohibit the police from flying drones over public spaces or private residences without violating one's privacy under the fourth amendment, a legal provision that protects people's right to privacy and freedom from unreasonable intrusions by the government (Feeney 2016). The potential use of robot technology by the police raises a number of questions: what are the legal and ethical consequences when police robots are deployed in ways that can endanger the lives of humans? What is at stake when police technology and robots can dictate the legal or even fatal outcomes of human lives? What are the effects of sharing sidewalks and roads with police robots, knowing they are not only extensions of the policing apparatus, but that their mere presence in public space, particularly as technologies of police surveillance, will continue to have chilling effects on certain groups and individuals (Maynard 2017; Lyon 2018)? While the full scope of how police robots will further enhance the excessive powers that are already granted to law enforcement remains to be seen, one thing is abundantly clear: police surveillance technology is a multi-billion dollar industry that shows no signs of slowing down (Newcombe 2019).

The Technocapitalist Triumvirate: Corporations, the Military, and the Police

Although policing expenditures vary from city to city, most law enforcement agencies have increased their spending in technology, despite its high costs (Newcombe 2019). That which will continue to permit law enforcement to procure more government funding for their increased technology expenditures, regardless of their costs, is the results that any given police technology produces, even if they are self-fulfilling in nature. There is some evidence to suggest that technology has helped reduce overall crime rates over the last twenty-five years (Newcombe 2019). Proof of this can be seen with the use of closed-circuit television (CCTV) and the reduction in some narcotics, vehicle, and property-related crimes (Piza 2019). Yet, this form of surveillance is also bound up in racial bias. As Clive Norris and Gary Armstrong demonstrate in their study of CCTV control rooms in London, England, Black youth "were systematically and disproportionately targeted, not because of their involvement in crime or disorder, but for 'no obvious reason' and on the basis of categorical suspicion alone" (2006: 163). Furthermore, technology like CCTV has not resulted in any significant reduction of violent crime (Piza 2019), which has in fact become more prevalent across some cities in recent years (Newcombe 2019). Scholarly research on other technologies like police body-worn cameras (BWCs) has shown that this technology has not had any significant deterrent effect on police behavior or misconduct (Ariel et al. 2017), nor has it reduced the exorbitant police killings of unarmed Black people.

Any notion that police robots will by some means rectify these deeply embedded issues of racial bias and discriminatory policing is misguided. The result of using police technology to monitor people through CCTV or BWCs, or by concentrating the use of police technologies on street-level crimes rather than on sexual offenders or domestic terrorists, both of which are crimes that are overwhelmingly committed by white males (Ackerman 2011; Swan 2020), is that police technology tends to inflate the arrest metrics of certain crimes and groups over others. These biased and inflated metrics are not simply used to justify more surveillance and policing of racially targeted people and communities; they are also used to justify the procurement of more funds for additional police technology.

Despite Boston Dynamics' repeated claims that assert their robots will not harm people or be used against them in any way (Bonnard 2019), the company leased Spot to the Massachusetts State Police's (MSP) bomb squad in 2019, becoming the first law enforcement agency to put Spot to use on two different but unspecified occasions (Holley 2019). Spot was also used more recently during military exercises that were carried out at the École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr, France's most prominent military school (Vincent 2021), as well as the New York Police Department, who deployed Spot to the scene of a home invasion (Stephen 2021). During their ninety-day lease, the MSP tested Spot's situational capabilities, which, according to MSP spokesperson Dave Procopio, involved using Spot as a tool of "mobile remote observation…to provide situational awareness of potentially dangerous environments" (Houser 2019). In the brief video footage made public by the MSP, Spot is also equipped with an extendable arm that is used to breach a door (Figure 2) and provide the police with 360 degree situational awareness through a mounted camera (Figure 2).

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has voiced concerns with the MSP's lease of the robot. In an email to the MSP submitted by Kade Crockford (2019), the Technology for Liberty Program Director at the ACLU of Massachusetts, Crockford makes numerous requests, including copies of internal and external communications, documents, and materials that pertain to any product or service related to robots. As Crockford points out, one of the central issues with police robots is that they will be deployed "faster than our social, political, or legal systems react" (Heater 2019), compromising statewide regulations that are required "to protect civil liberties, civil rights, and racial justice in the age of artificial intelligence" (Heater 2019).

Indeed, Crockford is correct in flagging the need to preempt the development and implementation of police robots with the necessary and appropriate laws, policies, and regulatory controls to safeguard people against law enforcement. Still, if we understand police robots not as mere technologies that require oversight, transparency, and regulatory controls, but as weapons that are meant to safeguard police officers rather than the people and communities they are sworn to serve and protect, then how effective will any precautionary measures be? Given the sheer number of fatal police shootings involving unarmed Black people, how compelling are any current police protocols and regulatory controls that deal with police use of force or technology? More importantly, will these much-needed controls and oversight measures fundamentally alter the ways that policing is conducted, or will they simply implement limits as to how robot technology will be used by police without rethinking policing itself?

Figure 2: Massachusetts State Police Lease Spot (Boston Dynamics)

While Boston Dynamics is home to a wide range of robotic quadrupeds and humanoids, including Spot, Wildcat, and BigDog, Spot is the company's first commercial product that will be made available in 2021. When considering Boston Dynamics' history and previous partnership with DARPA—one that no longer exists—it is impossible not to consider Spot or any of the company's other commercially available robots as technologies of violence, despite Boston Dynamics' terms and conditions of sale, which can void the product's warranty and prevent the robot from being updated, serviced, repaired, or replaced if it is not used in compliance with the law, or if it is used to harm or intimidate people. Although Boston Dynamics no longer receives funding from DARPA, they did receive funding from DARPA as recently as 2005 to develop one of their first quadruped robots known as BigDog. This robot was initially designed as a "robotic pack mule to assist soldiers in terrain too tough for vehicles" (Hambling 2006). Since then, Boston Dynamics has developed other quadrupeds that have ultimately led to the development of Spot. In spite of efforts to distance themselves from DARPA, which receives its funding from the DoD, Boston Dynamics has benefited from their previous relationship with DARPA.

Both DARPA and the DoD operate according to mission statements that are premised on national security. Logically, the majority of their funding in robots is geared toward technology that is meant to improve national defense and security. It would, therefore, be unreasonable to expect either DARPA or the DoD to invest any significant funds in developing robot technology that is not military-based or security-oriented. As a company that has grown largely due to its development of military-based robots with DARPA, including the ways in which Spot has evolved from previous iterations of military quadruped robots like BigDog and WildCat, this configuration of technocapitalism is rooted within the military-industrial complex. The brutality of this form of technocapitalism is not simply tied to the preservation of national security outside the US; it is intimately connected to the preservation of national security within its own borders. While this is at times upheld by the military, as we saw when former President Donald Trump ordered military personnel and vehicles to "dominate the streets" (Johnson et al. 2020) in response to the Floyd protests in Washington, DC, national security is also enforced by various law enforcement organizations.

With drones already used by the DHS, the US Customs and Border Protection, and local police departments to monitor the BLM movement, the question is not if police robots will be used but when? With anti-Blackness so ingrained in policing, the current and future use of police robots must be framed within the racist and discriminatory system that is further enabled by technocapitalism. It is a system in which police robot technology—and police technologies, in general—reinforce the imbalance of power that racial exploitation thrives on. But unlike other police surveillance technology that makes use of more affordable technology like cameras, which are also used by ordinary citizens in the form of mobile phone cameras as sousveillance, a type of bottom-up surveillance to observe those in power (Mann, Nolan, and Wellman 2003), the use of police robots will create a new class of policing technology that will remain largely inaccessible to the vast majority of individuals. Also important to note is that the ownership of police robots and the ways that these robots may be deployed, gestures toward a different understanding of

alienation or objectification than what Marx described as one of the "fundamental conditions of the bourgeois mode of production" (1973: 677). Rather than view alienation or objectification through a strictly Marxian lens, the conditions of alienation or objectification that emerge with police robots rests not in "the ownership of living labour by objectified labour" (Marx 1973: 677), but in the ownership of robot technology by those in authoritative power.

In this context, alienation does not occur as a result of the appropriation of labor by capital (Marx 1973), or by those who own the means of production. Instead of trying to maximize the surplus-value of the worker, owning the means of robotization in an age of technocapitalism will allow the police, companies, and corporations to maximize the summation of their powers in public spaces. These are not powers that are restricted to ways of seeing, surveilling, and policing in the traditional sense. These are powers that will magnify the racist, exploitative and oppressive conditions under which surveillance and policing already occur. In addition to the production, commodification, and exploitation of the surplus value that is generated through police surveillance technology, robots will further destabilize social relations between the police and communities, resorting to a form of alienation in which the policing of human bodies is taken on by race-less and faceless, non-human operators. Owning the means of robotization will lead to a paradigm shift, not so much in the discriminatory ways that policing is conducted but, rather, in how certain human lives are objectified and devalued. Giving police robots the power to respond to or assist officers with every day or potentially fatal or life-altering decisions that affect human lives and, more specifically, Black lives, demonstrates precisely which lives are worth preserving and which are not.

Conclusion

This article intervenes at a time in which police robots have yet to make a considerable imprint on everyday surveillance and policing in the US. In addition to some of the original insights that this article hopefully offers, it also serves as a preemptive call for more critical research in the intersecting fields of Marxism, critical race theory, policing, surveillance and robotics. With the health crisis brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, we are witnessing a global acceleration of robot development. As early as April 2020, Wing, the autonomous drone delivery system owned by Google's Alphabet Inc., reported more than a doubling of drone deliveries in the US and Australia (Levin 2020). Even Boston Dynamics' Spot was used in April 2020 at a Boston hospital to reduce the exposure of healthcare workers to the novel coronavirus, equipping the robot with an iPad and a two-way radio that transmitted a real-time feed from doctors to patients (Statt 2020).

In terms of strict surveillance technology, David Lyon (2018) notes that not all surveillance is inherently sinister. He points to the many ways in which surveillance technologies are used to monitor the health of patients both inside and outside the hospital setting, especially for those who require constant monitoring of their vital signs (Lyon 2018). Likewise, one can argue that not all robot technology is inherently evil. For example, surgical robots or robot-assisted surgery have been used by doctors to improve the outcomes of their patients with minimally invasive surgery techniques that only robots can provide. In addition to reducing the unnecessary exposure of healthcare workers to the COVID-19 virus, robots have also been used to sanitize hospitals (Murray 2020). As is the case with many issues, context often matters. This could not be more evident with the use of robots, which, on one hand, can aid in the survival of humans in a healthcare setting while, on the other hand, lead to the detriment of certain groups in a surveillance or policing setting.

Simply because some robots can be used for good does not mean that extreme caution with robots should not be exercised. The emphasis here in terms of robot policing is quite simple: we need to view and respond to the hyper-surveillance and hyper-policing of people of color as a health crisis with serious social, cultural and psychological implications, particularly because anti-Blackness is so ingrained in policing that it both represents and constitutes violence (Maynard 2017; After Globalism Writing Group 2018). The mere act of allowing police robots access to public spaces is itself a form of violence, where sharing a sidewalk with police robots can pose immense risk and uncertainty for people who have long suffered at the hands of law enforcement.

It is not a crisis that will be resolved with the introduction of police robots or other police technologies. If we view the disproportionate deaths of Black people at the hands of police officers as a health crisis, then the cure for such a crisis surely does not rest in the development and procurement of additional policing technologies that include robots. Avoiding technological determinism is key in understanding how the cure for issues of systemic racism, inequality, and injustice are woven into the fabric of the institution of policing. The fight against the accelerated emergence and potential cultural normalization of robots is fundamental to dismantling the technocapitalist and oppressive regimes, which may promote the expansion of police robot technology as the panacea to both issues of security and racial injustice.

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Beyond Prepper Culture as Right-wing Extremism: Selling Preparedness to Everyday Consumers as How to Survive the End of the World on a Budget

Timothy W. Luke

Introduction

Should the ethical, political and social currents in contemporary survivalist "prepper" cultures in the United States be dismissed simply as little more than the theory and practice of anti-statist, right-wing extremism? Known right-wing extremist groups, like The Base, The Oath Keepers, or The Three Percenters, which have been tied to the January 6 riots at the U.S. Capitol, clearly express prepper and survivalist themes in their rhetoric. Yet, are there many more folds in the largely "known unknown" features of "prepper cultures" that far beyond the activities of these three right-wing, self-styled militia groups?

Instead of fomenting insurrection against "the deep state" in Washington, DC, prepper cultures also increasingly link their followers to climate change adaptation as many devotees prepare to cope with a wide array of artificial and natural disasters (Pennington, 2014; Mattoon, 2016; and, Hollerman, 2016). Arguably, a "prepper" ethic is embedded deep in the possessive individualism of liberal society. A seventeenth-century sense of accumulating greater wealth through focused personal labor by extracting greater stores of valued materiel, holdings of land, and stocks of precious metal specie, for example, represents considerable preparation for dealing with possible disasters. More on point today, however, a contemporary prepper subjectivity can be tied to personal capabilities and plans to procure individual wants and needs now from the abundant outputs of industrial democracy's factories and farms, regardless of one's political predilections, to store for use tomorrow when such abundance no longer is readily available

While these behaviors are known, they are not well-known. Prepping to survive adversity in future crises or catastrophes appears to be an amalgam of "consumer cultures" drawing from today's mass produced abundance plus "saver cultures" always cognizant of how modern urban life can easily be disrupted or even destroyed. Prudence dictates purchasing more than is needed now to be ready to satisfy as well as defend most wants drawn from hidden personal bunkers for a certain future period in times of severe crisis. Such "bunker" culture clearly conveys these intentions in the original Scots word "bonker," which meant a compartment, chest or box used for permanent preparation, long-term storage or defensive action. Preparedness itself from this perspective, then, becomes another range of vital products sold in multiple markets to consumers steeled to survive various catastrophes through savvy budgeting, smart shopping, and strategic planning. Its extent and complexity are restricted by income level, information availability, and interest in public affairs -- as the devastating and unequal outcomes of many natural disasters underscores year after year across the U.S. Nonetheless, it appears "prepper" behavior is a a lesser-known dimension in "consumer" behavior across the U.S., and it is not solely a right-wing paramilitary extremist preoccupation.

Do its root parameters, in fact, arise from other extreme, but different perils, namely, twentieth contexts of global war? In such conflicts, the ordinary flow and volume of commercial exchange, anchoring industrial consumer

life and international trade, often were quickly put into "temporary suspension." Such disruptions in the civic and commercial contexts of relative peace in large-scale international war usually lasted "the duration" of such hostilities, because nation-states and their imperative military logistics typically redirected the flows of mass industrial production toward wartime needs rather than civilian wants. Hence, for many decades, the basic individual subjectivity of modern industrial society to some degree has presumed "the consumer" can, must and will be "a prepper" at the state's command.

To learn more about these "known unknowns" behind "prepping" leads one to World Wars One and Two as well as the Cold War. Shifting from a nuclear apocalypse to the climate change calamity today, how do the premises of industrial consumerism shape the strategies of different social strata adapting to ecologies ravaged by worsening climate change? Too many tactics implicitly appear to accept the most embedded beliefs of neoliberal culture: society does not exist, collective action is impossible, individual initiative is everything. Yet, can climate change futures in neoliberalism's ruins be continuously gamed, like global war futures, in material and practical strategies, which might buffer the individual and society against "temporary suspensions," to the extent that the privileged and powerless both imagine them in the present? The preppers of the world arguably appear to believe they can. In facing the calamities of climate change today, then, the final irony of gaming to survive such calamities is how today's stressed ecosystems are undermined to fuel mass markets with a bounty of goods and services. A tragedy behind such consumerism unfolds as the farce of prepperism. A few individuals and groups with the means buy in bulk as well as train to behave are prepping ahead of great disasters. They struggle to procure and protect the right mix of goods and services to perhaps survive amid devastated ecologies trapped in small artificial hidden ecologies, like time travelers, until Nature and Society might, once again, restart anew, if and when they can crawl out of their apocalypse-proofed rehabbed Cold War missile silos weeks, months or years in the future (see Survival Condo [https://survivalcondo. com], 2021).

This preliminary study, therefore, explores the strange conjunctures of right-wing extremism, the general populist discontent with today's governing elites, and a widespread sense that systemic crisis that express their capacity during times plagued by infrastructure failures, contested elections, and institutional gridlock. In another sense, these trends also are intertwined with "environmental politics" inasmuch as the artificial ecologies of advanced industrial society are degrading the natural ecologies of the planet, but more people are asking what can they do in order to avoid this sustained degradation in small familiar spaces they inhabit with their families, friends and neighbors. Hence, what might be learned from how some Americans, from "the Base" of the Make America Great Again movement to less organized networks of autonomist, anti-fascist, anticapitalist elements associated with the "It's Going Down" movement, are perhaps new cultural models for adaptations to these complex "climate changes" in the U.S.?

As a case in point, do these developments require rethinking the meaning, purpose, or significance of the estimated 3 to 4 million self-identified "survivalists" in the U.S. today? While they might be only one to two percent of the American population, the bubbles of contingency upon which these millions balance their identities between the roles of "ordinary consumers" and "extraordinary preppers" are suggestive. On the hand, "survivalism," "prepping" or "hoarding" arguably are pathologies in mass consumer society, because believers in these behaviors expect the mega-machineries of total abundance, like computer networks, electrical grids or oil pipelines can and/or will fail soon. On the other hand, however, are such preppers simply more attuned to starkly embedded oligarchic forces at work behind liberal America's consumer society that dictate how the Internet operates, impose public deregulation as individual choice or expropriate public and private lands to pump fossil fuels through pipelines from sites of ragged extraction to points of wasteful use only for the profit of a few like themselves?

Those already evident realities are signaling "the incommodities" of the ecological strife, green civil war or environmental exhaustion that will be, or indeed already have been, sparked by climate calamities. Outside of the European Union or United States, thousands are again streaming every week out of Africa, Central America and the Levant to climb over the wire fences into Ceuta, wade across the Rio Bravo or set sail in overladen boats for Lampedusa to catch transportation to Spain, Del Rio, Texas or mainland Italy, seeking work, safety and opportunity. Why do they take these risks? Such displaced souls would agree with Hobbes about how "the state of nature" can

overgrow and then disrupt the degraded environments they are escaping, "wherein men live without other security, than what their own strength, and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition, there is. . . .worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short (Hobbes, 1998: 84). Yet, are the places of refuge they seek to enter really interested in seeing them arrive?

Many preppers deeply fear the men, women, and children fleeing such conditions to find ways into the E.U., U.S. or any other safe haven. Yet, there also are preppers who already are suspicious about their neighbors one street over, in the next building or the apartment below them. The stereotypical "prepper" from the National Geographic Channel's "Doomsday Preppers," for example, usually is depicted as white, male, suburban/exurban, middle to working class. Fixated on facing some coming cataclysm that fascinates them, ranging from another global pandemic to a nuclear war, they are convinced their outdoor living skills, good marksmanship, technical acumen, clever home renovations, and/or prescient shopping will enable them to survive with body and soul intact (Garrett, 2020; Mattoon, 2016; Pennington, 2014; and, Crawford, 2010). Consumers, who are also avid readers and cost-conscious, can turn to the "#1 Amazon Bestseller in Survival and Preparedness," Jonathan Hollerman's, Survival Theory: A Preparedness Guide promising "How to Survive the End of the World on a Budget" (Hollerman, 2016). Still, this price-conscious imaginary of doomsday, which is shared by many affluent white suburbanites and rural residents, occludes other overlooked, like-minded compatriots in different demographic niches, namely, non-white, female, Latinx, or Native American groups.

There one discovers many different "ordinary consumers" stocking up as extraordinary preppers, who proudly present themselves as "Afrovivalists," "BattleX," and "Dark-Skinned Preppers" (see The Afrovivalist, 2020; BattleX, 2019; Black Prepper, 2020; and, Adewunmi, 2018). Their "prepper ethic" is a more discreet current in the current crisis, but minority group consumers and citizens also harbor very similar anxieties about the present. Are these groups really that different or have recent events, forces or pressures revealing that a "prepper ethic" is becoming more commonly shared? Where has this root subjectivity in advanced industrial countries come to be? Why does it persist? And, how is it morphing into tactics for adapting to climate change? These are critical questions for environmental political theory, and this preliminary discussion begins to explore them.

A Genealogy of Preppers

Despite common understandings about "preppers" and their elaborate rituals of preparing for doomsday events in tales about right-wing fringe movements, strange religious sects or future primitivist clans, is "the prepper" only "a consumer" getting into a state of readiness for when the "temporarily closed" signs go up on the doors of their favorite shopping destinations? Amid the COVID-19 pandemic and the halting recovery across the U.S. from this global disaster (Wall Street Journal, 2020), such situations no longer seem exceptional. After 9/11 or around the regions struck by massive North American blackouts during 2012, 2003, 1977 or 1965, such developments of readiness do not seem at all strange. Yet, are there other deeper sources in American prepper culture occluded in prejudicial presentations of the "Doomsday Prepper" televisual aesthetic? Indeed, is a preparatory stockpiling sensibility an implicit necessity of modern life, which unfolds with the development of consumerist "industrial democracy" in the Gilded Age, the American service state of the Progressive Era after 1914, or total war mobilizations in World Wars One and Two, and the Cold War? Prepper behavior today too easily is derided as a mildly neurotic deviation or an odd-ball underground movement. Yet, in consumerist industrial democracy, has not the federal government repeatedly also praised and then essentially directed its citizens to fundamentally embrace this identity and such behaviors as an imperative personal responsibility in every household for over a century?

Before 1991, as surreal as it seems in 2021, the civic duties of smart shopping implied having enough household necessities on hand to shelter in place with one's family during a thermonuclear war that might last three days or for years. This eventuality would often be cited regularly during random tests of the "Emergency Broadcast System" on radio and television networks in brief "public service announcement" (P.S.A.) clips. "Air raid" sirens would wail in cities and towns. Brief lessons at school, in print and soon online would instruct citizens about how to "duck and cover," "find nearby civil defense shelters" or "stock up and survive a disaster."

These core messages, first circulated during the 1950s and 1960s, were a bit disingenuous. Atomic bombs were depicted as dangerous threats, but clever citizens with thorough "personal preparation," like those needed to survive a blizzard, hurricane or tornado, could survive the horrendous conditions created by nuclear war essentially by gathering from all of the necessities to sustain their own complete household ecosystem. Through such temporal imports from lost normal milieux, each household was asked to stockpile whatever was needed to endure even massive attacks plus everything required to make their future survival a plausible possibility for the days, weeks, or months that would pass before the "all clear" sirens would be heard. Washington essentially commanded every consumer "to be prepared," and always bear in mind -- no matter where or when they moved -- such extensive personal advance preparations were mandatory for society to survive and prevail in a nuclear exchange.

The consumer, then, was mobilized as the ultimate line of final defense by actively preparing each shopper to survive and then thrive in the blasted burnt ruins of irradiated states. While this civic expectation seems insane, the most reliable environmental conditions beyond that geopolitical crisis when "mutually assured destruction," or the MAD strategy, triggered quick or protracted nuclear exchanges would depend upon pre-positioned canned, freeze-dried, powdered, or vacuum-packed goods purchased from antebellum suppliers. Ironically, in the packed vacuums of industrial commodity fetishism, a few human beings like the cockroach and sewer rat, might therefore survive nuclear war deep underground with those prepared consumers who could thrive on the canned cultures of mass consumption. The citizen as the consumer had a never-ending responsibility, namely, acquiring the logistical stores for such logistical resilience.

Such prepper behaviors were the official badge of individual reliance, as millions of potential "megadeaths" lived actual "microlives" ready to be counted upon, should they survive, to reclaim, rebuild and reassert their individual and collective lives after any nuclear nightmare. Such measures could only strengthen such chosen citizens, like those in the Western bloc of liberal democratic capitalist nations, by anticipating how the public might have access to environmental services in the future by conveying them from the past in blast shelters they made in basements, caverns, mines or tunnels. Attaining such readiness, to a real extent, was individual freedom itself. Think back to "Burt and Heather Gummer," or Reba McIntire and Steve Gross, living off-the-grid outside of the old tiny crossroads town of Perfection, NV in "Tremors," well-armed and fully stocked in a fortress-like house, waiting for "the end of the world as we know it" (Underwood, 1990)in their overstocked underground bunker. They had good vibrations, ready for anything -- even the "graboids" who did not think before they broke into the wrong basement full of devout believers in the Second Amendment.

At its roots, "prepping" comes from "prepare," which draws from a common Latin term "praeparāre," combining "prae," or notions of "the before-hand," and of "parāre," or "to make ready." Who prepares, what is readiness about, why act beforehand, who decides such readiness is required, and how this future could be concocted effectively says much about the scope of prepper consciousness. It recognizes the stuff of consumer subjectivity is purposely assembled, created, manufactured, or readied for use, after circulating as raw materials, constituent components, or stand-alone units in local, national, or global exchange, before arriving in stores to be purchased and used by ordinary consumers. Wartime blockades, mobilizations, or shortages have created "temporary closures" in these commodity chains. Still, the sustaining spirit of this material ecology on which in each techno-scientific process for production/circulation/accumulation/consumption rested could, and would, keep the faith that "normality" eventually must be restored after such "closed times."

Prepping, then, springs forth, not as a deviant libertarian style of self-reliance, but rather as one more variant of the foundational political subjectivities programmed into the everyday life of industrial societies to nurture unending economic growth. In times of global conflict, this disposition can be tied directly into a technocratic command-and-control regimen shaping all citizens and subjects to comply with its material demands for implementing "total war" during the twentieth century. Often attributed to General Eric Ludendorff, who elaborated this idea in a short 1935 book, *Der totaler Krieg*, as part of his strange collaboration with the new National Socialist party and the regime led by Adolf Hitler, the practical basis of the concept came from "the Hindenburg Program" of the German General Staff to mount a more extensive national mobilization in Germany and Austria-Hungary during the military stalemates of

1916 on the Western Front.

Beset by a sea blockade, and surrounded by its enemies of the Triple Entente on all sides, Imperial Germany saw Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg with General Ludendorff, who led the German General Staff, override the Hohenzollern regime's Imperial War Ministry by establishing the new *Kriegsamt*, or Supreme War Office, to far more completely mobilize the economy of the Central Powers for all-out war production as a Zwangwirtschaft, or a "compulsory coerced economy." Labor, resources, technology, revenues, and transport within the Hohenzollern and Hapsburg Empires were put under the strict supervision of a railroad expert, General Wilhelm Groener. He, in turn, worked with the General Staff to rationally extract and fully utilize any available resources from the stocks of the Central Powers' coalition to enable it to prevail in the battles of World War I.

War no longer was conducted then only in the trenches of the Western and Eastern front. Every subject and citizen was directed to prepare for and contribute to this victory on "the Home Front" by being ready and willing to consume less now as well as produce more to fuel the state's military victories. Unrelenting hard labor, material sacrifice, financial support, and moral investment by the subjects and citizens of the Reich were critical for victory. And, they worked in parallel with the demanding discipline of the military's all-out struggle to prevail in the campaigns Hindenburg and Ludendorff conducted thanks to these newly added increments of forcibly extracted war materiel. Essentially every sector of the built and natural environment was mobilized for the continuous creation of more capital, labor, resources, and talent to serve the war objectives set by the *Kriegsamt*, and this interpolation of the nation-state's objective macrological strategy produced individuals who were trained, readied or shaped to execute its tactics as part and parcel of their nationalist micrological subjectivity.

Later relabeled "the command economy" by Ludwig van Mises (von Mises, 1936), "state capitalism" (Lenin, 1917) or "planned economy" by Joseph Stalin (Davies, 1998), this centralized reorganization of mixed, profit-centered economies into an autarkic material-maximizing mobilization system constituted a new material ecology to wage unrestricted submarine warfare, conscript slave labor from prisons, and substitute new technology-intensive weapons, like poison gases, for more labor-intensive divisions. It also brought long-range aerial bombardments by armed airships and later long-range winged-bomber aircraft to attack its enemies' reciprocal efforts to stage a total mobilization for war. Hence, in the United Kingdom, Imperial Germany, the Third French Republic, one can observe the emergence of early prepper-like ethics in the spirited protective "civil defense" efforts on their home fronts. There are continuous drives to collect discarded junk to produce war materiel by children, women, and the elderly back home. Such practices laid the groundwork for envisioning modern political subjectivity centered as much on "prepping for war" in economies of "mass destruction" as it was readied for a future of "producing peacetime goods" in societies of "mass consumption" after the final victory.

In America, President Wilson's admiration for Prussian governance triggered the formation of the Council for National Defense at the federal level during August 1916, but the brief duration of America's involvement in actual hostilities did not lead to much more than the Council's members touting broader morale-building and material marshaling activities at the state and local levels during that conflict. Nonetheless, an organizational precedent was set, and F.D.R. called upon the Council's designs in the late 1930s to prepare America's economy and society to create a more expansive "civilian defense" apparatus during World War Two. By 1943, it pulled together 11 million volunteers in 14,000 local defense councils to organize air raid drills, stage rare materials collection drives, plant innumerable "victory gardens," lead gas attack training, and establish first aid stations around the nation.

After Hiroshima, these groups were reshuffled in light of atomic weaponry during the 1950s to be on the watch for Soviet bombers, prepare fall-out shelters, and learn how to treat "radiation sickness." Prepping to survive nuclear bombing was promoted by Washington and every state government. The message to 1950s consumers was clear: "**You Can Survive** You can live through an atom bomb raid and you won't have a Geiger counter, protective clothing, or special training. The secrets of survival are: Know the Bomb's True Dangers. **Know the Steps You Can Take to Escape Them**. (Office of Civil Defense/State of California, 1950: 3). In other words, "prepping" for a catastrophic event is a civic duty, and it pays off.

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Solemn government broadcasts about such normalized preparations of brutal wartime suffering became more elusive after America and Soviet Union realized "nuclear parity" in the Nixon years as massive arsenals of thermonuclear warheads on ICBMs displaced a few dozen small atomic bombs on jet bombers as the core of their strategic forces. Yet, those who live in Los Angeles, New Orleans or Miami Beach now routinely hear echoes of such warnings about impending "natural disasters." They are commonly repeated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) during earthquake drills, hurricane season and tropical storms "to prep" for the total disruption of public services, civic order, free travel and access to everyday necessities, which are basically, as Hobbes declares, "such things as are necessary to commodious living" (2008: 86). As the most engaged, but also more ineffective, offices of the American Leviathan, FEMA explicitly commands the residents under such emergency watches to expect the worse, namely, being thrown into the uncertain state of suspended, lost or inept conditions of "Leviathanlessness." Implicitly, FEMA is speaking in Hobbesian terms. Its managers recognize devastation on the scale of Hurricanes Katrina in New Orleans or Maria in Puerto Rico, should "be perceived as what manner of life there would be, where there was no common power to fear; by the manner of life, which men that have formerly lived under a peaceful government" could very soon "degenerate into, in a civil war" (Hobbes, 2008: 85).

Here the climate change imaginary as well as the memories of high-level nuclear mobilizations during the Cold War become significant. The World Wars ended for most combatants and in many areas. Where they did not, civil strife, ethnic cleansing, wars of national liberation, smaller-scale conventional war continued across the world from 1918 to 1939, and then again, more widely and intensely, after 1945 during (and after) the Cold War. Nonetheless, at its core, the world economy's "temporary closures" also ended in bouts of expanded productive prosperity. Never enjoyed fully by most, economic growth restarted, and the wartime mobilization of prepping for total victory, partisan warfare in defeat or sacrifice for statist autarky tapered down even in USSR until the 1960s.

Brushes with thermonuclear war in tense alerts during 1962, 1973 and 1983, however, raised the prospects of not merely the "temporal suspension" of consumption, but the "material end" of advanced industrial society as it has been known since the close of the nineteenth century. As lampooned with the notion of "the mineshaft gap" between the U.S. and USSR in the 1964 film, "Dr. Strangelove," about the U.S. and USSR accidentally stumbling into a nuclear war in 1968, national planners did thoroughly contemplate what the scope, duration, and annihilation a full-blown thermonuclear war could entail "terraforming" spaces beneath the planet's surface to preserve their state's "national command authority" (Graff, 2017). All that was needed to be "prepped" was the will and means to migrate from the surface of the planet to subterranean spaces of vast mines for months, years or decades.

A "nuclear winter" such conflict could trigger for the Earth's climate also was carefully modeled during the 1980s, setting the stage today for imagining comparably catastrophic alterations from other causes in the Earth's climate in the twenty-first century. Prepping to survive doomsday, whether it snaps together in a week of hydrogen bomb explosions (Kahn, 1960) or slowly emerges over decades of excessive greenhouse gassing of the atmosphere (Nixon, 2011), the proponents of "survival theory" (Hollerman, 2016; Mattoon, 2016; and, U.S. Office of Civil Defense, 1966) continue to animate the theory and practice for "preppers" among the ranks of ordinary consumers in 2021. Today, however, under neoliberal conditions that favor individual initiative, they ironically still draw on the social capital of collective sacrifice that Washington valorized as practical points of civic faith during the Cold War. .

Prepping under Pluralist Conditions of Rule

Consequently, millions of Americans do appear to plan and practice strategically pre-figurative, post-apocalyptic household prepping on weekend shopping trips fully convinced that no matter what disaster befalls society tomorrow the shops will remain shuttered for a long time. At one level, "prepping is, at its heart, a kind of activism, a bulwark against the false promises of capitalism, of the idea of endless growth and the perpetual availability of resources" (Garrett, 2020). At another level, however, the algorithms behind the restocking programs in Costco, Gander Outdoors or Sportsmen's Warehouse superstores lure certain psycho-demographic market segments down their aisles to buy their weekend camping needs as well as procure all their daily camping, fishing, and hunting essentials for months or years. This demand exists and sustains the always evolving niche markets of a multibillion-dollar business

selling "preparedness," which is regarded by many of these buyers as capitalism reliably delivering the goods that preppers desire.

Whether it is vended as jars of organic peanut butter by the case, 1000 round bricks of .22 L.R. cartridges, black plastic buckets holding a week's meals for four people in vacuum-packed bags, or MASH-quality medical kits sourced from around the world, there is a robust market for consuming the basic stocks of future household ecologies packaged to sustain everyday life today. Prepper "sportsmen" and "sportswomen" in tactical gear, who refuse "to trust business, trade networks, and markets to provide what we need, to not question the resiliency of globalization" (Garrett, 2020), shop daily under normal conditions to be ready for catastrophes tomorrow. Their objectives are clear: to accumulate complete stocks to supply their own stores of ecological services, which then are stacked high in the basement, hidden in the walls, or buried in the dirt around their last-stand rural retreats.

What do these peculiar activist trends reveal about a liberal democratic republic like the U.S.? Too many associate them only with violent right-wing extremist politics. Of course, the events of January 6, 2021, in Washington, DC, suggest that connection is not insignificant, but it is insufficient. Other people with different ideological perspectives recognize that politics under extreme conditions of social collapse will entail violence, and they are rightfully readying their preparedness.

In one register, over the past 15 years, "climate change" has taken on new meaning with every major power outage, hurricane season, blizzard white-out, heatwave, or protracted drought. These events are seen more as the forerunners of greater "climate calamity" incidents in which natural disasters trigger miserable distress. Prepping might prevent major misfortune or total loss in the future for those who are realistic now. In a second register, FEMA, Baton Rouge, and the City of New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina in 2005; Washington, DC, the National Guard, and Commonwealth government during 2017 after Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico; or, the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT), Austin, and hundreds of municipal governments during the severe polar vortex intrusions across the Midwest in February 2021 are vivid instances of tremendous chaos actually happening. These incidents made it blatantly obvious that advanced industrial life for most Americans is not fool-proof. In only in few hours, one can be forced to survive under conditions that are far from advanced, no longer reliably industrial, and often not really living.

These episodes also reveal the sub-political infrastructures underpinning the everyday civic life (Beck, 1992) overseen by America's political superstructures are an unreliable tangle of corroded machinic ecologies too often run to the point of sustained collapse as well as worn-down cash cows operated to enrich pension funds, private equity firms, and professional consultants rather than deliver reliable public utility to their clients. Plainly, this terrain is a close study of "how everything can collapse" (Servigne and Stevens, 2020). Trapped in this situation, basic public services and regular store hours will rapidly be "temporarily suspended." Basic public utilities are only one case in point. Pacific Gas & Electric or Southern California Edison in the 2020s must quickly impose rolling electricity blackouts for millions (after neglecting to routinely maintain their powerlines or regularly groom their grid easements for decades) to avoid sparking forest fires. Their customers, in turn, face entire towns burning down as well as forced emergency evacuations during heat waves, Santa Ana wind events, or extreme droughts. Not surprisingly, many consumers prep their own DIY-responses for coping with such climate calamities within their households alone or with a few trusted neighbors (Moses, 2018).

These recent events explicitly affirm the embedded beliefs of American neoliberal culture: society does not exist, collective action is impossible, markets are reliably efficient until they fail, and the individual is all that counts. If one wants a dependable, authoritative order, he or she will be disappointed. Far too many Americans do not see "that great **Leviathan** called a **Commonwealth**, or **State**" (Hobbes, 1998: 7) seated in Washington, DC, explicitly directs the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to brief its citizens about expecting to encounter occasional "Leviathanlessness" by commanding "consumers" to be "preppers," since the "salus populi (the people's safety) that is "its business" (Hobbes, 1998: 7) often does suffer "temporary suspension." At FEMA's website, Ready.gov, the U.S. state then extolls this implicit state of exception with appeals to "Build A Kit," since "after an emergency, you may need to survive on your own for several days. Being prepared means having your own food, water, and other supplies

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to last for several days" (Ready.gov, 2021b).

IConsumers must be preppers, and their astute purchases must assemble "kit built ecologies" that ideally should fit into "a couple of plastic bags" with "a gallon of water a day for each person; several days of food (at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food); battery-powered or hand-crank radio and a NOAA Weather Radio with tone alert; flashlight; first aid kit; extra batteries; whistle (to signal for help); dust mask (to help filter contaminated air); plastic sheeting and duct tape (to shelter in place); moist towelettes, garbage bags and plastic ties (for personal sanitation); wrench or pliers (to turn off utilities); manual can opener (for food); local maps; cell phone with chargers and a backup battery disaster" (Ready.gov, 2021b). Of course, there are those who are too feckless to prepare, because they realize one can always rob these resources from the ready at gunpoint when needed (Osnos, 2016), while the ready also recognize they must be armed to deter such brigands.

From the scores, hundreds and thousands that have died on FEMA's watch since 2003, astute survivors are learning how life in the U.S. unfolds now amid neoliberalism's ruins. To the extent they grasp how fully its "the states of exception" recklessly throw "ordinary consumers" into "the state of exceptions," "extraordinary preppers" now can shine by "prepping" their own ecological zones for intermittent, if not protracted, self-reliance in "All Hazards," or what some label "The Event," including such circumstances as "Emergency Alerts; Attacks in Public Places; Avalanche; Bioterrorism; Chemical Emergencies; Cybersecurity; Drought; Earthquakes; Explosions; Extreme Heat; Floods; Hazardous Materials Incidents; Home Fires; Household Chemical Emergencies; Hurricanes; Landslides & Debris Flow; Nuclear Explosion; Nuclear Power Plants; Pandemic; Power Outages; Radiological Dispersion Device; Severe Weather; Space Weather; Thunderstorms & Lightning; Tornadoes; Tsunamis; Volcanoes; Wildfires; and, Winter Weather" (Ready.gov, 2021a). This list will take a lot of shopping in the here-and-now to live with a slim hope of materially surviving the disastrous futures that may strike most of them, but this fact is at the bottom-line for consumers who are key parties to the crumbling social contracts of "the world's last remaining superpower" (Pennington, 2014).

Drifting into prepper culture follows naturally from the neoliberal competition, aggressive survivalism, and winner-take-all mentality, which could be described as the terms of engagement in which most groups face the hostilities of "the new class war" (Lind, 2020). Living in a perpetual state of being ignored, neglected or unaccommodated in the increasing frictions of market competition between individuals and groups to adverse circumstances, a few increasingly refuse to compromise with government incompetence, corporate malfeasance or ineffectual expertise. In trying to mutually build a surreptitious accumulation of survival stores, family firearms, and bug-out bags, which they believe will afford them a commodious existence "after the crash," the hassles of existing market society actually often put them at odds with the present, as a few right-wing militia organizations have done confronting the F.B.I. or local police. Eventually, the authorities often arrest them, strip them of their survival supplies, and leave them less prepped to face their worst imagined future conditions, even though many law enforcement officers share the same anxieties and have similar plans for survival. Yet, near the end of a world normally spinning around mass consumerism, industrial democracy, and civil order, can many ordinary consumers reasonably prepare for collective desperation, post-industrial oligarchy, and civil disorder?

After decades of neoliberal reforms, the American government lost much of its once robust capacity and has become increasingly ineffectual, incomplete, and inconsistent. So far, the inequalities of neoliberalism have rested mostly on the poor, struggling along the rural periphery, striving in among the precariat, and settling across the inner-city. They know they are superfluous, the unwanted others, maybe even the enemy. The "winners take all." With their winnings, they are repositioning their ecological existence in more viable but also confined lifeworlds only for themselves in the short-, medium- and long- terms of the future.

The unprepared "loser get nothing" elements are left to cope with rapid climate change, deepening desertification, and frequent famine on the street. For the most destitute street people, then, doomsday is already here. One vision of things to come for all can be witnessed today in the degradation of this underclass. Their everyday life is entangled already in building narrow niche ecologies in run-down cities, under freeway overpasses, or on public beaches. There

they prep for greater disasters by trading in odious black markets, committing violent crimes, squatting in rag-tag tent camps, and engaging in freegan nomadic scavenging (Chandler, 2020a; and 2020b).

For truly wealthy consumers, prepping is more discretely sold in the clean green envelopes of well-stocked safe rooms, unmapped ranches in Idaho, ocean-going yachts with months of range or remote New Zealand farms (Osnos, 2017). Other more numerous strata in once affluent America now are squeezed between the homeless poor and the rootless rich, and they hoard their canned, powdered, and shrink-wrapped ecological caches in attics, basements, or sheds. Prepping with more limited financial means and maybe living payday to payday, these preppers consume strategically to supply the lifestyles behind their "sustainable materialism" by stockpiling an extended shelf-life and indefinitely storable stash of daily essentials. Can these "consuming for the future" preppers continue to believe they can "buy time" from neoliberal ecologies of overshoot? Many do. Yet, in such extremely "denaturalized ecologies" (Biro, 2005), is it not environmental overshoot that has robbed all life in these times and places of its resilience, making these mixed maladaptive prepping movements both seem imperative, and yet be likely unreliable?

The Qualities of Mutual Aid

In mapping the contours of "mutual aid," Petr Kropotkin posited this human quality was integral to the evolution of humanity itself. Like many intellectuals during the nineteenth century, much of his work targeted the writings of Charles Darwin on natural evolution. Rather than regarding "the survival of the fittest" as endless pitched struggles of individuals against individuals, groups against groups, or nations against nations, Kropotkin took the opposite tack. By his lights, the evolution of humanity was sustained by an innate disposition of humans to collaborate productively in strong mutualistic support of one another in competition with other groups and against nature. Cooperation and mutual aid rather than competition and selfish conflict were the personal sentiments that gradually guided the social, moral, and ethical evolution of human beings.

A diverse range of mutual aid arrangements, according to Kropotkin, could be found in history, and he urged all to look beyond the boundaries erected in most Social Darwinist arguments, which focused more on selfish individualism or diffident helplessness, to search for any and all forms of mutualism at the core of humanity's existence. How can his analysis of mutual aid shed light on the fruitless activities of mutual disaccommodation?

From the bottom of society looking up, on September 14, 2019, many thousands of Americans gathered at public parks, civic squares, or local churches around the country to celebrate "Guns & God Appreciation Day." Such an event for most individuals living in elite communities concentrated in major cities on the East or West Coast seems almost incredible. Yet, those who attended these gatherings did so with the belief there are too many "God-free zones" to allow such out-of-touch elites, who are often aghast when hearing about these events, to impose "Gun Free Zones" in America today (Haug, 2010).

Holding these two beliefs about "Guns & God" may seem utterly implausible to upper-class middle suburbanites or downtown condominium dwellers; still, their prevalence must be put into a large cultural, economic, and political context of FEMA's directives "to prep to survive on you own" rather than being dismissed, as Hilary Clinton did in 2016, as the delusions of "the deplorables." With the erosion, decay, or even collapse of basic state functions, public health services, and business operations during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in many regions across America, ordinary working-class citizens have been, and continue to be left behind and ignored (Lind, 2020). Along with prayer, they believe having plenty of guns and ammo to remain, if needed, "tactically effective" (Luke, 2020: 186-191) is a basic civil right. Some are MAGA men and women, but many are not.

As their once more habitable communities in rural areas and inner cities became dead places and decaying spaces, what might prepper behavior reveal about mutual aid? For the truly survival-minded, it reveals much because no one person can easily cope with the near-anarchy found in many neighborhoods today. And, this reality becomes even more true if, and when, any consumers/preppers are forced to put their prepping into practice

during major disasters. Lone survivors rarely last long. Small communities for mutual aid have much higher chances because the practices of everyday life demand tactical coordination. As Mattoon (2016: 9) asks, "you are searching for food and water in an abandoned grocery store -- who is on guard; you are asleep –- who is on guard; you are cutting firewood –- who is on guard; you have food and are eating –- who is on guard; you are doing something that requires your full attention –- who is on guard?" If these questions cannot be readily answered by any individual, the strategic tragedies of living before climate calamities, global pandemics or nuclear conflicts as "a prepping consumer" all alone will turn into the tactical farces of "the consumable prepper" ready to be raided for her or his stores.

Mutual Aid Might Be Magnum Force

Desolation is not yet common everywhere. Where it has unfolded, however, its degradations are troubling. With abandoned farms, declining populations, food deserts, shuttered hospitals, closed mines, obsolete schools, derelict factories, bought-out banks, degraded infrastructure, and lost jobs, too many citizens are witnessing the general repudiation of post-World War Two liberal democratic capitalism's faith in priming markets to fuel the expansion of state services as the dual panacea for pressing economic and social problems. As the growth of mega-cities has overshadowed depopulating rural areas, the one-time important role of the state in bridging urban/rural divides in civic life has lessened due to bureaucratic indifference, agency ineffectiveness, or resource inadequacy. Maybe President Biden will "Build Back Better" across the nation. Meanwhile, these neglected regions are more conflictual, corrupt, and crime-ridden.

Those left behind in such places already depend daily upon mutual aid: their communities have indeed been consigned to "the back row" where residents suffer insecurity, go without, lose hope, and feel unwanted. Because the state is distant, businesses have departed, non-profit organization assistance is intermittent, and public services are being privatized, deep fears arise. Getting access to basic needs for too many requires new tactics beyond neoliberal fables about the greater individual initiative. Put in this perspective, then, populist forms of mutual aid relate directly to waning government power and services.

Even before FEMA's warnings about intermittent episodes of "Leviathanlessness" in massive disaster, the "liteness of the Leviathan" has loomed over such communities. As a result, declaring where you and your trusted neighbors live will be a "gun sanctuary" seems to be a smart strategic choice for otherwise defenseless neighbors who are, in the meantime, left with too few, or no, police units to keep the peace (Luke, 2020: 186-191). Those who protest "defunding the police", are not necessarily right-wing extremists friendly to the Three Percenters or Oath Keepers; they are instead already coping with lawlessness and disorder. During January 2021, gun shops sold over 2 million firearms -- a 75 percent rise over January 2019, and most active January on record for gun dealers, while the F.B.I. recorded 4.3 million firearm background checks, the greatest monthly count since their system went online in the late 1980s (Long, 2021: A3). At the heights of the global pandemic, in the same month as the attack on the Capitol, and in the aftermath of a partisan insurrection that the police and National Guard forces barely contained, many ordinary consumers, who have never owned a firearm, took this step to be prepped for the greater disorder.

As was the case for some areas in New Orleans during Katrina or in Puerto Rico since Hurricane Maria, mutual aid did hold in some neighborhoods. Elsewhere, however, it can evaporate because the police, firefighters, E.M.T. ambulance drivers, emergency room doctors, respiratory therapists, who might be key mutual aid agents themselves, are already dead, incapacitated, or nowhere to be found. Such scenarios are what rightly inspire "dark-skinned preppers" and female "Afrovivalists" in New Orleans, Chicago, or Los Angeles since comparable event horizons are apparent already in their local urban dead zones. As Jason Charles, a firefighter and organizer of N.Y.C. Preppers assert, "It's when law enforcement stops going to work, that's when the breakdown begins. Now you're talking about a free-for-all, every-man-for-themselves kind of deal" (Moses, 2018). What will make a difference in these chaotic new ecologies is "a good support group" and "what preparation...you have will be all you have to survive the event" (Mattoon, 2016: 9).

The political ecologies of prepping recognize nothing today is this fail-safe. When and where the cloak of normality is shredded by racism, neglect or indifference, preppers anticipate that fighting over control of what is left to be consumed will require conflicts, not unlike "armed revolution" to survive (Haug, 2016; and Carlson, 2014: 335-383). One might dress this violence up as democratic community defense, people's war, or armed republican ardor, but the miseries of neoliberal disorder over decades sour those narratives, making many forms of mutual aid essential.

These scientific and technical revolutions behind mass industrial consumerism unfolded out of developing mass markets in a series of largely normal accidents, in which the key players sought to profit. This is how technocratic command-and-control capitalist life under the aegis of technocratic elites spins up economically, managerially, technologically today, and its subpolitical processes are not democratic (Mezzadra and Nelson, 2019). Capitalists are commanders, operators are oligarchs, and technicians are autocrats. If their work stops, slips, or slows, no democratic vote will necessarily restore it. And, if/when it resumes, the general public will not be served first. The commanders, oligarchs, and autocrats of the economy have the power, position, and privilege in the polis to act against the social needs of critical clients, democratic voters, and civic republicans quite effortlessly on the plane of "postpolitics" (Scerri, 2019).

How one survives in such new environmental conditions of developmental dictatorship, technocratic tyranny, and expert elitism is why "preppers" ask what must be done and then ready themselves to do it. They hustle to assemble the necessities of their own "storable materialism," hoping to live on the fragile bubble between spoilage of their stock, consumption of their stores, and the reawakening of more normal trading conditions in society. Whether it is local mutual aid; a passport and a farm bought to escape to New Zealand; or perhaps sufficient arms and ammo to loot others for long months of total anarchy, they believe prepping will pay off. It is never entirely clear "We All in This Together," because what "this is" looks altogether very different, depending on who you are, how you prepped, and what damage mutual disaccommodation did to you as your preparations were made to find your niche in these ecologies before the climate cataclysm and its ensuing states of exception.

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A Prelude to Insurrection: How a 4chan Refrain Anticipated the Capitol Riot

Marc Tuters

Abstract

This paper looks at how vernacular practices associated with fringe web communities seem to have found their way into reactionary American politics in recent years. Combining concepts from political communication (Bennett and Segerberg 2013) and from assemblage theory (Samson 2020), the paper looks at how key elements of the Capitol insurrection narrative initially emerged on 4chan as meme about a second civil war (called "the Boogaloo"), then spreading to social media and amplified by President Trump. In an effort to make sense of this relationship between the fringe the mainstream, the paper offers both original empirical analysis as well as conceptual innovation.

Keywords: Internet memes, post-digital far-right, assemblage theory, connective action, entryism, memetic antagonism, obfuscation, bottom-up agenda setting

In the Trump era a new kind of post-digital far-right activism emerged that spread from fringe regions of the web into corporate social media through the medium of memes. The most notable and widely reported of these was QAnon, the notorious deep state conspiracy theory that made its way into the core of Republican party politics under Trump (Levin 2021) and which seemed to take the form of a real-world game (Thompson 2020). Having started out in late 2017 from a series of anonymous posts the notorious 4chan imageboard (Tuters 2020), over the course of the next few years QAnon developed into a "super conspiracy" (Barkun 2013) incorporating a wide variety of different communities ranging from Tea Party libertarians to New Age anti-vaxxers (Argentino 2020), as it spread from the fringe into the mainstream of public attention (Zeeuw et al. 2020). Part of what drew these different constituencies in and held them together was a sense of collaborative participation in the construction of a narrative—whose subcultural origins made it seem more authentic. Across various social media, the growth of QAnon went largely unchecked over the course of Trump's presidency, and is widely considered to have been a significant contributing factor in galvanizing the motley crew of protestors that stormed the Capitol on January 6th 2021, leading social media platforms to subsequent ban much related content (Conger 2021). As reports of that day later noted, iconography and sloganeering from the fringes of the Internet were a ubiquitous sight on that day (Rosenberg & Tiefenthäler 2020).

Beyond its shocking violence, a striking aspect of Capitol insurrection was its subcultural pageantry, most notably the infamous "QAnon shaman". A bare chested man with a painted face carrying a spear with an American flag tied below the blade and wearing a fur hat with buffalo horns, this man was photographed standing on the raised platform on the site where the Vice President Mike Pence was supposed to ratify Biden as the new president—while other insurgents wandered through the halls of the Capitol building chanting "hang Mike Pence", some wearing full military body armour. While the events of that day came as a surprise to many Americans, the narrative of a second civil war, had in fact been floated by Trump on Twitter over a year prior and it had been developing online since the spring of 2019 in posts to 4chan by online gun enthusiasts on 4chan whom referred to it coded ironic Internet-speak as the Boogaloo. As described below, 4chan's vernacular conception for a second civil war in turn inspired an

entire anti-state insurrectionist movement whom referred to themselves as "the Boogaloo Bois" and used vernacular "dissimulation" techniques, adapted from 4chan's subculture (Zeeuw and Tuters 2020), both to create a "playful" movement identity as well as to avoid detection in the context of corporate social media efforts at "deplatforming" (Rogers 2021). As in the cases of QAnon and Pizzagate before it, 4chan provided the nascent movement with a ready-made format for political activism, in the form of an Internet meme. As these far-right memes served Trump's agenda, in political communication terms we may consider them as instances of bottom-up agenda setting. Combining concepts from political communication (Bennett and Segerberg 2013) and from assemblage theory (Samson 2020), this paper analyzes the constitutive role of antagonism in the construction of precarious political movements that connects the fringe with the mainstream—as was so clearly on display on the day of the Capitol insurrection.

How 4chan Innovates Connective Antagonism

While 4chan is regularly (and often rightly) considered as a kind of cesspool of racism bigotry online, it is also an interesting object of study from a media studies perspective for the ways in which aspects of its technical design affect the kind of connective action that the site affords. In spite its anarchic reputation 4chan can be understood as a highly structured and rule based "subcultural language community", governed by ironic, antagonistic, often hateful forms of play (Peeters et al forthcoming). On 4chan, expressions of political extremism are often so entangled with arcane language games as to confound any clear distinctions between the irony and sincerity—a paradox colloquially referred to in discussion forums as "Poe's Law".

4chan contains 74 discussion forums or "boards" each of which is structured as a list of "threads" opening with an image—hence 4chan as a whole is commonly being referred to as an "imageboard". Boards support only a limited number of threads that are ranked with the newest at the top of the board, so that they gradually disappear from the board unless they receive a new post. Additionally, threads can only accrue a fixed number of posts before they become inactive and then are deleted from the site. These technical features make all conversations on 4chan ephemeral by design. In addition to its ephemerality, 4chan is designed so that posts are anonymous by default. As a result of this, no matter how familiar a user may be with the community, each time they post anew they essentially appear to others as a complete stranger. In order to negotiate these affordances, posters to 4chan (or "anons") thus need to exhibit fluency with the community's latest vernacular innovations, which has led computer science researchers to describe the site as an "excellent venue" for studying "innovation diffusion" (Bernstein 2011: 56)— from LOLcats and Rickrolling to alt-right versions of Pepe the Frog and QAnon. While the incomprehensibility of the 4chan's interface constitutes a significant barrier of entry to outsiders, its innovations make their way into the mainstream due to the paradox of what has been called "meme value"—according to which memes need to be "popular enough to gain traction, but not too popular to become mainstream and be adopted by normies" (Literat and van den Berg 2019: 239).

In an highly cited article on the impact of social media on grassroots activism, the political communications scholars Lance Bennet and Alexandra Segerberg develop the notion of that "connective action", which entails the use of social media to "appropriate, shape, and share" "easy-to-personalize action themes" rather than having to achieve "ideological identification" with a "common group" (2013: 744, 742). Bennet and Segerberg also specifically identify "the meme" as a kind of synecdoche for their theory of political communication: "a symbolic packet that travels easily across large and diverse populations" that provides "action repertoires that might be passed on" (752). Since connective action replaces membership in organizations with a more fluid form of affiliation based on identity, such groups are more open-ended and adaptable. Connective action makes groups more susceptible to "entryism"—a political strategy in which one organization joins another, often by subterfuge, in order to control the latter—a fact overlooked by Bennet and Segerberg. To this point, a common charge amongst old 4chan anons is that the site was essentially over-taken by an organized far-right actors in the aftermath of the law enforcement campaigns against hacker groups related to the Anonymous movement in the mid 2010's—though others contend that the subculture had always been essentially racist (Phillips and Milner 2021: 52). Indeed, before its association with the far-right, scholarship noted the difficulty of pinning down a singular core coherent ideology to 4chan (Uitermark 2017), whose user-base is rarely the same form one moment the next (Phillips et al. 2017).

Whether or not organized entryism was the main cause of 4chan having become one of the preeminent sites of extremism online, on 4chan the way in which in-group identity formation is tied to out-group antagonism tends to escalate from antagonistic "play" to expressions of downright (often genocidal) hostility. Constantly vying to demonstrate their in-group status, anons have developed arcane techniques by which to distinguish members of the subcultural in-group from "normies" or "NPCs"—the latter an acronym for non-player characters. If we refer to way that 4chan anons use of memes and vernaculars in the process of group identity formation as "memetic antagonism" (Tuters and Hagen 2020), then we might refer to the process by which versions of those memes and slang expressions reach beyond this subcultural language community as one of *connective antagonism*. From the spread of QAnon to protest as far afield as in Germany and Japan, 4chan vernaculars are becoming a ubiquitous element of what have been called the "post-digital cultures of the far right" (Fielitz and Thurston 2018). Because 4chan's design renders the extraction of users' personalized data essentially impossible, the website is perceived to be an anarchic alternative to the corporatized web of social media platforms whose business model is based on ubiquitous surveillance (Zeeuw and Tuters 2020), with anons cultivating tactics of "opaque resistance" as a means by which to elude discovery by an "all-seeing power" (Certeau 2011: 133, 158). As will be seen in the discussion below, post-digital far right cultures have been adapted some of these vernacular techniques as strategic means of *obfuscation* (Brunton and Nissenbaum 2015). This argument having been established, let us now move on to consider how one particular 4chan meme, t*he Boogaloo*, would resonate deeply with the theme of the Capitol insurrection—in which an angry mob beat a Capitol police officer to death, while others allegedly sought to murder politicians in the Capitol building—if it did not directly inspire the latter.

The Boogaloo's Birth and Spread

We can trace the very first time that "boogaloo" was used to refer to the idea of a second American civil war to a series of posts on a 4chan's weapons-themed discussion board, "/k/", in the spring of 2019 (see Figure 1 below).1 The opening post of that thread—which featured an image of the "Spurdo" meme, used to mock normies—asked: "In the event of the boogaloo, how will america be split and which side will win?" (Anonymous 2019a). Over the course of the next months, similar threads would develop the narrative of a violent armed insurrection against the state as "the Boogaloo". Following Trump's aforementioned Tweet, in the fall of 2019, the Boogaloo meme seems to have picked up on Facebook where it held together a loose network of pages devoted to a "Boogaloo Bois" movement, with names like "Big Igloo Bois" and "Big /K/ahuna's Big Luau" (Evans and Wilson 2020)—"igloo" and "luau" being vernacular derivation of boogaloo whose use may be understood in terms of obfuscation techniques for opaque resistance, intended to elude discovery by Facebook's content moderation algorithms.
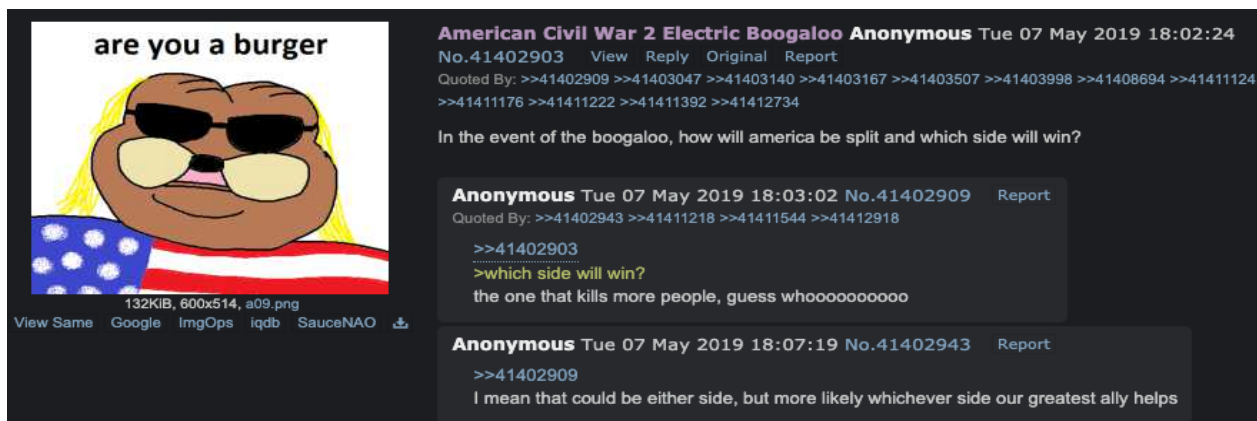

Figure 1. First Boogaloo conversation thread on 4chan/k/ (Author anonymous).

Already a month after the first 4chan post, anons were disparaging the Boogaloo as a "boring LARP" (Anonymous 2019b)—LARPing referring to a cos-play genre in which gamers "live-action role play" aspects of game mechanics in real-world environments. Yet, though LARPing is typically denigrated on 4chan, on corporate

social media platforms it has been an important means by which elements of 4chan's subculture have been adapted by the "alt-right" as the basis of post-digital counter-protest tactics (Tuters 2018). On this same model of translating elements of 4chan's subculture for a more mainstream audiences, Boogaloo memes on Facebook explicitly embraced LARPing—for example often using video game language of "quests" and "achievement points" to describe acts of real world violence as though the second American civil war would occur within the diegesis of a game. As self-described Boogaloo Bois increasingly appeared at protests against police violence throughout the summer of 2020 in cosplay outfits that incorporated references to 4chan's meme subculture, including insignias of igloos and luau patterns. Through the use of such playful seeming imagery, Boogaloo Bois seemed to present themselves as merely LARPers—thereby self-consciously obfuscating sincere political commitments under a veil of self-deflating irony and arcane references to in-group vernaculars. This paradoxical position of participating in extremist political activism while seeing oneself also as player in a game was also a common characteristic amongst the Capitol rioters, many of whom would later consider themselves to have been played by Trump.

Of the many different fringe far-right groups that covered on the Capitol on January 6th, perhaps none was more single-mindedly focussed on violent insurrection than the Boogaloo Bois. In both their preoccupation with guns as well as their anti-state politics, the Boogaloo Bois appeared superficially akin to the organized militia movements whose membership had dramatically grown over the last decades in the United States (Belew 2018). In contrast, however, to movements that feature membership in formal organizations the Boogaloo Bois seemed to lack a clear ideological foundation—which indeed Bennet and Segerberg claim to be one of the characteristics of Internet-enabled connective action. (In their extreme hostility to federal law enforcement, on occasion Boogaloo Bois for example appeared to align themselves with Black Lives Matter protesters—to whom many Trump supporters were fundamentally opposed.) Counter-terrorism experts warm however that the Boogaloo Bois strategically exploited the seeming lack of coherence of their connective action movement, in order to obfuscate what was in essence an extreme-right ideology (Newhouse and Gunesch 2020).

Figure 2. Meme shared on Facebook Boogaloo Bois groups. (2020, author anonymous).

While several Boogaloo Bois were arrested for their role in the Capitol insurrection (Sanchez and Mallin 2021), the movement appears not to have been central in organizing the riot. In retrospect, we may consider the idea of the Boogaloo—which is to say a second civil war live-action role-play—as having created a memetic template for the Capitol rioters. In particular, one Boogaloo meme widely shared on Facebook and other social media in the summer of 2020 seems to support this claim (see Figure 2 below). The meme features an image of a comic book villain photoshopped to appear as though in Boogaloo garb with a caption reading: "when you and your boys go full boogaloo and baptize all the politicians at the capital [sic] building and now it's completely surrounded by National Gaurd [sic] [...] and the boys are asking you what to do." Another caption at the bottom of the image provides a response: "Do I really look like a guy with a plan?" Indeed, around the time that this image was being circulated, several months prior to the Capitol insurrection, a group of self-identified Boogaloo Bois would be charged with conspiracy to kidnap the governor of the state of Michigan (Department of Justice 2021). The way in which such Boogaloo memes appear to have prefigured the Capitol insurrection calls for some conceptual innovation into how and why (so-called) memes have so frequently moved from 4chan to Facebook, to which we move in the next and last section.

On Social Media's Dark Refrains

The American far-right had long been characterized by their innovative use of new media and of discussion forums (Niewert 2017). Seen from this historical perspective, Boogaloo memes are merely the latest in a long series of bizarre extreme-right subcultures that date back to the late-1970's, and which have experienced a renaissance on 4chan (Tuters and OILab 2019). What appears relatively novel, however, is the degree to which a far-right ideology is entangled with the distinctly subcultural style of contemporary imageboards, as well as the dynamics by which far-right action formats appear again and again to move from 4chan into the mainstream of social media. While 4chan anons constantly produce antagonistic memes and narratives, relatively rarely do they reach much beyond into the mainstream. What set QAnon, Pizzagate and the Boogaloo apart was their alignment with Trump's agenda as well as a social media ecosystem that seemed to valourize such connective antagonisms.

Trump style of political communication has often been a catalyst in the process of mainstreaming the icons and narratives of the fringe Internet. Key to their success is the capacity of these memes to create connections between different antagonistic groups with differing degrees of commitment connections. In particular, 4chan memes have repeatedly proven extremely effective at radicalizing the base through the uptake of vernaculars favoured by the far-right—such as with the spread of the anti-semitic triple parentheses meme from 4chan to Facebook (Tuters and Hagen 2020). Although own Trump's words on the alt-right, QAnon and the Proud Boys suggest an awareness of 4chan-adjacent fringe movements' beliefs, it is plausible that Trump recognized them as primarily for their outrageous sensationalism. In this respect, Trump's political communication style shared something with Facebook and other similar corporate social media which, according to the science studies scholar Noortje Marres, are designed to valourize content that is "sensational, often outrageous and extremist" and exhibit a general "disrespect for knowledge" that Marres claims "has something to do with the dominant conception and design of social media platforms as a behavioral domain, where users are often framed as influence-able subjects" (Marres 2018: 430, 435). As the political figure with "most engaged with" page of Facebook, Trump well understood how platform's content metrics valourized antagonism, and was always in search of new ways to express that theme (cf Kang and Frenkel 2021).

It has been suggested that the reason that 4chan memes do so well on social media is that they have grown super-resilient by adapting to its exceptionally harsh (and essentially meaningless) communication environment (Venturini in review). While phenomena originating on 4chan such as QAnon and Boogaloo are often conceptualized through the evolutionary theory of memetics, the media scholar Tony Sampson has argued that memetics is a poor concept for analyzing the essential role of media in their propagation because of the fact that "in memetics, the medium in which an idea is transmitted is typically dismissed as an inert channel" (2012, p.72). Departing from that critique, in his most recent monograph, "A Sleepwalker's Guide to Social Media" (2020), Sampson has developed an alternative to that of the meme in order to better understand the relationship between right-wing demagogues and the Internet. Sampson writes of a "staccato-like repetition of a racist populist politics, spreading throughout the world" that is facilitated by demagogues' use of social media, which he refers to as a dark refrain drawing on assemblage theory (2020: 4). In Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory the concept of "the refrain" relates to their notion of "milieu", which they define as "a block of space-time" that is coded by "periodic repetition", in which "one milieu serves as the basis for another" such that the milieus "are essentially communicating" (1993: 313). This conceptual lens offers a way to think about the Boogaloo meme as kind of pattern that repeats itself as part of a larger arrangement, as in a fugue. The "staccato rhythms" of Trump's political communication style can thus be understood as resonating with and reiterating aspects of the ephemeral milieu of from which they emerged. From this Deleuzoguattari perspective, communication is less a question of conveying information than it is of patterning of unconscious obedience to the imagined desires of the vernacular language community (Peeters et al, forthcoming).

Thus conceived, we can understand Boogaloo memes on Facebook as having encoded 4chan's memetic antagonism as the basis for a form of cross-platform connective action that was the key leitmotif in the storming of the Capitol. This framework helps us to appreciate how populist demagogues like Trump's use social media to orchestrate antagonisms between different reactionary milieus via connective "memes" without necessarily having to

fully grasp their manifest significance. Through the Deleuzoguattari refrain, we can understand how Trump has used social media to orchestrate the repetition of repetitive motifs in an arrangement whose *players* include elements from the fringes of web subcultures in positions of importance. To put this in more conventional political communication terms, we can say that Trump engages in a kind of *bottom-up agenda setting*, amplifying elements so as to orchestrate them. Rendered possible by the way that platforms' valourizes "user engagement", this demagogic style of political communication echoes the Deleuzoguattarian contention that fascism is only ever appropriated by state power "but it finds its energy right at the heart of everyone's desire" (Guattari 1992: 245). So long as the bottom line of platforms' extactivist business model is to capture and incentivize users' every need (Srnicek 2017), they will remain susceptible to the orchestration of dark refrains.

While the recent rise on extremism on corporate social media has been explained as matter of content producers responding to extant user demand (cf Munger and Phillips 2020) such a market explanation overlook platforms' own culpability in creating the conditions that structure the emergence of extreme speech markets (cf Keulenaar et al forthcoming). Following Deleuze and Guattari, we need to appreciate how media are never simply inert channels, but instead function as substrates with which specific kinds of desire can develop and proliferate—with certain circumstances tending towards the toxic. The spectacular success of QAnon, the Boogaloo and other fringe refrains has made abundantly clear just how easy it is to produce toxic desires in the current platform assemblages. Given their awesome reach and potentially destructive power, Americans could take a much more active role in considering what kind of desires they truly value and how to regulate platforms accordingly.

Endnotes

1. For this analysis third party archives of 4chan/k/ were used as well as Facebook's Crowdtangle software and Google's reverse image search feature. Since the term "boogaloo" had long been used as a joke in online forum discussions, the analysis required data cleaning and query design.

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Make Women Great Again: Women, misogyny and anti-capitalism on the right

Caherine Tebaldi

Intoducion

Neo-confederate blogger Dissident Mama describes the January 6 Capitol Insurrection as "#resistance without the corporate sponsorship". In a series of blogs, she appropriates the language of anti-capitalist movements to defend armed resistance from Charlottesville to the Capitol. Negative media coverage is woke "agitprop" by elites: journalists and politicians, but also "corporate goons." These politicians, meanwhile, are the "very people who are empowered and enriched by mass democracy, forever wars, and our oppression1", according to Mama. The language of wealth, profit, and enrichment is used to criticize liberal democracy as in the throes of corporations and imperial wars. However, liberalism's chief attack is on the family and the forgotten man, and for Momma, its shock troops are the feminists.

Defending the Capitol riots, Dissident Momma positions herself, a stay-at-home mother, as at the front lines of another kind of insurrection. She is uniquely capable of speaking out against the tyranny of woke capital, political correctness and corporate HR's liberal cancel culture. Without a boss, she cannot be fired or cancelled for expressing explicit racism. Secondly, a stay-at-home mother is the guardian of traditional morality, family values, and southern White identities which are being attacked by the corporate cultural Marxists. The home has become the new battleground, as Mama herself points out.

Her own insurrection is homeschooling. Post after post, Dissident Mama compares the act of homeschooling to the civil war; it is "educational secession" freeing her children from the "puritanical progressives" or the Northern "power elite" who run the state and public schools and seek to impose a "globohomo tyranny" on Southern boys. She echoes familiar moral panics over cultural Marxism, describing teachers as "apparatchiks" and schools as a "gulag of the mind." But when she discusses the supposed anti-white bias of "the educrats" who want to make children "rootless, hopeless, and disoriented" she uses the language of anti-capitalism; despite being marxists they want to make children "loyal consumers of both the corporate and governmental systems"2

For Mama the opposition of corporate cultural marxism is raising children in their "heritage" of southern-style White supremacy. She believes in the lost cause mythology which celebrates the antebellum South as the high-water mark of western civilization, and frames today's White Southerners as an oppressed "remnant." Mama uses the language of anti-capitalism, but she supports not socialism but paleolibertarianism. Paleolibertarians support deep social conservatism (or sexism and racism) along with economic libertarianism, a belief system with roots in chattel slavery (Maclean 2017). Capitalism is good when it supports homeschooling and heritage; her blog is an Amazon affiliate and advertises for Ron Paul's libertarian homeschooling, the Tuttle Twins libertarian children's fables, in addition to the white nationalist Christendom Curriculum.

Anti-capitalist language shades quickly into anti-feminism, in Dissident Mama's discourses, dismissing social change as HR newspeak and conflating postwar gender roles with postwar affluence. Sophie Bjork James (2020) notes that the Christian right often blames feminism for the socio-economic struggles of late capitalism. This is something common across the far-right: Identitarian Lacey Lynn calls feminism elitist and anti-working class, conspiratorial vlog and radio station RedIce positions fascist women at the front lines in the fight against corporate communism, while the evolutionary psychologists of the intellectual dark web from Stefan Molyneux to Jordan Peterson use the language of corporate anomie to argue for gender essentialism.

Anti-capitalist language is deployed against working women while elevating White working men, providing a return to "traditional" roles as an answer to economic as well as social challenges. That is, right wing language displaces anxieties about capitalism onto anxieties about gender roles, family and love. In this essay I look at women in far-right activism, and the ways in which anti-capitalist language is used to celebrate the gender roles of post-war American breadwinner capitalism. This at once diminishes feminist and socialist critques, enougaging the reframing of economic concerns into what Rosenthal (2020) calls gendered dispossession. This emerges from real failures of liberal feminism and late capitalism, but appropriates critiques of capital that might challenge the identity politics of the white right, instead encouraging reinvestment in the conservative social order.

Anti-Capital/Anti-Gender

How is it that the language of anti-capitalism can be used to support the party of oligarchs and oil? As Stuart Hall notes, gender has long served as a way to mobilize contradictory tendencies between capitalism and traditionalism on the right. For Hall (1988), the contradictions between traditionalist values and market capitalism were resolved by mapping these onto the gendered public and private spheres. Women became symbols of the home, morality, and tradition, while men became engaged in competition for the survival of the fittest. The neoliberalization of work life was accompanied by an intense discursive investment in family, timeless morality, and wisdom.

Women in the home became symbols of atavistic tradition, both popular morality and wisdom. Women working, or on welfare, have become in the contemporary right, symbols of all the ills that the liberal social order has inflicted on man, tradition, and the family. This vision of the 1950's, of postwar economic order, the ease of a life with a social safety net and subsidized mortgages, will be used on the far-right to represent suburban affluence through the metonym of "traditional gender roles." Using stay-at-home mothers to portray lost affluence encourages a moral panic about gender roles, rather than capital.

Kovats and Poim (2018) note the importance of antifeminism for right wing organizing. They describe gender as a "symbolic glue"; gender has become a symbol for all the unfairness experienced in the neoliberal social order, from economic deprivation to social isolation or a loss of male supremacism. Uniting multiple elements of neoliberalism under the umbrella term "gender ideology," this symbolic opponent also allows different right-wing groups to come together. Gender may function as Kovats and Poim's symbolic glue, but it also becomes a site of slippage between economic and social interpretations of crisis.

Gender ideology doesn't merely unite these critiques of neoliberalism, but becomes a fetish object (Inoue 2004) which replaces them. From moral panics over welfare queens or satanic day cares the family, women, and motherhood were often mobilized both practically and symbolically for rightist political economy. In the gilded age Bederman (1995) notes how, as opportunities for land ownership and social mobility became restricted, affectively changed visions of masculinity as the virile domination of women replaced older visions of manhood as self-control. As the empire grew, patriarchal roles were used to justify imperialism, framing America as the husband of its colonies, and celebrating war as producing strong American fathers (Hoganson 1998). In the postwar era, Cooper (2016) explains how conservative social values were enforced by the neoliberal erosion of the welfare state, which forced the family to become the locus of social care, while at the same time the celebration of "family values" provided a moral pretext for dismantling the welfare state. During deindustrialization, gendered dominance was used to win men's consent to the right wing order as economic options become restricted, now mobilizing women and housewives as to reject

feminism and, with help from sex manuals by women like Marabel Morgan and Beverly La Haye, to use sexualized submission to shore up manliness (DuMez 2020). The affective investment in masculinity and virility grew in value as economic opportunity shrank, and after the 1970's women took a larger and more active role in shoring up and reproducing male supremacism. From Schalfly to sex kittens, women were encouraged to see their role in the home as a choice, a privilege, and then as a battleground in the culture war. Today, far-right women extend this - positioning their role in the home as the culture war's front line.

Returning to Stuart Hall (1988), in moments of social crisis dominant ideology must appropriate experiences of economic crisis, and express them in ways that continue to support ruling power. While personal experiences of the social crises of capitalism are influenced by how dominant ideology is taken up, this is always partial. Dominant ideology must continually offer new propagandas, moral panics to win the consent of the governed. Even the right is beginning to notice capitalism isn't providing sufficient ROI.

Contemporary far-right politics, then, has to mobilize gender roles in new ways in order to continue to win consent to the capitalist social order, and to continue to provide affective visions of masculinity and femininity. As the labor market conditions and opportunities rapidly worsen, and gender becomes more fluid, far-right discourses must become more intense. Far right metapolitics now mobilize anti-feminism as a deep critique of liberalism; they seek to re-gender both capital and re-gender the public sphere more broadly. To win consent to a worsening crisis, this discourse must move further right, and in doing so there are two main changes. First, a larger role for women within these movements, and with these housewife insurrectionists, a greater importance for both anti-feminist ideology and anti-capitalist language.

Organizing women

As Dissident Mama notes, women are soldiers at the front line of right wing organizing; sometimes entering electoral politics as Marjorie Taylor Greene did, sometimes storming the Capitol, but more often spreading the message through mommy blogs, church groups, or the "pastel Qanon" of instagram wellness communities. Women's role in home and family is reframed as combat, promoting a renewed affective investment in this "traditional" role, while framing white heteropatriarchy as "family values" (see Bjork James 2021) normalizes their broader political aims.

Women have been part of both the far right (Blee 2012) and movement conservatism; their involvement and often leveraged their identity as mothers, from "housewife populists" (Nickerson 2012) fighting school integration, to Schlafly's "femininity tactics" which involved well coiffed anti-ERA women who offered homemade bread to male politicians with the line "from the bread bakers to the breadwinners." Today however, their role is larger; a majority of organizers in the Tea Party are women (Westermeyer 2019), while 55 percent of Christian Nationalists, one of the main ideologies behind support for Trump and the Capitol insurrection, are women (Whitehead & Perry 2020).

Antifeminist women are central for the digital far-right as well. Women play a similar role of recruitment and retention online as Blee (2002) noted women do in earlier, offline, white nationalist movements. Tradwives, the female members of far-right groups who advocate "traditional" gender roles, also build community, attract and retain new members, and conduct outreach. They create channels and networks like Critical Condition's "Girl Talk" which brings together women from various strands of the right from the Identitarian Cheerleader Blonde in the Belly of the Beast to Neo-Pagan Fascist Philosophicat. Dissident Mama, for example, brings together Paul Gottfried, the man who coined the term Alt-Right, the leader of the NeoConfederates, with housewives and small business owners protesting lockdown. Their idealized performances of midcentury femininity may also attract members from men's rights and other groups, "red pill" men, or convince some men to remain in this online community. And of course, they educate online and homeschool children.

Many far-right women frame this "traditional" role as their own insurrection. In her video "Community: the traditional woman's battle ground" Lacey Lynn notes that women's traditional roles were to support and build

community, but she describes this as a battle ground, against the forces of feminism and big pharma. First, because "femininity, motherhood and the family" are under attack from feminism, the traditional woman is introduced as having a "place in the fight for the future of her children" by building a family and a community. In other videos Lynn calls herself a momma bear, a warrior for her kids. Similarly, Lana Lokteff refers to herself as a "viking shield maiden" in the war for a white west, likening her role in the battle for white nationalism to a viking woman picking up a shield to defend her home. Women's economic participation is the sign of this decadence, but this decadence is also what allows Lokteff and others to take a place in the front lines of the fight.

Far right women rhetorically imagine their decision to stay home as a fight against soulless corporations that steal mothers from families, to save tradition, love and domestic bliss. The far-right has a long tradition of using domesticity and white femininity to normalize their politics, to reframe racism as moral appropriateness or family values (Bjork James 2021, Butler 2021). This alt-maternalism (Mattheis 2018) also gives a sense of urgency and rebellion to the choice to be a stay at home mother, deepening engagement with this role that is already central to many women's lives. For many women (including my own mom) right offers a broader and more activist definition of motherhood promoting women's affective engagement with these politics. They can then mobilize this division between capital and community for organizing.

Celebrating traditionalist women allows the right to demonize feminists. If traditional women represent the solution to all of the problems of late capitalism, the return to harmony and happy mother nature, feminists come to represent all of the failures of the neoliberal political, social, and economic order. This "symbolic glue" allows the right to locate roots of male oppression in feminism, not capitalism, to see the economic and social loss of the breadwinner role in purely gendered terms. This anti-feminism can absorb critiques of capitalism's sickness, encouraging others to see the prescription as farther right, White or Christian nationalist positions.

Moms Not Worker Drones

Right wing discourse displaces the anxieties and unease of capitalism onto anxieties about women's changing role in the family. Feminism is described as unfulfilling and unnatural, as corporate anomie and HR newspeak, as elite cultural Marxism and anti working men, as weakening the family and community. With the exception of cultural Marxism, all of these things are true of corporate capitalism, but these discourses ascribe it to liberal feminism. This is done both explicitly, through discussions of women's nature, and implicitly, by connecting these critiques of capital primarily to women.

Figure 1. Jordan Peterson's pseudo-academic videos celebrating motherhood as women's meaning.

This exists on a spectrum across the right, beginning with the quite reactionary but widely read Jordan Peterson – in mainstream, academic looking videos. Peterson describes his role counseling an indeterminate number of late 30s women who feel unfulfilled by their jobs. He says corporate America "fed us a lie" and told us our careers were fulfilling, alienated us from fundamental humanity, meaning, purpose, and community. As we see in a representative video below,

Peterson begins by critiquing the late capitalist obsession with career, pointing out the ways the current economy makes most people work unfulfilling jobs and those who do have careers often sacrifice personal life. Yet the lie he says our culture tells is not in fact, exploitation, but the lack of celebration of motherhood. He calls this "the good-mother archetype." The difficulties of work life balance serve to normalize his baldly anti-feminist claim that all women who are not mentally ill desire motherhood over career at 30, and are desperate for children by 40. Of course, Peterson himself does not experience his career as a lack of fulfillment, alienation, or being a soulless corporate shill. This opposition of career and motherhood, rather than parenting, excludes any male patients, instead, the critique of corporate employment is female, and the alternative is a return to babies and baking.

A bit further on the pseudo-philosophical, misogynist right, Stefan Molyneux picks up where Peterson left off. Molyneux begins with a discussion of the second shift that working women engage in, the stress of late capitalist life and the lack of time for with a family as anathema to the "personal fulfillment" described by the original poster. Again, working long hours and maintaining a family is an issue, but this language is aimed only at women. There is no discussion of dad's lack of time to play soccer with the kids, or do household chores and cooking, in any of his videos.

In tweets, figures 2 and 3 below, we see how concern about working a second shift at home really means concern about women working at all.

Figure 2. Stefan Molyneux's tweet about the struggles of working women
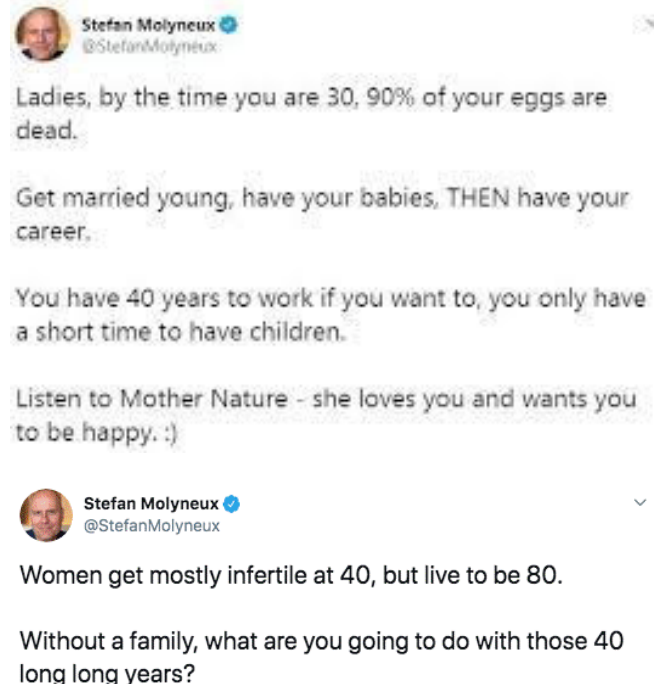

Figure 3. Two more of Molyneux's tweets clarifying he supports motherhood, not better working conditions for women.

That this is not merely a coincidence or the deployment of family against capitalism is made clear by other of Molyneux's tweets; the lack of purpose and fulfillment is because women are designed by nature to bear children. In the two tweets below Molyneux discusses women's fertility in opposition to careers.

In the first, he makes it clear that career is bad because it gets in the way of having children early; capitalist success is opposed to "Mother Nature." Nature and happiness, however, is treated as the same thing as bearing children. In the next tweet, this is made even clearer, as childless women are relegated to 40 years of lonely meaningless life. Nature here, means fertility, family, biological "facts" about eggs naturalizing a postwar gender role. Capitalism then, is wrong and meaningless when it is opposed to nature and joy. But for Molyneux, nature means our role as incubators for white babies. Molyneux affirms this when he speaks at the 21 convention, a grassroots organizing event for the worldwide manosphere (anti-feminist) community. His speech is called "Make women great again."

This fight for motherhood not worker drones is not just fought by the men of the Intellectual Dark Web, but by a growing number of far-right female activists. Most invested in this type of anti-feminist/capitalist language are the tradwives, a group of women in their 20s -40s, who celebrate "traditional gender roles" including women staying at home, homeschooling, and submitting to their husbands. Mainstream media often frame this return in anti-capitalist terms, as in figure 4 below, a video framing homemaking as freedom from employers.

Online they echo these talking points, sharing memes that submitting to one husband is better than submitting to 10 bosses, or making videos about how much happier they are as they gave up lonely careers in finance to marry true masculine men. They share makeup tips and dress styles to increase femininity, and with them, farther right talking points. Some also use this gender role to support a racist, pronatalist, illiberal politics that would deny women the vote in a new white nation state.

Figure 4. Youtube archive of a morning tv show that celebrates the #Tradwife movement

One of the strongest traditionalist and white identitarians is Lacey Lynn. In her video "Yes All Feminism" Lynn discredits feminism as an elitist movement, against white working men. She describes feminists as privileged, selfish, capitalist women, even though she locates the origin of the feminist movement in what she calls cultural marxism. Lynn suggests that the end of couverture laws, which granted us legal personhood, was actually feminists seeking money, status, and power over men. Her feminist origin story begins with an elite, wealthy and unfaithful woman who sued for divorce, "demanding property rights" and wanting money rather than fulfilling her own role of love and submission. This characterizes even early feminism and suffrage as selfish and capitalist, a concern only of elite women; even voting is attacking men and family. A Victorian divorce court becomes a metonym for all feminism. This is a narrative which would be very well known to participants in the manosphere, who often use divorce court as a symbol of the cultural dispossession and oppression of men. The right to divorce and the end of couverture laws, is framed by Lynn as women seeking to take from men, economically, without fulfilling their social role as submissive wives. Feminism from its inception, according to Lynn, has been about elite women exercising control over working class men.

Across the right, critiques of feminism use anti-capitalism in similar ways to discredit feminists as selfish, concerned only with money and not with family. Feminism is not about search for recognition, rights, or self but artificial elite social engineering, antithetical to women's fundamental nature as mothers. It's not something women needed, fought or starved for, but an elite game. This reflects our broader concerns about capitalist work, its lack of meaning or flexibility, but uses them in limited ways which reinforce gendered stereotypes. This is a familiar refrain in my own life, as my mother would also use economic arguments, asking me, why does feminism happen and all of a sudden you need two incomes to support a family? For some on the right, the answer is feminist marxist conspiracy.

Feminists, Marxists and the Great Replacement

While the language of anti-capitalism on the right speaks to real issues around supporting a family, it is undergirded, however, by a racist and misogynist politics linked to the conspiracy theory known as "the great replacement" or "white genocide." Hall explains that as multiple moral panics follow on another they become enjoined into a single grand conspiracy theory, here multiple panics around fertility, shifting gender roles and moral values, immigration, corporate capitalism and the tightening of the economy, become linked in a single grand theory of white genocide.

The great replacement, taken from the French author, Reynaud Camus, refers to a conspiracy by a shadowy network of elites to replace the culturally and racially rooted native-born White population with rootless, diverse, and more easily manipulable workers. This anti-immigration theory uses anti-elite and anti-capitalist language, but the heart is white men's replacement. As Holmes (2010) explains, this is a reaction against global capitalism and homogeneity, but the solution is "integralism" or the rebuilding of a racially, culturally unified people tied to a land.

Its American iteration, white genocide, becomes more deeply tied into notions of fertility, purity, and anti-feminism. White genocide states that elites are conspiring to end the white race through immigration, miscegenation, feminism, and indoctrination. Feminism and white women's political and economic participation is a "corporate capitalist" conspiracy to weaken the race by producing lower birthrates, a more submissive workforce, and a more left politics. White women who work, may pursue education and have children later, have fewer and spend less time raising them. Women's maternal nature means they will also be a more submissive workforce, more easily led by elites. Because of this submission, our suffrage will mean a welfare state and open borders. This is what white nationalist book *The Turner Diaries* describes as a nation like a nursery, padded and pink -- white women will be making a nation of weak babies instead of making more white babies.

White genocide was first promoted by the far-right but which has since been part of the Republican Party, as when representative Steve King suggested we "cannot restore our civilization with somebody else's babies."3 As the tradwives and far-right women take up this theory they focus heavily on white women's need to make more children, and return to their roles as mothers, tying anti-feminism intimately to racism. We can see this in "Wife with a Purpose" Ayla Stewart's #whitebabychallenge, which challenged other women like her to make as many white babies as possible.

We can see this growing emphasis on anti-feminism with two videos by the American Fascist Lana Lokteff and her Swedish husband Henrik Palmgren, shown in figure 5 below. In the first video around the great replacement, the global elites used economic crises to bring in immigrants. In the second, feminism and women's empowerment has become an essential part of the description.

Greece's Economy Was Wrecked by Globalists to Initiate the Migrant Crisis - Poseidon

Red Ice TV

How To Become An Empowered Female

Red Ice TV

Figure 5. Two vides from Red Ice TV illustrating the different takes on the great replacement/white genocide conspiracy.

Even within this conspiracy theory, we can see a shift towards emphasis on gender politics. The Swedish video focuses on the white man's battle against shadowy cabal of Jewish cultural Marxist elites who are opening borders and attacking tradition. American white genocide offers a much more sexualized politics: a gendered version of replacement that blames white feminists for working instead of making as many white children as possible, dispossessing white men of their social and racial birthright. Their ambassador of cultural Marxism here is not a shadowy cabal but is often the empowered white female, Lacey's elitist suffragette, the professor "drinking until her ovaries dry up,4" who comes to stand in for all the corporate and cultural elite. In contrast to this elite, the ordinary working man is elevated as a rebel hero battling feminism for a return to breadwinner capitalism and the American way.

The Redistribution of Sex

The right presents economic and social change as dispossessing men of women, while the far right suggests this is leading to the end of the white race. We can also see this shift from economic to gendered dispossession in the gendered anti-capitalist language in the right's solutions to the current social crisis. The language of these solutions often blend the language of the market with the language of marriage, but offer state support for social not for economic power. Most famously, conservative Ross Douthat suggested a redistribution of sex.5 In his discussion of Incels and those men who are excluded from both dating and the labor market, he suggested a return to both traditional marriage and--failing that--the creation of sex robots.

While the idea was ridiculous, perhaps meant as a foil for his real call to return to patriarchal marriage, it was notable for both the heavy use of economic language and the absence of any real economic solutions. Douthat

describes the current sexual moment as the result of the "Neoliberal deregulation" of the sexual marketplace which creates "new winners and losers." Sexual changes are linked to economic and technological change, celibacy and virginity are described as inequalities (of sexual access). He suggests we need "sexual redistribution" and compares Incels' lack of sexual access directly to those who suffer from economic deprivation.

A "pro-redistribution lobby" is not a lobby for a welfare state but for sex workers (or robots). These ideas are common on much of the far-right as well. Jordan Peterson often speaks about the need for social enforcement of patriarchy though monogamy, reframing the return to male dominance as a question of equitable sexual distribution. This is echoed by tradwives who celebrate patriarchy and pro-natalist politics, offering a vision of social and sexual success to alienated men.

This language of the sexual marketplace, which elevates men and demonizes feminists, is also common across much of the right. Sites like Reddit's Red Pill forum construct a kind of "sexual meritocracy" (Burnett 2021) that rates men's access to women, success dating or sleeping with them, in terms of his "sexual market value" or his "relationship market value." Women, as well, are encouraged to be submissive to raise their relationship market value or lose weight to improve their sexual value. On these forums, discussions of evolution and the survival of the hottest, also frame a lack of sexual success in terms of social inequalities and the oppression of men.

Blending this language in terms like sexual redistribution, deregulation of the marriage market shows a discursive slippage between economic and cultural dispossession, central to new discourses of white oppression across the right. Underneath the language of anti-capitalism is male supremacism. It is made desirable through discussions of sexual access and power. It's constructed through market language which naturalizes a transactional view of sexual relationships, making them "earned" or deserved on the market. Capitalist feminist deprive him of the natural result of this market success, social and economic dominance. The far-right call to reinforce this dominance with traditional marriage, rape gangs and "white sharia".

So what?

This essay explored how women mobilize anti-capitalist language to celebrate stay-at-home motherhood and advocate for a pre-feminist political and social order. They have taken on an increasing role in the movement, often framing themselves as warriors for the family and against the feminist. Feminists come to represent all of the failings of the late capitalist, liberal democracy as "symbolic glue," linking together varied right coalitions and interests and making these anti-feminist women's role ever more important. They use the language of workers' exploitation to paint liberal society as inherently against the family and women's true nature as mothers. This gendered reframing of critiques of late capitalism is elaborated in both the right's diagnosis of the problems of liberalism and its solutions: white genocide, or conspiracy theories which blame a feminist elite for low birthrates and social decline, and white sharia, the enforcement of the "redistribution of sex" and male power.

In her blog entry" Hey Grrrls you're not as irreplaceable as you think" Dissident Mama uses all these visions of freedom from corporate capital, embracing feminine roles and nature to characterize her own role within the movement:

> Meanwhile, as my husband toils away at his occupation, sitting in a cubicle under fluorescent lighting, and dealing with all the insufferableness that can come with corporate culture, I'll be here, chilling in my yoga pants and tending to the "unpaid work" my sweet hubby subsidizes: homeschooling, full-time rearing of the kids, and blogging. Now there's some economic power, ladies.

Her writing here blends the critique of capital with a call to return to traditional gender roles which characterizes much of far-right discourse: the male sphere of work is framed as one of a "husband toiling" through bad lighting and insufferable culture while the home life is one of a "sweet hubby" who supports her raising three sons. Bloggers and organizers like Mama reframe traditionalism, it is not oppression but escape from it. It is not submission, it is a

fight against our feminist elite.

This presentation of traditionalism as counterculture allows the right to appropriate critiques of capital while it exploits contradictions within mainstream right politics. As Hall explains, right wing movements map ideological contradictions between tradition and market onto gendered divisions of labor. Here, the contradictions between traditionalism and capitalism are neatly resolved by calling for women's return to the home. Capitalism squeezing families, reshaping traditional lives and values, even growing inequality and ecological collapse can be reframed in terms of "feminist attacks on the family" or "white genocide".

This discursive exploitation is effective because it calls to mind family and domesticity, or gender roles associated with family and love not extremist politics. It has become normal across the right; as Bjork-James notes this is common in evangelical families, while Briggs (2017) explains blaming feminism for capitalism's strain in the family happens across the Christian and mainstream right as well. The far-right's anti-feminism works because of broader American nostalgia for breadwinner capitalism; 74 percent of Americans, in a 2013 Pew survey, also believe women working has made it harder to raise children.

Their rightist vision of a return to postwar affluence happens through a return to the gender roles of this time - or earlier. Many far right men and women advocate for a vision out of the 1850's: the end of women's suffrage, economic participation or higher education. Lacey Lynn advocates "traditional courtship" meaning marriage out of high school, and couverture laws that would make women men's property. This nostalgic, normalized language of family against the corporate culture advocates for some truly extremist politics. The far-right uses the language of anti-capitalism, or anti-economic liberalism, in order to achieve political illiberalism - often by demonizing women's economic participation in order to advocate for our political exclusion.

Looking closely at this language matters. We might see the rise of populist language, resentment of elites, women calling for fewer bosses or the growth of parties like Neo-Nazi Matt Heimbach's "traditionalist workers party" as a rise in anti-capitalist sentiment. We might see Dissident Mama's critique of the #resistance as corporate sponsored, and hope that we could win her support for a resistance that isn't sponsored by Nike, or which goes beyond a model giving a cop a Pepsi. But from Lacey Lynn to Dissident Mama, Tucker Carlson to JD Vance, this language of economic populism is directed at cultural elites.

Instead left scholars and activists might look more closely at how the economic language is used by the right to co-opt and reinterpret our experience of the failures of the economy. Their language promotes seeing the economy in gendered and raced ways; rather than simply trying to make appeals to their economic interests, or taking this anti-capitalist language as bad conscience or merely contradictory language, to look seriously at how economic life is invested with gender, racial and other social meanings. Only by looking seriously at what the right is doing, and how it is taken up and understood, can we begin to create alternative meanings and better futures.

Endnotes

1. http://www.dissidentmama.net/disavowing-is-the-disgrace/

2. http://www.dissidentmama.net/public-schools-are-killing-our-kids/

3. https://edition.cnn.com/2017/03/13/politics/steve-king-babies-tweet-cnntv/index.html

4. From Blonde in the Belly of the Beast, "My Redpill Journey" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8E3VjkSDqo

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The Plague of White Supremacy in the Age of Fascist Politics

Henry A. Giroux

> "Language provides [fascism] with a refuge. Within this refuge a smoldering evil expresses itself as though it were salvation."
>
> — Theodor W. Adorno

The toxic thrust of white supremacy runs through American culture like an electric current. Without apology, Jim Crow is back suffocating American society in a wave of voter suppression laws, ongoing attempts by right-wing politicians to implement a form of apartheid pedagogy, and the resurgence of a right-wing cultural politics organized around the legacy of white nationalism and white supremacy. The emergence of white supremacy to the centers of power is also evident in the reign of police violence against Black people that came into full view with the murder of George Floyd by a white police officer and the ensuing mass protest against racist police brutality across the globe.

White supremacy works not only through the force of state repression and violence but also in the colonizing of subjectivity, manufactured ignorance, and the power of a reactionary culture with its relentless pedagogies of repression. The cult of manufactured ignorance now works through disimagination machines engaged in a politics of falsehoods and erasure. Its politics of cruelty now cloaks itself in the false claims of "patriotism." The spectacle of Trumpism and its brew of white supremacist ideology and disdain for the truth undergirds the further collapse of democratic visions in higher education and in broader public spheres, made all the more obvious by the obsession with methodologies and the reign of instrumental reason, which has returned on the educational front with a vengeance. Education as a vehicle for white supremacy now moves between the reactionary policies of Republican legislators that now use the law to turn their states into white nationalist factories and a right-wing social media machine that uses the Internet and other online services to spread racial hatred. As William Barber II, Liz Theoharis, Timothy B. Tyson, and Cornel West have argued, white supremacy has once again turned deadly and has put democracy on trial. They write:

> Even now, the ancient lie of white supremacy remains lethal. It has left millions of African-American children impoverished in resegregated and deindustrialized cities. It embraces high-poverty, racially isolated schools that imperil our children — and our future. It shoots first and dodges questions later. "Not everything that is faced can be changed," James Baldwin instructs, "but nothing can be changed until it is faced."i

In what follows, I want to examine the totality of white supremacy as an educational force by connecting its threads through the rise of voter suppression, the attacks on education via critical race theory, and the culture of police violence.

The Republican Party and the politics of Voter Suppression

Jim Crow politics are back with a vengeance. Both during and in the aftermath of the Trump presidency, the Republican Party has dropped any pretense to democracy in their affirmation of authoritarian politics and their embrace of white supremacy. This has been evident in their weaponizing of identity, support for a range of discriminatory policies of exclusion, the construction of a wall that became a resurgent symbol of nativism, and their internment of children separated from their undocumented parents at the southern border. The rush to construct a home-grown form of fascist politics is also clear in the era of Trumpism in the passing of a barrage of voter suppression laws introduced in Republican-controlled state legislatures, all based on baseless claims of voter fraud. Voter suppression has become the new currency of fascist politics. Some states such as Georgia, Texas, and Florida have enacted them into law. As of April 1, 2021, 361 bills had been put into play in 47 states. The Georgia and Florida bills either restrict or prohibit mobile drop boxes, and in the case of Georgia:

> eliminates weekend voting days, most notably Sundays, when Black churches hold "Souls to the Polls" voting drives, restricts the use of ballot drop boxes, prevents counties from accepting nonprofit grants to improve their elections, adds new voter I.D. requirements for voting by mail, gives local election officials less time to send out mail-in ballots and voters less time to return them, "and even makes it a crime to distribute food and water to voters waiting in line.ii

What we are witnessing here is not only a return of another ideological and political register of white supremacy, but the use of corporate power and dark money to destroy the last remnants of democracy. For example, *Public Citizen* claims that over $50 million has been spent since 2015 to undermine voting rights; during the 2020 election cycle, $22 million went to legislators/lawmakers who support voter suppression bills. *Public Citizen* also notes that "Among the Fortune 100, 81 companies have contributed to these lawmakers, giving a combined total of $7.7 million. Among the Fortune 500, 45 percent of companies have contributed to these lawmakers, giving a combined total of $12.8 million."iii The companies that have given the most to these white supremacist efforts include: "AT&T [which] has given, $811,000. AT&T is followed by Altria / Philip Morris ($679,000), Comcast ($440,000), UnitedHealth Group ($411,000), Walmart ($377,000), State Farm (315,000) and Pfizer ($308,000). More than 60 corporations have contributed more than $100,000."iv Such efforts do more than weaponize the lie that the American presidential election was stolen; they also represent an attempt to impose policies that amount to a form of racial cleansing, both of which echo an earlier legacy of slavery and Jim Crow policies in the United States and the fascist genocidal politics that emerged in Europe in the 1920s and 30s.

In addition, conservative groups such as the Heritage Foundation, Wallbuilders, and the Koch-backed American Legislative Exchange Council are helping right-wing legislators to craft model voter suppression bills.v Voter suppression laws represent both an expression of an updated form of Jim Crow and must be seen as part of a neoliberal fascist project intent on eradicating the foundations of citizenship, expanding the punishing state, waging war on truth, elevating ignorance over reason, and pandering to white supremacists and right-wing extremists, while merging elements of twentieth-century fascism and neoliberal rationality.

The United States has entered a period marked by the production of a neoliberal rationality, which includes normalizing the notion that the market is a template for all social conditions, asserting that democracy and capitalism are synonymous, normalizing ideologies of race/culture supremacy, and legitimating the use of state-sponsored violence to repress dissent and those populations considered disposable. It should be clear that fascism thrives in moments of severe capitalist crisis. Moreover, the main reason for its return in the present moment of plagues and pandemics cannot be removed the failure of neoliberalism "to offer any real hope to segments of the population facing increasing inequality and a downward spiral of social and economic mobility."vi As the social contract withers, civic culture disappears, and any notion of shared citizenship is eroded, neoliberalism reveals its fascist alignments by tapping into deep rooted fears, uncertainties, and racialized popular anger.

Neoliberal fascism attempts to legitimate and manufacture a culture of fear, anxiety, and hatred. It is a pedagogy

rooted in racism and bigotry and is used to divert public attention away from the various crisis of capitalism marked by needless deaths caused by a health crisis during the pandemic and "a downward spiral of social and economic inequality."vii Senator Raphael Warnock is right in arguing that voter suppression laws are resuscitating a full-fledged assault on voting rights "unlike anything we've ever seen since the Jim Crow era.   This is Jim Crow in new clothes."viii This updated version of Jim Crow is waged through the power of political policies and right-wing disimagination machines—it diverts, represses, excludes and creates the subjective conditions for advancing the cause of a racialized authoritarianism. Jim Crow also hides under the liberal call for unity, and a refusal to translate political responsibility into moral responsibility. How else to explain Democratic Senator of West Virginia Joe Manchin's echoing of Republican Party talking points about voter rights bills and support for the filibuster. Manchin has refused to support the For The People Act, a bill that would protect the nation's voting rights, because it would destroy bipartisan legislation, as if it existed in the current politically hyper-polarized climate.

Manchin enacts a soft version of white supremacy hiding behind the false call for political unity across party lines, in spite of the current reality of political gridlock. Manchin wants the Democrats and Republicans to come together at a time when the Republican Party only believes in a notion of unity organized around a full-fledged attack on civil rights and democracy itself. A New York congressman was right in stating that Joe Manchin's position on voting rights "might be titled, 'Why I'll vote to preserve Jim Crow.'" Manchin's claim that passing a voting rights will only "destroy the weakening binds of our democracy" does more than ring hollow, it reaffirms the long legacy of Jim Crow and the white nationalists' hatred of Black people.ix This is an insult to the thousands of Americans who died on the battlefields of the Civil War, fought for freedom in two world wars, and gave their lives in order to expand civil rights and social justice.

It is one thing to condemn Manchin for his unholy alliance with a party that is resurrecting the legacy of Jim Crow, it is another thing for him to be in alliance with a party that thrives on ignorance, lies, and white supremacy. Manchin appears blind in his support for a party that has a weak connection with reality, apparent in the fact that 63 percent of Republicans claim the election was stolen from Trump along with "23 percent [who] believe that the world is controlled by Satan-worshipping pedophiles."x Another 25 percent support the inane and outlandish claims QAnon, with its "imaginary global syndicate of Satan-worshipping child traffickers."xi

Voter suppression laws breathe new life into white supremacy and fit nicely into the racist argument that whites are under siege by people of color who are attempting to dethrone and replace them. In this case, such laws, along with an ongoing attack on equality and social justice, are defended as justifiable measures to protect whites from the "contaminating" influence of immigrants, Black people, and others considered unworthy of occupying and participating in the public sphere and democratic process. Voter suppression laws are defended as legitimate attempts to provide proof of "real Americans," code for defining people of color as "counterfeit citizens."xii

The Republican Party no longer hides its racism and boldly engages in widespread voter suppression.xiii As Robin D. G. Kelly has argued, Republicans have made clear that they endorse the white supremacist notion that "the United States [should] be a straight, white nation reminiscent of the mythic 'old days' when armed white men ruled, owned their castle, boasted of unvanquished military power, and everyone else knew their place."xiv It is crucial to mention that these bills are also aimed at preventing youth from voting as well. Closing polling stations, restricting student I.D. as a form of voter identification, and restricting absentee voting to people over 65 or older automatically eliminates young people from voting by mail.xv All of these issues are a stumbling bloc for young voters, whose changing demographics scares party of the Confederacy. Republicans have also argued openly that voter suppression policies are meant to enable permanent minority rule for them, the end point of which is a form of authoritarianism. xvi

White Supremacy and Apartheid Pedagogy

The genocide inflicted on Native Americans, slavery, the horrors of Jim Crow, the incarceration of Japanese Americans, the rise of the carceral state, the My Lai massacre, former President Bush's torture chambers and black

sites, among other historical events now disappear into a disavowal of past events made even more unethical with the emergence of a right-wing political and pedagogical language of erasure. For example, the Republican Party's attack on the teaching of critical race theory in the schools which they label as "ideological or faddish" both denies the history of racism as well as the ways in which it is enforced through policy, laws, and institutions. For many Republicans, racial hatred takes on the ludicrous claim of protecting students from learning about the diverse ways in which racism persist in American society. For instance, Republican Governor Ron DeSantis of Florida stated that "There is no room in our classrooms for things like critical race theory. Teaching kids to hate their country and to hate each other is not worth one red cent of taxpayer money."xvii In this updated version of apartheid pedagogy and historical cleansing, the call for racial justice is equated to a form of racial hatred leaving intact the refusal to acknowledge, condemn, and confront in the public imagination the history and tenacity of racism in American society.

In the current era of white supremacy, apartheid pedagogy is present in attempts by Republican Party politicians to rewrite the narrative regarding who counts as an American. This whitening of collective identity is largely reproduced by right-wing attacks on diversity and race sensitivity training, critical race programs in government, and social justice and racial issues in the schools. These bogus assaults are all too familiar and include widespread and coordinated ideological and pedagogical attacks against historical memory and critical forms of education. The most aggressive moves by Republican dominated legislatures are focused on efforts to control how American history, particularly the legacy of slavery, is taught in classrooms. As John Feffer states, this is the educational version of an updated Jim Crow and points to "a version of white supremacy is being legislated into classrooms in various republican-controlled states."xviii

The fight to censor critical, truth-telling versions of American history and the current persistence of systemic racism is part of a larger conservative project to prevents teachers, students, journalists, and others from speaking openly about crucial social issues that undermine a viable democracy. Such attacks are increasingly waged by conservative foundations, anti-public intellectuals, politicians, and media outlets. These include right-wing think tanks such as Heritage-foundation and Manhattan Institute, scholars such as Thomas Sowell, politicians such as Mitch McConnell, and media outlets such as *City Journal, The Daily Caller, Federalist, and Fox News*. The threat of teaching children about the history and systemic nature of racism appears particularly dangerous to *Fox News*, which since June 5 has posited "critical race theory" as a threat in over 150 broadcasts.xix What is shared by all of these sources is the claim that critical race theory and other "anti-racist" programs constitute forms of indoctrination that threaten to undermine the alleged foundations of Western Civilization.

The nature of this moral panic is evident in the fact that anti-CRT bills have become law in eight states and 15 state legislatures across the country have introduced bills to prevent or limit teachers from teaching about the history of slavery and racism in American society. In doing so, they are making a claim for what one Texas legislator called "traditional history," which allegedly should focus on "ideas that make the country great."xx Texas stands out in its efforts to influence what is taught in public schools because it has a huge influence in what textbooks are adopted across the country. As Simon Romero reports in the *New York Times*, Texas along with a "dozen other Republican-led states seek to ban or limit how the role of slavery and pervasive effects of racism can be taught [amounting] to some of the most aggressive efforts to control the teaching of American history." He writes that a number of the bills proposed by the Republican led legislature include the following and is worth citing at length:

> One measure that recently passed the Texas House, largely along party lines, would limit teacher-led discussions of current events; prohibit course credit for political activism or lobbying, which could include students who volunteer for civil rights groups; and ban teaching of The 1619 Project, an initiative by The New York Times that says it aims to reframe U.S. history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans at the center of the national narrative. The bill would also limit how teachers in Texas classrooms can discuss the ways in which racism influenced the legal system in the state, long a segregationist bastion, and the rest of the country. Another bill that sailed through the Texas House would create a committee to "promote patriotic education" about the state's secession from Mexico in 1836, largely by men who were fighting to expand slavery. And a third bill would block exhibits at San Antonio's Alamo complex from explaining that major figures in the

Texas Revolution were slave owners.xxi

Idaho's lieutenant governor, Janice McGeachin, is equally forthright in revealing the underlying ideological craze behind censoring any talk by teachers and students about race in Idaho public schools. She has introduced a taskforce to protect young people from what she calls, with no pun intended, "the scourge of critical race theory, socialism, communism, and Marxism."xxii McGeachin's chilling attack on freedom of expression echoes an earlier period in American history when during the McCarthy and Red Scare period of the 1950s heightened paranoia over the threat of communism resulted in a slew of "laws that banned the teaching of Marxism and communism, and required professors to swear loyalty oaths."xxiii

This version of neo- McCarthyism was on full display in Ohio when Republican Representative Fowler Arthur introduced the "Promoting Education Not Indoctrination Act." This bill would outlaw the teaching of critical race theory not only in the public schools but also "in Ohio's large public university system, threatening any institution that allows such teaching with a reduction of one quarter of its state funding."xxiv Fowler's disdain for democracy, evident in her erasure from state mandated curriculum guidelines of the notion of common good, is matched by her distorted views of racism, environmentalism, and critical thinking itself.xxv When Arthur was asked at a press conference to define the substance of the bill, her ignorance of Marxism and support for a ginned up version of neo-McCarthyism was clear in her response, reported by Timothy Messer-Kruse:

> "We really focus on defining the Marxist ideology..." When asked to define what Marxist ideology was, Representative Fowler Arthur said that "those are specifically that one nationality, color, ethnicity, race, or sex is inherently superior to another nationality, color, ethnicity, race, or sex... So the main goal of this definition of divisive concepts is to define the ideology behind some of these Marxist ideals..."xxvi

Such attacks are about more than censorship and racial cleansing. Apartheid educational practices allow the intrusion of criminality into politics by nourishing habits of powerlessness and undermining any viable form of critical agency. Civic illiteracy is the goal of the Republican Party, reinforced by the belief that an uninformed public shaped through a pedagogy of manufactured ignorance will not hold power accountable. Right-wing attacks on critical race theory also ignore any work by prominent Black scholars ranging from Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. DuBois to Angela Y. Davis and Audre Lord. There is no mention of even Derrick Bell, the founder of critical race theory in the 1980s.xxvii Nor is there room for complexity, evidence or facts, just as there is no room for either a critique of structural racism or the actual assumptions and influence that make up CRT's body of work. What disappears in the attacks on anti-racist work is an attempt to analyze how its most profound theorists explore and make visible its history and contemporary effects on the existing social order.xxviii Bell's work on critical race theory was highly theoretical and academic, largely taught in law schools, and focused on how racism is institutionalized in the law. While such work makes clear that racism can only exist along side tyranny, it is not only about racism and an appeal to equality but also about the "possibility of democracy."xxix The goal of the attacks on critical race theory is a reign of tyranny reinforced through a cultural politics that ensures that when and where civic literacy and freedom are destroyed, democracy disappears. The enemy of the Republican Party is not critical race theory, per se, but democracy itself.

In this instance education becomes a site of derision, an object of censorship, and a way of demonizing schools and teachers who address critically matters of racism and racial inequality. Right-wing politicians now use education and the power of persuasion as weapons to discredit any critical approach to grappling with the history of racial injustice and white supremacy. In doing so, they attempt to undermine and discredit the critical faculties necessary for students and others to examine history as a resource in order to "investigate the core conflict between a nation founded on radical notions of liberty, freedom, and equality, and a nation built on slavery, exploitation, and exclusion."xxx The current attacks on critical race theory, if not critical thinking itself, are but one instance of the rise of apartheid pedagogy. This is a pedagogy in which education is used in the service of dominant power in order to normalize racism, class inequities, and economic inequality while safeguarding the interests of those who benefit from such inequities the most. In pursuit of such a project, they impose a pedagogy of oppression, complacency, and mindless discipline. They

ignore or downplay matters of injustice and the common good, and rarely embrace notions of community as part of a pedagogy that engages pressing social, economic, and civic problems. Instead of an education of civic practice that enriches the public imagination, they endorse all the elements of indoctrination central to formalizing and updating a mode of fascist politics.

The conservative wrath waged against critical race theory is example of white ignorance parading as a form of patriotic pedagogy, which in reality is central to the conservative struggle over power—the power of the moral and political imagination. White ignorance is crucial to upholding the poison of white supremacy. Apartheid pedagogy is about denial and disappearance, a manufactured ignorance that attempts to whitewash history and rewrite the narrative of American exceptionalism as it might have been framed in the 1920s and 30s when members of a resurgent Ku Klux Klan shaped the policies of some school boards. Apartheid pedagogy uses education as a disimagination machine to convince students and others that racism does not exist, that teaching about racial justice is a form of indoctrination, and that understanding history is more an exercise in blind reverence than critical analysis.

Apartheid pedagogy aims to reproduce current systems of racism rather than end them. Institutions such as *No Left Turn in Education* not only oppose teaching about racism in schools, but also comprehensive sex education, and teaching children about climate change, which they view as forms of indoctrination. Without irony, they label themselves an organization of "patriotic Americans who believe that a fair and just society can only be achieved when malleable young minds are free from the indoctrination that suppresses their independent thought."xxxi This is the power of ignorance in the service of civic death and a flight from ethical and social responsibility. Kati Holloway, citing the NYU philosopher, Charles W. Mills, succinctly sums up the elements of white ignorance. She writes:

> "White ignorance," according to NYU philosopher Charles W. Mills, is an "inverted epistemology," a deep dedication to and investment in non-knowing that explains white supremacy's highly curatorial (and often oppositional) approach to memory, history, and the truth. While white ignorance is related to the anti-intellectualism that defines the white Republican brand, it should be regarded as yet more specific. According to Mills, white ignorance demands a purposeful misunderstanding of reality—both present and historical—and then treats that fictitious worldview as the singular, de-politicized, unbiased, "objective" truth. "One has to learn to see the world wrongly," under the terms of white ignorance, Mills writes, "but with the assurance that this set of mistaken perceptions will be validated by white epistemic authority."xxxii

New York Times columnist Michelle Goldberg reports that right-wing legislators have taken up the cause to ban critical race theory from not only public schools but also higher education. She highlights the case of Boise University, which has banned dozens of classes dealing with diversity. She notes that soon afterward, "the Idaho State Senate voted to cut $409,000 from the school's budget, an amount meant to reflect what Boise State spends on social justice programs."xxxiii Such attacks are happening across the United States and are not only meant to curtail teaching about racism, sexism, and other controversial issues in the schools, but also to impose strict restrictions on what non-tenured assistant professors can teach and to what degree they can be pushed to accept being both deskilled and giving up control over the conditions of their labor.

In an egregious example of an attack on free speech and tenure itself, the Board of Trustees at the University of North Carolina denied a tenure position to Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, Nikole Hannah-Jones because of her work on *The Times Magazine's* 1619 project, "which examined the legacy of slavery in America."xxxiv The failure to provide tenure to Hannah-Jones, who is also the recipient of a MacArthur Foundation "Genius Grant," and an inductee into the North Carolina Media and Journalism Hall of Fame is a blatant act of racism and violation of academic freedom. Let's be clear. The North Carolina Board of Trustees denied Hannah-Jones tenure because she brings to the university a critical concern with racism that clashes with the strident political conservatism of the board. It is also another example of a racist backlash by conservatives who wish to deny that racism even exists in the United States, never mind that it should even be acknowledged in public and higher education classrooms.

This form of "patriotic education" is being put in place by a resurgence of those who support Jim Crow power

relations. This type of retribution is a part of a longstanding politics of fear, censorship, and academic repression that conservatives have waged since the student revolts of the 1960s.xxxv It is also part of the ongoing corporatization of the university in which business models now define how the university is governed, faculty are reduced to part-time workers, and students are viewed merely as customers and consumers.xxxvi Equally important, this case is an updated attack on the ability and power of faculty rather than Boards of Trustees in making decisions regarding both faculty hiring and the crucial question who decides who gets tenure in a university.xxxvii Keith E. Whittington and Sean Wisents are right in stating that the Board's actions to deny Hannah-Jones a tenured professorship are about more than a singular violation of faculty rights, academic freedom, and attack on associated discourses relating to critical race theory. They write:

> For the Board of Trustees to interfere unilaterally on blatantly political grounds is an attack on the integrity of the very institution it oversees. The perception and reality of political intervention in matters of faculty hiring will do lasting damage to the reputation of higher education in North Carolina — and will embolden boards across the country similarly to interfere with academic operations of the universities that they oversee.xxxviii

Holding critical ideas has become a liability in the contemporary neoliberal university. Also, at risk here is the relationship between critical thinking, civic values, and historical remembrance evident in the current attempts to suppress voting rights, dangerous memories, and an urgent analysis of racism in the U.S. The current conservative attack on critical race theory testifies to a renewed effort to eliminate any critical teaching and dialogue regarding racism. It also testifies to the degree to which anti CRT bills are funded by organizations such as the Koch brothers, and the American Legislative Exchange Council, which provides the template for these bills used by many state legislators.   David Theo Goldberg has brilliantly outlined how the war on critical race theory and other anti-racist programs, which he defines as critical race studies, is designed largely to eliminate the legacy and persistent effects of systemic racial injustice and its underlying structural, ideological, and pedagogical fundamentals and components. This is apartheid pedagogy with a vengeance. Goldberg is worth quoting at length:

> First, the coordinated conservative attack on CRT is largely meant to distract from the right's own paucity of ideas. The strategy is to create a straw house to set aflame in order to draw attention away from not just its incapacity but its outright refusal to address issues of cumulative, especially racial, injustice…. Second, the conservative attack on CRT tries to rewrite history in its effort to neo liberalize racism: to reduce it to a matter of personal beliefs and interpersonal prejudice. … On this view, the structures of society bear no responsibility, only individuals. Racial inequities today are …not the living legacy of centuries of racialized systems…. Third, race has always been an attractive issue for conservatives to mobilize around. They know all too well how to use it to stoke white resentment while distracting from the depredations of conservative policies for all but the wealthy.xxxix

Apartheid pedagogy in the form of attacks on CRT also have a chilling effect on freedom of expression, suggesting that even thinking about racism and the legacy of racial injustice is unacceptable pedagogically in the nation's schools. Vincent Wong, a research associate at African American Policy Forum, states that "it is difficult to separate the conservative critique of CRT from the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement and "the backlash to constrain, censor, restrict the ability to talk about racial justice both in terms of contemporary inequality but also the history of it."xl

Police Violence and culture of white supremacy

The face of white supremacy and its culture of violence is most evident in the scourge of police violence with its long legacy of racism in the United States. Police aggression, the criminalization of social problems, massive inequality, the surge of a culture of lies, the rise of white supremacy and the easy availability of guns represent a mosaic of factors contributing to a larger culture of violence. This culture of aggression has not gone unnoticed by a public increasingly disturbed by racist violence. The spread of gun violence, police brutality, and mass shootings have galvanized public attention and produced a widespread debate focused largely on defunding the police and "legislative initiatives for how to better prevent gun violence [that] may lead to substantial state gun policy changes."xli Increasingly, the call

for reform has challenged the notion that police violence is the result of the behavior of a few rogue or bad cops and has little to do with the availability of guns in America.

Liberal reforms aimed at violence have done little to restrict the proliferation of guns in American society. A more sustained and louder call for reform against systemic violence has built upon earlier calls for defunding the police, abolishing the police completely, and eliminating prisons. At best, these varied critiques have pushed the criticism of police violence into mainstream conversations and produced a newfound public concern with the institution of policing and issues of safety and protection. What has been ignored or under theorized in the mainstream concern with police brutality is what Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, citing Mariame Kaba, refers to as a larger system of violence and punishment with its "death-making institutions" organized to produce entire systems of "harassment, violence, and surveillance" whose function is "to keep oppressive gender and racial hierarchies in place."xlii

While not without merit, such calls for reform, especially those advocated by liberal politicians and the mainstream media, do not go far enough in understanding the reach and power of violence in America, especially with regards to a politics and culture that fuels racist forms of police brutality. What is missed in these calls for police reform is a broader interpretation of the culture of violence, especially as it has emerged with the melding of neoliberalism with fascist politics defined through the lens of white supremacy and white nationalism. The problem of police violence is part of a broader crisis and must be addressed as part of a more comprehensive view of racism and class oppression, produced through a neoliberal politics that merges the market-driven imperatives of a criminal economy with a fascist politics defined increasingly by its advocacy of white supremacy and racial cleansing.

Sociologist Alex Vitale rightly insists that the call for police reform begins not with producing "better" police through technocratic reforms such as the increased use of body cameras and bias training but with a "larger structure of economic life in America."xliii In the age of neoliberal austerity, the defunding of the welfare state has given way to a range of social problems--extending from the criminalization of homelessness and the relentless erasure of human rights to the mass proliferation of surveillance and the placing of police in the schools--all of which has contributed to the expansion of police power as a way to control people "disconnected from meaningful participation in the global economy."xliv Turning over every social problem for the police to fix is more than an impossible task; it is a failed, if not diversionary, political decision.xlv That is, it is a decision divorced from not only from a history in which the police have been murdering Black people with impunity--but also from the emergence of neoliberal social order in which economic activity is divorced from social costs. Under such circumstances, state-sanctioned acts of lawlessness, a politics of domestic terrorism, disposability and white supremacy have become normalized, and removed from the grammar of social and ethical responsibility. Investing in force as the first strategy of police engagement, and a widespread acceptance of lawlessness have accelerated and expanded the power of the police. This perfecta of violence constitutes a first principle of policing and is part of what Cornel West calls "a failed social experiment."xlvi According to West, this experiment is rooted in a form of capitalism that brutalizes people of color and is built on staggering levels of inequality, a culture of anti-intellectualism, and concentrated economic power that tramples "on the rights of poor people and minorities decade after decade."xlvii

Police violence has become a form of domestic terrorism. domestic terrorism—or what Mark Levine has called in a different context "a necropolitics of the oppressed."xlviii This is a form of systemic terror and violence instituted intentionally by different levels of government against populations at home in order to realize economic gains and achieve political benefits through practices that range from assassination, extortion, incarceration, violence, and intimidation or coercion of a civilian population.xlix Some of the more notorious racist expressions of U.S. domestic terrorism bring to mind the assassination of Black Panther Party leader Fred Hampton by the Chicago Police Department on December 4, 1969. The MOVE bombing by the Philadelphia Police Department in 1985, the existence of COINTELPRO an illegal counterintelligence program designed to harass anti-war and black resistance fighters in the 60s and 70s, the use of extortion by the local police and courts practiced on the largely poor black inhabitants of Ferguson, and the more publicized killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd by the police--to name just a few incidents.

Domestic terrorism is informed both by the scale of increased militarism, violence at the level of everyday life, and the increase in technologies of surveillance, arrests, convictions, and privatized prisons. In our digitally mediated world, marginalized populations are tracked, reduced to data, and mapped onto different avenues of disposability. The discourse of criminality and control has produced a slew of law enforcement measures that targeted urban schools, social services, and public housing, all of which became terrains of surveillance and fodder for the expansion of the punishment state.l At work here, is also a move away from the war on poverty to a war on the poor. As welfare programs were defunded, a culture of punishment morphed into a war on drugs that became synonymous with a generalized war youth. According to Vitale, police reform must move from talk about police accountability to political accountability to address police violence as part of a broader set of economic and political issues. He writes:

> the decision to turn social problems over to the police is a political decision (as is the creation of the social problems in the first place). Responding to this deeply entrenched form of governance requires a new politics. We just cannot fix policing with a set of superficial, technocratic reforms, because they don't address the way the most basic needs of people have themselves been defunded, creating the "crime" that must be policed in the first place…. This is not about just getting the police out of the homelessness and mental health business: this is about a radical rethink about how safety is produced.li

The liberal call for reforming the police largely fails to address what Zach Beauchamp calls police culture, or the tenets of police ideology, which are shared by police departments throughout the United States. Police ideology is part of the hidden curriculum of police culture, and while it is not taught overtly in police academies, it is often part of a silent code that is passed down to each generation of police officers and offers "a deeply disturbing picture of the internal culture of policing," which Beauchamp describes as follows:

> The tenets of police ideology are not codified or written down but are nonetheless widely shared in departments around the country. The ideology holds that the world is a profoundly dangerous place: Officers are conditioned to see themselves as constantly in danger and that the only way to guarantee survival is to dominate the citizens they're supposed to protect. The police believe they're alone in this fight; police ideology holds that officers are under siege by criminals and are not understood or respected by the broader citizenry. These beliefs, combined with widely held racial stereotypes, push officers toward violent and racist behavior during intense and stressful street interactions.lii

What is often not evident to the public and liberals is that this is an armed culture that trains the police to be an occupying army, views Black communities as a threatening population, and privilege the use of violence as a privileged response to dealing with targeted Black communities. This approach to policing cannot be separated from a broader neoliberal fascist culture in which whiteness becomes both a badge of solidarity and is shaped by larger forces of structural racism. It is no accident that "the officer corps remains overwhelmingly white, male, and straight [and] that police heavily favor Republicans."liii The rise of white supremacy at the center of power with the election of Trump in 2016, and the transformation of the Republican Party into a party of white supremacists after Trump lost the presidential election to Joe Biden points to a racist system in which the targeting of Black populations has the potential to get worse rather than better in the future. The delusions of white supremacy have turned into a project spearheaded by a Republican Party that celebrates the racist legacy of the Confederacy.

Conclusion

The United States has suffered a steep decline in democracy over the past few years, especially under the Trump regime. According to The Freedom Report, the U.S. has experienced an 11-point drop in freedom since 2020, "making it one of the 25 countries to suffer the steepest drops over the 10-year period."liv The U.S. now ranks "closer to countries such as Romania and Panama than western European partners such as France and Germany."lv The Freedom House report was not alone in assessing the decline of democracy in the United States. The Economists' Intelligence Unit cited the U.S. as a "flawed democracy" and ranked it 25th out of 167 countries analyzed as democratic nations.lvi

The length and breadth of the struggle in the United States to close the gap between its ideals, promises, and reality have reached a vanishing point. America's penchant for violence abroad has now turned inward. The Trumpian call for "law and order" inspired dictators across the globe and accelerated a politics of disposability connected to updated forms of racial cleansing, white nationalism, and white supremacy. Authoritarian nationalism increasingly finds its counterpart in forms of cultural triumphalism and the proliferation of state violence, now largely waged by Republican-controlled state legislatures.

America's collective desire for a democratic future has not simply been diminished; it appears to have become irrelevant, if not an object of scorn by both the Republican Party and the legion of Trump followers. America is haunted by apocalyptic yearnings camouflaged in the promise of a white public sphere and society cleansed of those populations considered disposable. Central to this bigoted and nativistic social formation is a racially infused notion of citizenship, an atomized notion of personal liberty, and an unmitigated defense of individualism and selfishness free of any sense of social responsibility.lvii To paraphrase Zygmunt Bauman, visions have now fallen into disrepute, and what once produced shame, many Americans are now proud of.lviii

America's slide into fascist politics with its undercurrent of white supremacy has been acknowledged even by President Joe Biden in speeches he delivered marking both the Tulsa race massacre and Memorial Day.lix Using a language long associated with leftist critics, Biden warned that U.S. democracy was not only in danger but that Americans had to recognize and challenge the "deep roots of racial terror."lx

The U.S.'s slide into the chasm of white supremacy demands a revitalized understanding of the historical moment in which we find ourselves, along with a systemic critical analysis of the new political formations that mark this period. Part of this challenge is to create a new language and mass social movement to address and construct empowering terrains of education, politics, justice, culture, and power that challenge existing systems of racist violence and economic oppression. The beginning of such a strategy can be found in the Black Lives Matter movement and its alignment with other movements fighting against authoritarianism. The Black Lives Matter movement teaches us "that eradicating racial oppression ultimately requires a struggle against oppression in all of its forms...[especially] restructuring America's economic system."lxi This is especially important as those groups marginalized by class, race, ethnicity, and religion have become aware of how much in this new era of fascist politics they have lost control over the economic, political, pedagogical, and social conditions that bear down on their lives. Visions have become dystopian, devolving into a sense of being left out, abandoned, and subject to increasing systems of terror and violence. These issues can no longer be viewed as individual problems but as manifestations of a broader failure of politics. Moreover, what is needed is not a series of stopgap reforms limited to particular institutions or groups but a radical restructuring of the entirety of U.S. society.

The call for a socialist democracy demands the creation of visions, ideals, institutions, social relations, and pedagogies of resistance that enable the public to imagine a life beyond a social order in which racial, class and gender-based violence produce endless assaults on the environment, systemic police violence, a culture of ignorance and cruelty. Such a challenge must also address an assault on the civic culture and the social contract, mediated through the elevation of war, militarization, violent masculinity, and the politics of disposability to the highest levels of power. Capitalism is a piece of death-driven machinery that infantilizes, exploits, and devalues human life and the planet itself. As market mentalities and moralities tighten their grip on all aspects of society, democratic institutions and public spheres are being downsized, if not altogether disappearing, along with the informed citizens without which there is no democracy.

Central to any viable notion of resistance to the threat of white supremacy and fascist politics is the courage to think and take on the challenge of what kind of world we want—what kind of future we want to build for our children? These are questions that can only be addressed when addressing politics and capitalism as part of a general crisis of democracy. This challenge demands the willingness to develop an anti-capitalist consciousness as the basis for a call to action, one willing to dismantle the present structure of neoliberal capitalism. Chantal Mouffe is right in

arguing that "before being able to radicalize democracy, it is first necessary to recover it," which means first rejecting the common-sense assumptions that capitalism and democracy are synonymous.lxii

Given the current threats to democracy in the U.S., the time has come to reclaim the great utopian ideals unleashed by a long history of civil rights struggles, the insights and radical struggles produced by the Black Lives Matter movement and ongoing struggles against the rise of fascism across the globe. There is a need to rethink and relearn the trajectory of history by considering the role that critical education and notions of civic literacy have played in producing a collective anti-capitalist consciousness. At stake here is the crucial project of once again creating the critical agents and social movements that refuse to equate capitalism and democracy and uphold the conviction that the problems of ecological destruction, mass poverty, militarism, systemic racism, and a host of other social problems cannot be solved by leaving capitalism in place. Only then can mass movements arise in which the future can be written in the language of justice, compassion, and the fundamental narratives of freedom and equality. Resistance in a time of tyranny is no longer an option. It is a crucial necessity.

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Risk, Return to Industry, and The Future of Democracy

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Abstract

Reflecting on 2020, I consider the possibility of the collapse of the United States, as well as the ways in which it has fallen short of representative and democratic promise. I argue that the spread of conspiratorial reason is symptomatic of the mistrust that has arisen from these failures. Drawing on naturalist, critical theory, and sociology of knowledge accounts of conspiratorial reason, I argue that such thinking is interest-bound, weaponizing mistrust, and is broadly appealing but ultimately disempowering, serving the ends of failed praxis and reification of power. I examine two possible sources of institutionalized mistrust: the "culture wars" thesis which argues that mistrust is iteratively linked to polarization along religious, racial, and cultural lines, and Ulrich Beck's vision of a "return to industry" in which responses to novel hazards are constrained by techno-economic imperatives that politicize knowledge and splinter class loyalties. I emphasize the second explanation without discounting the first, arguing that this approach to hazards, from COVID to institutional discrimination to climate change, is both unsustainable and self-thwarting in terms of building social trust. Then, drawing on Beck as well as scholars from various democratic traditions, I offer possible future visions, including but not limited to avenues toward restoration of social trust in the United States, based on this analysis.

I have worked on this paper on and off through 2020. For months I considered, and rejected, multiple possible approaches that followed from the spectacle as I watched the year unfold. When former Minneapolis PD officer Derek Chauvin murdered George Floyd by kneeling on his neck for upwards of eight minutes, causing his death, it was followed by record-breaking international Civil Rights protests, and widespread calls to reform, defund, or even abolish the police. The trial of Chauvin began the week I drafted this paper, and dominated the Minnesota news cycle. Being both a sociologist who recently moved to Minnesota, and a sympathetic human being, I was moved to put these events into context. As I finished this work, over 500,000 U.S.-Americans had died from COVID-19, and over 30 million had been infected. In recent months, heavily-armed militiamen confronted police and stormed federal buildings, assembled to threaten protesters in scattered towns and suburbs, rallied against the largely-nonexistent threat "antifa," and worked alongside elected officials to delay Congress' (ordinarily) largely-symbolic role in confirming the next President of the United States.

Is the United States a failed state? For years, I have tried to maintain optimism, or at least composed skepticism, without sinking into the "it can't happen here" complacency shared by so many U.S.-Americans, even in the face of growing apprehension and doubt. The United States is typically referred to as a "representative democratic republic," and as a state, is traditionally expected to hold *the monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory*" (Weber 1946:78, emphasis in original). To claim the "failure" of this state would mean that these elements are no longer present. I am less interested in diagnosing the failure than in examining how each of these elements have fallen short of their promise, how such failures reflect long-standing and multiple disintegrations in social trust underpinning the events of 2020, as well as how broader historical, cultural, and political-economic elements have

driven this disintegration.

In the wake of COVID-19 and its human as well as economic consequences, the average U.S.-American is struggling, financially, with tens of millions facing precarity, unemployment, eviction, and homelessness. That the U.S. stands alone among wealthy nations in lacking a public health care infrastructure reflects a long-standing tension between a vocal minority of the U.S. population who hold an ideological suspicion of "government" (see Jouet 2017:157-62) coupled with standing idiosyncrasies of the U.S. electoral system that give outsized power to some minorities (largely white, rural voters who lean Republican) while systematically disenfranchising others (particularly low-income persons of color living in urban areas who lean Democrat). Since the failed coup of January 6, Republican legislatures have introduced scores of bills designed to make voting more difficult in areas densely populated by voters of color, using largely-nonexistent "voter fraud" claims as justification (see Certo 2021). Former President Trump was declared the 45th President after losing the popular vote to contender Hillary Clinton by over two million votes in 2016, whereas in 2020, Joe Biden won the popular vote by over eight million. However, the Electoral College totals for the winners were almost identical (DeSilver 2020). At the legislative level, each state elects two senators, meaning that in the upper chamber of Congress, a state such as Wyoming, with a population of around half a million people, has just as much representation, and power as California, with a population of over 39 million (Riccardi 2020). Some fear that "open rejection of democracy" and denial of 2020 election results has become part of official political platforms given the above trends, coupled with the fact that over a hundred members of Congress voted against certifying 2020 presidential election results (Riccardi 2020). After former President Trump spent his final months in office sowing fear of widespread voter fraud, more than five dozen post-election legal challenges and multiple recounts failed to produce evidence of widespread fraud (Cummings, Garrison, and Sergent 2021). Taken together, these facets of the U.S. electoral system call into question whether it has ever been representative of the will of the majority of its population, while also illustrating its current precarity.

The immediate "why" is simple: lack of trust. Social trust has failed, or is failing, on multiple levels and across multiple fault lines simultaneously. To shift the conversation from the language-game of political science to that of sociology, legitimacy can be thought of as a kind of trust, and no state—no *society*—long survives without it. Societies live on trust, and die on mistrust. However, trust is not a *thing* that can be manufactured, nor is it a feeling that can be magically restored once undermined; it is both a necessity among an inherently social species, as well as an ongoing and largely quotidian *process* rooted in interaction. This was perhaps most clearly articulated in the work of Emile Durkheim (2014), arguing both for the primacy of the social as well as importance of solidarity in coordinating social life. Two important facets emerge from Durkheim's work. The first is his critique of "the social contract" as basis for social trust, including a rejection of the primacy of the self-interested individual in favor of the primacy of altruism and social solidarity as the basis of society. This becomes increasingly evident as societies become more complex and differentiated, paralleling an expansion of legal frameworks alongside the transition toward solidarity rooted in occupational specialization (Durkheim 2014:158-79). Second, the failure in social solidarity and collapse of trust can be traced, then, to a pathological division of labor, which result from political-economic instabilities, class warfare, and poor coordination between specializations (among other possibilities—see Durkheim 2014:277-308).

Durkheim theorizes mistrust as rooted in broader conditions of labor and its relationship to social solidarity. This raises two distinct issues in turn: the first involves whether, and to what extent "external" factors drive this dissolution of solidarity, and if so, where and why those factors arise here and now. The second issue involves how that breakdown of solidarity manifests itself. The first involves the emergence of a novel civilization characterized by global hazards (see Beck 1992, 2015); the second involves the proliferation of conspiratorial reason.[1] The second, as I will show, leads back to the first. This paper, therefore, is divided into two broad sections. In the first, I analyze "conspiratorial reason" as diagnosis of social mistrust, bringing multiple perspectives into communication in order to build toward a more precise, comprehensive, and useful definition of "conspiratorial reason." In the second, I bring this "pragmatist account of conspiratorial reason" into dialogue with the cultural, as well as political-economic causes of its appeal and proliferation, with an emphasis on the work of Ulrich Beck. I conclude with some thoughts on possible future directions based on this connection with a focus on the United States.

Conspiratorial Reason, Power, and Critique

Conspiratorial reason is by no means a novel phenomenon in the United States, and evidence of its persistence is easy to come by (see Jouet 2017: 63-79; Lavin 2020; Uscinski 2021). Popular and scholarly analyses have often focused on conspiracy theories as evidence of a departure from Enlightenment commitments to reason and science. I refer to this as the *naturalist account* of conspiratorial reason—that is, it rests on an epistemic commitment to viewing science as the systematization of reason. At the further end of this philosophical continuum, knowledge is essentially what science shows knowledge to be (for a pragmatist critique of this position, see Putnam 1995:3-22). Rationality is wedded to science, and it is departure from this commitment itself, a turn, or *return*, to a "darker age," that drives conspiratorial reason. In fact, the use of the term "reason" as attached to "conspiratorial" in this context would make the naturalist balk—to be "conspiratorial" is to be "not reasonable." This position is perhaps most eloquently expressed by Carl Sagan (1996) in his magnum opus, published shortly before his death, The *Demon-Haunted World*:

> Avoidable human misery is more often caused not so much by stupidity as by ignorance, particularly our ignorance about ourselves. I worry that, especially as the Millennium edges nearer, pseudoscience and superstition will seem year by year more tempting, the siren song of unreason more sonorous and attractive. Where have we heard it before? Whenever our ethnic or national prejudices are aroused, in times of scarcity, during challenges to national self-esteem or nerve, when we agonize about our diminished cosmic place and purpose, or when fanaticism is bubbling up around us—then, habits of thought familiar from ages past reach for the controls. The candle flame gutters. Its little pool of light trembles. Darkness gathers. The demons begin to stir (26-7, see also Szrot 2015:142).

A quarter of a century later, there is perhaps a prophetic air to it. The naturalist account of conspiratorial reason points to social unrest or times of insecurity as linked to the flourishing of conspiracy theories or rejection of reason in favor of more basic impulses. This account tends to note the role of social unrest and insecurity, but does not in turn interrogate the causal factors driving sociopolitical events—one is left to imagine that they are largely idiographic case studies in historical contingency rather than the manifestation of laws, patterns, or trends (thereby presuming a break between the "hard" science on one hand and the "soft" sciences/humanities on the other). In terms of *causality*, the naturalist account looks instead to human nature, specifically to the evolutionary fallibility of the human beings and our attendant mental architecture. Exemplifying this is the argument, made popular in evolutionary psychology, that human beings have an inborn tendency to seek patterns, and even false pattern recognition meant survival for our prehistoric ancestors. On average, it is better to anxiously flee a rustling in the tall grass when it is just the wind, than to second-guess the rustling and become a predator's next meal. This tendency manifests itself as a lapse in reason given the prevalence of beliefs in conspiracies and pseudoscience (see, for example, Shermer 2003:32-58).

The naturalist may therefore fall back on a biological explanation to explain the prevalence of conspiratorial reason. What served us well on the savannah leads us astray in the information society. Human beings are ultimately primates, and when angered, afraid, or aroused, differences in beliefs and behaviors reflect our difference of degree, not kind. This is, from the standpoint of an evolutionist, humanist, pragmatist, and social behaviorist[2] like me, undoubtedly the case. However, there is a danger in the naturalist account of tautology of asserting that *people are irrational apes because people are irrational apes*. And indeed, this can potentially take on the form of secularized "original sin"—an axiomatic belief in the fallibility of human beings. Dewey, among others, has challenged the apparent circularity of this view upheld as an explanation, reflected perhaps most evidently in his debate between himself and theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (see Hook 1995:172-74).[3] More importantly, moving beyond this approach allows for another set of popular explanations to be rendered suspect. Drawing on Dewey's (1989) criticisms of "human nature" once more: "Those who wished to justify the exercise of authority over others took a pessimistic view of the constitution of human nature…what passed as psychology was a branch of political doctrine" (29-30).[4] It does not seem accidental that protecting hereditary or "natural" social hierarchy and refusing empirical method in certain domains are linked—it represents a kind of "naturalistic mystification" as Mills (1985) described. In this context, searching for a satisfactory explanation of broad failure of trust solely in the fallibility of "human nature" risks providing fodder for a specific kind of cognitive model—and social hierarchy. This is not because the naturalist account is wrong. As a starting-point for an explanation it offers an evolutionary account of *where* conspiratorial

reason comes from as well as a partial sociological account of *when* and *why* it might be appealing. As will be shown, it also offers important and humbling correctives to the intellectual elitism sometimes wielded in discussions of "conspiracy theory." Building on this means critiquing problematic assumptions about what conspiratorial reason *does*. That is, an account must also capture the "cash value" of conspiratorial reason, to paraphrase William James (see Capps 2019). The pragmatist is interested in what our ideas about the world *do*—if conspiratorial reason does not "do" anything that can be theorized, then it does not in fact deserve to be called *reason*. The practical aim of analyzing conspiratorial reason must reach well beyond the truism that human reason is far from perfect, but living in a society populated by more reasonable people is to be preferred.

There are several pitfalls in any discussion of conspiratorial reason that have ensnared those seeking amore lucid understanding. In terms of the naturalist account, there is the danger of arguing that conspiratorial reason is *driven by* hucksters and charismatic strongmen who have *duped* millions of unwitting followers for the purposes of gaining money, power, or fame. This approach is much more common in public forums than among serious scholars of conspiratorial reason, but is nonetheless problematic in its consequences. The corollary being that those who can see the conspiracy "as it really is" are able to elevate themselves at the expense of these presumed dupes. This is itself a form of cultural distinction (see Bourdieu 2003)—a kind of intellectual elitism—that risks *preventing* more careful consideration of what motivates conspiratorial reason.

At the level of social theory, Weber, via Smith (2013), offers a useful corrective: For Weber, charismatic leaders derive power from the "bottom-up," from followers conferring legitimacy more so than "top-down," through leaders bamboozling unwitting and vulnerable people via some kind of otherworldly gift. This approach "disenchants charisma," opening greater conceptual space to more carefully—and practically—consider the motivations and interests of persons, groups, and institutions implicated in the ongoing unraveling of social trust. It also brings current events into stark relief: the human beings who find conspiratorial reason compelling, and consequentially have supported, and support, flouting democracy and rule of law, are not simply fools or dupes. They are acting on what they take to be in their best interest, based on limited information; they *know, and believe in, what they are doing, and are convinced that it is the right thing to do.* This re-centers legitimacy as a "bottom-up" phenomenon, and allows one to avoid making the facile claim that many who adhere to conspiratorial reason are simply "dummies" or "dupes" being misled by a strong leader. This is not the only way in which *power* might enter the explanation, however, as will be shown.

A second pitfall emerges in the context of a critique of critical theory itself. If critical theory is itself "conspiratorial," insofar as it takes aim at making connections that are often missed, passed over in silence, or seem "far-fetched," then perhaps the widespread conspiratorial reason reflects sincere efforts to grapple with the complexity of a world in which a few seem in fact to have outsized power over the many. One approach would parallel Jameson (1988) that views conspiratorial reason as the critical theory of the common person, an attempt to map, better make sense of, and seek critical distance from the repressive, maddening, and incomprehensible system of late capitalism. A related approach, championed by Bruno Latour points to the proliferation of conspiratorial reason as a *consequence* of critical theory in the university (see Marasco 2016:242).

Implicit in both approaches is intellectual elitism in different clothes—in Jameson's vision, what separates critical theorists from the "common person" is an increase in erudition and perhaps a decrease in desperation. In Latour's critical theory, the spreading beyond the universities that birthed it (itself a dubious claim) *has caused* conspiratorial reason. Both visions would give dubious power to both the university, and to the small enclaves of "critical theory" existing precariously within it. With Marasco (2016), what both get right is that conspiratorial reason *does* in fact live within, and at least share an elective affinity with, critical theory. A second corrective to this approach comes from the naturalist account itself, and is, in my view, one of the great strengths of the approach. Survey data have long reminded social scientists and opinion pollsters of the prevalence of conspiratorial reason, and some of its cousins—paranormal and pseudoscientific claims (Moore 2005; Rose 2020; Szrot 2015:92-8). In a naturalist account, a strong majority of U.S.-Americans holding scientifically improbable beliefs is cause for humility and self-reflection on the sheer depth of fallibility that underpins human cognition and capacity for reason. It is not *believing strange*

or unlikely things that makes conspiratorial reason at heart, problematic, as this is quite common. It is not unique to "critical theory" or "common people" (let alone one's ideological adversaries). This again begs the question: what does conspiratorial reason *actually do*?

Social movements scholarship has long demonstrated that conspiratorial reason, as a means of simultaneously sowing social distrust and providing a sense of order, is a common political tool, particularly among political "outsiders" (see Stewart, Smith, and Denton 2012:285-306). It follows that in practical terms, conspiratorial reason is better understood as taking root insofar as it serves some specific concrete purpose related to personal or group interests—or, at least, to what people take their interests to be. Richard Hofstadter, famously penning *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, argues that conspiratorial thinking provides something "far more coherent than the real world, since it leaves no room for mistakes, failures, and ambiguities" (1964:32). This plural approach, wedding the naturalist account to both political aims and social-psychological appeal, means that conspiratorial reason in some regards resembles sociologies of knowledge anchored in standpoints based on the power of those who hold them (Szrot 2015). These, with Mannheim (1936), are variously rendered *ideological*, insofar as "ruling groups can in their thinking become so intensively interest-bound to a situation that they are simply no longer able to see certain facts which would undermine their sense of domination," or *utopian*, such that "oppressed groups are intellectually so strongly interested in the destruction and transformation of a given condition of society that they unwittingly see only those elements in the situation which tend to negate it" (40).

Political and social movements which exist outside the halls of power can potentially draw upon their relative powerlessness for myriad aims, weaponizing conspiratorial thinking through narrative in order to personify social evils at once real and perceived. In pragmatic terms, I argue that the appeal of these approaches, whether utopian or ideological in their standpoints, is outmatched by the numerous hazards such approaches pose. Conspiratorial reason isn't "bad" because it hinges on drawing unlikely connections between seemingly unrelated events, let alone because it attempts to interrogate the complexity of power structures. In terms of utopian aims, this is a problem because of the "ineffectual and impatient praxis" (Au 2019:68) that attends a litany of social movement failures, in part a result of rhetorically simplifying the ambiguity, complexity, and ambivalence of the social world and the relationships that inhere within it. Working toward social change with an insufficient, simplistic, or misleading understanding of the problem, well-meaning activism feeds into simplistic "pseudo-realities" (Adorno 1998; Au 2019: 60-3) or increasingly symbolic and ineffectual abstractions in a quest for broader support (Au 2017, 2019). The appeal of conspiratorial reason leads to disempowerment, or at least to distraction.

Conspiratorial reason, used ideologically, has qualitatively different aims. Drawing again on Au (2019) via Adorno's (1994) *regression of consciousness,* conspiratorial reason in the service of ideology intentionally *disempowers*: "That is, when we submit to the will of the gods, rather than see society—and its problems—as a network of mediated interactions that we constitute, we sit on our hands and abandon attempts to change reality" (Au 2019: 56-7). *There is perhaps an explanation of an immediate social phenomenon that is superficially satisfying, at least from the standpoint of the interests it serves, but the explanation is crafted to draw attention away from, and thereby foreclose upon, broader critical explanation.* However, conspiratorial reason in the service of ideology would seem to do far more than this. Illustrating this means briefly revisiting Hofstadter's original formulation of the "paranoid style," as well as Marasco's (2016) critique of it. Hofstadter's formulation was predicated on the practical problems of extremism and failure of moderation. The flattening of motives and rejection of ambiguity served the aforementioned social-psychological purposes, as well as being tied to political aims. What Marsco (2016) via critical theory adds to this, and what is particularly germane to conspiratorial reason used ideologically as described here, is the Freudian conception of conspiratorial reason as:

> ...a certain idealization of big power. What is more, conspiratorial reason is an idealization of power itself, in which power *really is* what it says about itself, really is all-powerful, really does have clear and known ends, and really can meet these ends...conspiracy theory is a love affair with power that poses as its critique. Like so many love affairs, it is premised on a fantasy about its beloved. The task of critical theory is to decipher a structure of thinking and feeling, not dismiss or indulge it (Marasco 2016:238).

Despite its appeal and potency, conspiratorial reason, an effort to weaponize and perpetuate mistrust, is ultimately disempowering when put in the service of either *utopia* or *ideology*, leading *away from,* rather than *toward*, the more lucid assessment of the world which is a necessary but not sufficient condition of changing it. In its ideological formulation, conspiratorial reason *protects* power like a desperate lover protecting a fantasy of a beloved; a love affair with power that allows no ambiguity or complexity in human motives, particularly in the motives of "the Other"…this is the seed of the *concrete fascism* that the Frankfurt School warned about (see Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). What is at stake in accurately assessing what conspiratorial reason *does* in practical terms is to decipher the interests that it serves and the ends toward which it strives, while keeping at the forefront of such analysis a spirit of humility and self-reflection. I have offered plural motives that drive conspiratorial reason, as well as theorized plural consequences of it, in working toward a means by which to assess the role that conspiratorial reason plays as driver of social mistrust. In doing so, I seek to balance universal human fallibility, dignity (as arising from anti-elitist framings), capacity for freedom (both intellectual and otherwise), and the possibility of *false consciousness* (Putnam 1994:54-5).

A brief pragmatist interpretation of false consciousness5 is in order before situating these tendencies toward conspiratorial reason in the current cultural and political-economic landscape. Per Dewey's philosophy of mind, *thinking* is an inherently *social* activity which takes the form of a *plan* or potential course of action which can be selected, or not, based on the environment and ever-changing knowledge and conditions (see Hook 1995:51-73). Blurring the dichotomy between thinking and acting, between subject and object, and between self and society, means that false consciousness arises not merely because a person thinks or acts in ways that are against their interests, or that they incorrectly assess their interests. It is the possibility of consciously committing to courses of action that *are themselves self-thwarting,* resulting in consequences that both run counter to plans as well as foreclosing on the possibility of future planning. Attempting social change based on hasty conclusions and conspiratorial thinking serves both functions. Utopian sociologies of knowledge which simplify human motivations and social phenomena result in myriad "unintended consequences" which place their adherents in an untenable position regarding praxis; ideological sociologies of knowledge force adherents into the untenable position of consolidating power while seeming to unmask it. I have considered elsewhere that this is the methodological contribution to more effective praxis made by Popper in his apparent critique of the Frankfurt School, even though the debate itself seems to have been a "misfire" (D'Amico 1990; Popper 1961; Szrot 2014). That is, the social, in its ambivalence and complexity coupled with its Durkheimian primacy, invites careful analysis, but such analysis insofar as it affects change itself must not fall into *three* distinct traps: the *ideological* trap, in foreclosing on the possibilities of change, often to protect the status of one group at the expense of another; the *reformist* trap, or becoming dogmatically committed only to gradual reform within existing, potentially flawed or dysfunctional, institutions, perhaps out of fear of "innate" (*natural*?) human fallibility; the *utopian* trap, or prioritizing perfection which is unattainable where improvement is possible, leading to the pseudo-realities and unactionable abstractions (Adorno 1998; Au 2019). Overcoming disempowerment and the institutionalized mistrust that led to failure means judiciously avoiding the Scylla of hasty praxis as well as the Charybdis of ideology. It also means confronting the narrative visions that make perpetuation of disempowerment possible, from social theory to popular rhetoric. As noted by Jameson, the "winner-loses" inverted world of theory can have similar paradoxical effects:

> What happens is that the more powerful the vision of some increasingly total system or logic…the more powerless the reader comes to feel. Insofar as the theorist wins, therefore, by constructing an increasingly closed and terrifying machine, to that very degree he loses, since the critical capacity of his work is thereby paralyzed, and the impulses of negation and revolt, so to speak of those of social transformation, are increasingly perceived as vain and trivial in the face of the model itself (Jameson 1984: 57).

The totality of a vision regardless of specific content or aims leads logically to its inescapability. The growing potence of a hidden power leads to the growing impotence of those who theorize it. Evoking a global elite or a New World Order or a Deep State or even an erudite and polysyllabic global supervillain serves these functions well, simplifying reality, sowing mistrust, and recruiting collaborators. However, by establishing an enemy so ubiquitous and powerful that resistance is doomed, or steering attention toward a single movement, group, or person who has the power to stay demon's hand, one actively courts one's own disempowerment.

However, this is only *how* mistrust is amplified; I have not established *why* trust should have failed so completely across so many fault lines at the same time. As a sociologist, I posit something *external* to this vicious cycle which must provide a motivation, or catalyst, otherwise I have not ultimately escaped the potential circularity of the naturalistic account. If I cannot offer something by way of praxis after criticizing failed and hasty praxis, then I have not vindicated this more complex and pluralistic approach to interrogating conspiratorial reason. Therefore, I offer two possible external motives, or drives, for failure of trust, below, and then connect them to what I take to be two tenable future visions or possibilities for escape.

Culture and the Return to Industry

Mistrust fed through conspiratorial reason can be a potent political tool. It can also be exploited for the purposes of wielding misinformation to manipulate public opinion, a tool used to great effect by the political Right in the U.S. (see Jouet 2017:63-75). However, conspiratorial reason, despite its multifariousness, is in the end a *consequence*, not a cause, of mistrust. People just do not suddenly, *ex nihilo*, awaken one morning and decide that a secret cabal of incorrigibly evil people has seized every part of the government and poses a threat to their loved ones, such that they are willing to lay waste to all the institutions that have made life stable and possible in order to stop *them*. The tools of theorizing conspiratorial reason aid in making sense of the practical aims or ends of various belief structures and the interests to which they are connected. According to an NPR/Ipsos poll published at the end of December 2020, over seven in ten Republican voters, and almost forty percent of U.S.-Americans, believe there is, in fact, a Deep State working to undermine the president. Seventeen percent of U.S.-Americans answered *true* to the question: "A group of Satan-worshipping elites who run a child sex ring are trying to control our politics and media," and an additional 37% answered that they do not know for sure (only 47%, a minority, answered *false*) (Rose 2020). If, with Durkheim (2014), we take for granted that human beings are social, and we need each other to survive, it follows that mistrust is not a default position, and therefore does not, and cannot, *motivate* itself.

It also follows that political commitments, particularly in electoral democracies and more individualistic societies, can be seen as a rather superficial reflection of deeper schisms in more durable moral and ontological frames—*culture*. Political polarization and dysfunction, like mistrust, does not motivate itself. Instead, with Durkheim, (2014),

> "Every society is a moral society. In certain respects this feature is even more pronounced in organized societies. Because an individual is never sufficient unto himself, it is from society that he receives all that is needful, just as it is for society that he labors...cooperation also has its intrinsic morality" (178).

A common site of mistrust, as described in the U.S. in terms of moral schism, involves culture. Cultural shifts in the U.S., gaining momentum after the 1960s, drove growing mistrust as people divided increasingly into two culturally distinctive and morally incommensurate camps. *Culturally orthodox*, or *cultural fundamentalist* persons appeal to external, transcendent moral authorities such as a god or tradition, interpret holy books literally, and hold socially conservative views; *cultural progressives* appeal to scientific rationality or subjective experience to shape morality, are secular or interpret religious texts within historical contexts, and hold socially liberal views (see Eve and Harrold 1990; Hunter 1991; Jones 2016:30-3). Jouet (2017) has argued that what is exceptional about the U.S. is captured by facets associated with the culturally fundamentalist or culturally orthodox elements of culture (and that cultural progressives increasingly resemble broad consensus views among other developed nations). He pushes back against this conceptualization of the culture wars by noting the sharp rightward turn of the Republican party in the U.S. of late, as well as the ways in which both religion and U.S. nationalism/exceptionalism have been politicized against a background of religious fundamentalism, anti-intellectualism, and uniquely harsh, punitive views on cultural issues, crime, punishment, and poverty.

In both instances, issues ranging from Civil Rights, abortion, second-wave feminism, and sexual mores to law enforcement practices and decriminalization of vice have driven a wedge between two increasingly divided and vocal camps, each waging ongoing campaigns to gain and hold the cultural center6. I argue that declining trust in government, media, and even education, from this standpoint, can be explained in terms of cultural shifts, and that

the kinds of conspiratorial reason that are functioning in this context are a reflection of these shifts. The U.S., in particular, is becoming both more secular and more multicultural; mistrust and polarization is a response from the culturally orthodox, particularly whites and Christians, as they lose the cultural center (Jones 2016). Conspiratorial reason which postulates a conspiracy of satanic pedophiles overtaking centers of cultural and political power, however *prima facie* absurd, is both plausible and emotionally compelling among those who feel anxieties surrounding apparent loss of whiteness and Christianity as central to U.S.-American culture. This implies that culture, as manifested via religion, race, and ethnicity, is the driver of ongoing mistrust. In fact, this conspiracy is a hybrid of two twentieth-century conspiracies: the "Satanism Scare" of the U.S. during the latter decades of the twentieth century—just as secularization and cultural change began to accelerate (see Richardson, Best, and Bromley 1991); and the "blood libel" anti-Semitic conspiracies that arose in the Middle Ages, which were instrumental in the Nazi power grab in twentieth-century Germany (see Lavin 2020). If conspiratorial reason is, as I have argued, interest-bound, weaponized mistrust, which can be particularly dangerous when functioning ideologically, then these connections point to grim possibilities.

Both sides of the culture wars seek to "capture the moral center"—if every society is a moral society, as Durkheim argues, then this suggests that fundamentally incommensurate moral centers are not likely to thrive within the same society. However, culture, like trust, does not come from nowhere. I have asserted that culture drives aspects of politics; however, the broader political-economic structure in which both take place looms large. I do not commit to *economic determinism* in all matters (for an incisive pragmatist critique see Dewey 1989:62-81), nor fully discount Rorty's (1998) criticism of how an emphasis on "cultural issues" can and does function ideologically through both media and politics:7

> Since economic decisions are their [the super-rich's] prerogative, they will encourage politicians, of both the Left and the Right, to specialize in cultural issues. The aim will be to keep the minds of the proles elsewhere—to keep the bottom 75 percent of Americans and the bottom 95 percent of the world's population busy with ethnic and religious hostilities, and with debates about sexual mores. If the proles can be distracted from their own despair by media-created pseudo-events, including the occasional brief and bloody war, the super-rich will have little to fear (88).

[Mistrust can, and does, arise from cultural shifts and conflicts, but culture can be readily thought of as a survival strategy in turn: religious change, as well as shifts toward cultural progressivism (including greater gender equality, bodily autonomy and more individualistic, self-expressive mores), is driven significantly by changes in *existential security* based on variations in wealth, health, and education; greater political polarization along religious lines accordingly follows as societies have transitioned from agrarian to "post-industrial" (see Norris and Inglehart 2011). As the development process which gave rise to cultural change has unfolded8 it has generated increased and increasingly-threatening hazards in the form of side-effects. Drawing on Giddens (2000), the Enlightenment promise, that "the more we are able to rationally understand the world, and ourselves…the more we can shape history for our own purposes" (19) gave rise to this runaway world, in which "science and technology are inevitably involved…but they have also contributed to creating [these risks] in the first place" (21). Burning fossil fuels has led to climate change; the spread of pandemics such as COVID-19 is facilitated by an increasingly mobile and globally-interconnected civilization; racial injustice in the U.S. as it exists today is in part a consequence of urbanization, coupled with an ongoing legacy of geographic segregation and environmental injustice enforced deliberately through political-economic mechanisms (see Bullard 1994; Mohai, Pellow, and Roberts 2009; Rothstein 2017).

These hazards are *real*—they exist independently of what human beings think of them (see Szrot 2021:3). However, the hazards posed to human beings, by climate change, as well as pandemics, industrialization and urbanization, are not inevitable in their extent and severity. They are shaped by societal responses to risk—how, and to what extent, societies adapt to a changing environment, albeit an environment irrevocably changed by the consequences of human activity. The goal is to *come to terms* with the metamorphosis, or *Die Verwandlung*, as Beck (2015) referred to it. There is, accordingly, not a single approach to *coming-to-terms*, but several. I argue that social trust, or lack thereof, is ultimately a direct consequence of the social and economic approaches favored by the U.S. in coming to terms with hazards.

In *Risk Society,* Beck offered three possible visions in coming to terms with the novel hazards which are simultaneously created by, and imperil, societies in a new era of modernity. The first, which Beck (1992) deemed most likely for most societies in most circumstances, he termed "back to industry" (223-28). This approach, looming large in the U.S., involves a "doubling-down" of the paradigm of technical progress and industrial capitalism, with decisions increasingly made first and foremost based on the perceived needs of the economy, and other concerns (including everything from science to employment) expected to be addressed within this framework. Hazards are secondary or tertiary concerns; economic growth, it is presumed, can be relied on to eventually benefit all. An ideology of "rugged individualism"—or more accurately *ragged individualism* (Dewey 1999:5)—serves as ideological cover, as mystification, for the continued operation of techno-economic logics. In an era of widespread and unprecedented risks, whose impacts are directly shaped by human decision-making, this approach breeds and accelerates mistrust. In U.S. cities, decades of racial oppression erupt in mass demonstrations again and again, capturing widespread public and media attention, but institutional remedies are token or sluggish at best—and brutally repressive at worst. Environmental and public health measures from the most modest steps to mitigate climate change, to wearing a mask to protect others from COVID-19, become fraught imaginaries of power and position, symbolic threats to a machine which must be kept running at all costs.

Per Beck (1992): "As side effects the risks fall under the responsibility of politics and not business. That is to say, business is not responsible for something it causes, and politics is responsible for something over which it has no control" (227). Decades of massive corporate spending was involved in preventing the U.S. public from learning of, and mounting effective regulatory responses to, hazards posed by everything from cigarettes and asbestos to carbon monoxide and climate change. "Merchandising doubt," or selling uncertainty surrounding environmental and public health hazards to prevent regulatory reform, is an ongoing historical travesty that fits comfortably into this paradigm (see Mooney 2005; Oreskes and Conway 2010). That this is accelerated and strengthened by conspiratorial reason and amplified through cultural fears, is evident. U.S.-Americans have had decades to interact with and grow accustomed to the weaponization of mistrust surrounding the reality of, and risk posed by, environmental and public health hazards. That refusing to wear masks became a political statement may be unsurprising for this reason alone. However, the political-economic path on which the U.S. has doggedly committed itself in the face of Beck's (1992) "risk society," of a world faced by increased hazards produced and perpetuated by the very human activity on which such a society comes to depend, structures decision making and securely institutionalizes this mistrust. It is not merely that risk becomes politicized, as Beck's work clarifies. It is that this approach to risk *takes for granted* that some will win and some will lose. When a highly-contagious and potentially-deadly pandemic strikes a society structured around economic growth and technical progress above all, the results, through the lens of sociology of risk, are tragically predictable:

> Resentment fractures societies and undermines trust. Stay-at-home orders became casualties of the "culture wars" precisely *because* people like me, a middle-class academic, can and do support these efforts while working from home, while "essential workers" face daily risk, and panic among the jobless rises as bills come due. No one is immune to risk for long. Businesspersons squabble with lawmakers, and each other, because of what they stand to gain—or lose—with policy changes. Civil unrest breaks out, placing larger populations at greater risk of infection. Risk fractures old political loyalties and undermines civic trust, "trickling up" to eventually make everyone vulnerable (Szrot 2020).

Beck (1992), writing as a German, goes further in articulating where this vision might ultimately lead:

> Perhaps the rejection of 'politics' will then tend to affect not just individual representatives and parties, but the system of democratic rules as a whole. The old coalition between insecurity and radicalism would be revived. The call for *political leadership* would once again resound ominously. The longing for a 'strong hand' would grow to exactly the degree as people see the world crumbling around them. The hunger for order and reliability would revive the spectres of the past. The side effects of a politics that ignores side effects would threaten to destroy politics itself. Ultimately, it could not be ruled out that the still undigested past [of Germany (tr.)] might become a

possible developmental option for the future although in a different form (228).

Mere weeks after the first major shutdowns, the U.S. economy seemed to grind to a halt. As months passed, and distribution of financial aid was lopsided and botched where it happened at all, economic losses pressured small business owners to demand to reopen or defy state regulations even in the face of possible illness or death for business owners, staff, customers, and families. Behind the appearance of "no other choice," resisting or ignoring health guidelines and protocols became a symbolic, ideological defense of a culture guided by this political-economic approach to hazards, and compelled into existence by systemic failure of hazard-response capacity. Public health officials advised staying at home in-between commercials for tourism, dining, and spending holidays with family. Ideologues anxious to keep the machine running, and appease donors and constituents who suffered economically from any lag in growth, ignored or openly challenged experts and even used conspiratorial thinking to undermine the dissemination of scientific knowledge and public trust. Even as COVID-19 may be defeated by vaccination, addressing racial injustice has gone mainstream, and climate change is being taken seriously, the social mechanisms necessary to forward such efforts may have been fatally compromised. At the same time, the proliferation of conspiratorial reason is a predictable consequence based on the model posited here: a toxic stew of cultural polarization, existential insecurity, and multiple fault lines bred and weaponized mistrust, culminating in an attempted *coup d'etat* on January 6, 2021.

Despite civil unrest and chaos driven by baseless claims of widespread voter fraud, this year, 2021, will see a U.S. Congressional majority, and a president, who are Democrats. This likely signifies a different approach to hazards than the current dominant paradigm. A progressive movement which claims science as part of its political platform offers the possibility that "the auxiliary and alternative governments of techno-economic sub-politics—science and research—could be brought under parliamentary responsibility" (Beck 1992:229). Rhetoric surrounding "listening to the scientists" and "listening to experts" in addressing hazards abounds in the current incarnation of the Democratic Party. Trust in science has effectively become a partisan political stance, with a long history (see Gauchat 2012; Jouet 2017). Beck (1992) stressed that this will either result in increased bureaucratic obstacles to technical and scientific progress, or it will result in the expansion of the welfare state to combat hazards as it has been expanded to combat social ills such as poverty in the past (229).

Rather than the occurrences as described in the first approach, the one most closely aligned to the U.S. as it exists at present, speculations can be offered. If the U.S. had had universal health care, universal basic income, substantive efforts toward redressing racial injustice, and more robust worker protections in place prior to the spread of COVID-19, precarity would likely have been at least partially mitigated. Perhaps, rather than a state trying to regain legitimacy in the wake of a mercurial strongman, mendacious political elites, partisan bickering, cultural fracture, a coup attempt, and a haphazard response to the pandemic, the U.S. and its citizens would have better weathered these trials. This seems like the vision that Democrats, in their more moderate and progressive variations, are embracing, and promoting to the public.

Some or all of these reforms may be necessary to stabilize and rebuild; however, the "welfare-state" approach, championed to degrees by moderate and center-left reformers as well as progressives, involves large-scale expansion of state bureaucracy, likely over a relatively short period of time. The dangers of bureaucracy, as an institutional system cursed by its own impersonal efficiency to become both durable and undemocratic, were well described by Weber (1946a). In particular, this vision, whatever its potential benefits, weds science and technology to the state in the service of combatting global hazards. Together, these tendencies suggest how this approach will be ideologically imperiled in the present U.S. context. "Certain progressive policy measures undoubtedly make it easier to combat global hazards, but they are costly and empower armies of civil servants and expert specialists who are themselves notoriously appointed rather than elected" (Szrot 2020). Mistrust around a "deep state" has been institutionalized in the U.S. among Republicans, along with a resurgence of anxieties surrounding "socialism" and "communism." Neither ideology has ever actually found broad support in the U.S., especially if one accurately views U.S. progressives as social democrats rather than "democratic socialists." However, the spread of these terms reflects conspiratorial reason which holds at its heart, ideological resistance to "government" with deep roots in the past, flourishing

during the last decade of the Cold War, and nurtured through the neoliberalism that took root during the Reagan Administration. Misgivings about bureaucracy and state expansion in these regards may find little empirical support (see Jouet 2017:143-67); current social democracies appear to function as well as, or better than, the U.S. in terms of securing the well-being of citizens, and fears that regulating markets and progressive taxation would lead to a loss of personal freedom *a la Hayek* (1994) seem increasingly unfounded.

However, because the cause of failure has been diagnosed here as systemic loss of *trust*, accelerated through both conspiratorial reason and long-standing cultural conflict, it will be extremely difficult to rebuild society along these political and economic lines given a society which has internalized decades of deep and widespread *mistrust* toward these approaches. "Trust the scientists" may be a reassuring motto for both current scholars and current Democrats in response to fears of an anti-intellectual populism, but this vision and approach, in the end, does not necessarily translate to higher trust in science. In fact, poorer and more religious countries enjoy somewhat *higher* levels of trust in science than wealthier and more secular ones (see Norris and Inglehart 2011:68). Additionally, social research has shown that U.S. resistance to science manifests along moral, not epistemic, lines, and this resistance has increased among U.S. Republicans and conservative Protestants over time (Evans 2013; Gauchat 2012; Mooney 2005), placing this approach in profound tension with broader centrist appeals for unity and depolarization and showing how this approach may, at least in the near-term, lead to *greater* polarization along existing cultural fault lines.

Conclusion: Politics Beyond the Political

What ineffectual praxis this would make for if I were to end there. I have told a gloomy story about a state at the edge failure, widespread mistrust expressed as conspiratorial reason, nurtured through cultural polarization which is fed, in turn, by a stubborn "return to industry" approach to hazards. In this, I have also briefly visited the fraught political efforts to return from this through the bureaucratic planning and state intervention that appear likely in the coming years. Perhaps the spiral of mistrust can be halted and trust restored through well-intentioned policy measures and expansion of the welfare state. It is, as they say, worth a shot. However, that would presume genuine common ground, coupled with a widespread will and desire to *remain* together. Maybe it is too late for that. If we do not, and there are good reasons to think this is the case, then failure will lead to social collapse. If, with Durkheim, every society is a moral society, and moral common ground cannot be found or shared, then it seems difficult to imagine how things will play out without a degree of pessimism—at least for some. Perhaps the culture wars will ebb in the face of secularization and the cosmopolitan, cultural progressives will claim the cultural center. However, the fault lines exposed by ham-handed U.S. responses to twenty-first century hazards such as COVID-19 are both multiple and geographically porous: bourgeoisie versus proletariat, as well as religious versus secular, college-grad versus school of hard knocks, Boomer versus Millennial, pro-life versus pro-choice, urban versus rural, white-nationalist versus multicultural, Left versus Right, Texans versus Californians, and so on. Increased violence is likely in any case, scattered but ongoing in the form of civil unrest or incidents of "terrorism" that seem isolated but become more clearly connected to specific ideologies and conspiratorial reason. That white nationalist violence has claimed the most casualties in the U.S. among non-state violence (see Bergengruen and Hennigan 2019) fits tragically well with cultural polarization and conspiratorial reason as weaponized mistrust, deployed ideologically. Barring a successful authoritarian takeover and the resulting suppression of opposition, even in a case of state collapse, there are likely too many divides for anyone to get a lasting upper hand, but such an environment would quickly become a laboratory for all manner of illiberal governance to take hold. Historically, state collapse, though it seems almost unthinkable here and now, has been a regular feature across civilizations, and is often atrocious even when ranked among human atrocities (see White 2012).

It remains possible that authority and legitimacy may devolve to more local spaces. Both staunch critics of the kind of radical, humanistic, global democracy posited by theorists from Dewey to Beck (more on this in a moment, see Lippman 1965), and champions of a conservative, communitarian populism (see Lasch 1995) have acknowledged that democratic norms may function better in smaller spaces. The state as is understood today is a historical newcomer; something more like the city-state, tribe, or band has been more commonplace, historically. A future of smaller and more local "city-state" enclaves, with or without some kind of intercontinental connection facilitated by ongoing

advances in communication, farming, and manufacturing technologies, remains a possibility (Stucki and Tran 2019). Another possibility would involve communal living centered around farming, scaling back technology, and egalitarian, anarcho-syndicalist governance, such as the Catholic Worker movement (see Stock 2009, 2015; Stock and Szrot 2020).

However, if mutual mistrust reigns, then devolving authority or alternatives to the nation-state will be insufficient to prevent unrest from continuing. Whether or not failure leads to collapse, some version of a multifront internal conflict is already underway, between some combination of independent militias, activist groups and social movements, ideologues, and state actors including police, military, and other security agencies, and "hired guns." Foreign competitor states, and businesspeople looking to enrich themselves and extend their interests, may keep the money, and blood, flowing. For many people, life will go on as normal (if we can be said to be living through anything fitting that description), at least for a time. That may sound far-fetched, but the first signs of this have already taken place. Additionally, experts have shown that this kind of conflict is increasingly the norm throughout the world (see Miranova 2018).

The alternative is learning to trust one another and our institutions again, and for those institutions to warrant such trust, in that they can respond effectively to future hazards—a simple statement that belies a fantastically complex undertaking. To do so means institutions that are not locked into a "return to industry," taking for granted that pitting human beings against one another as "winners" and "losers" is mandatory. This does not mean an end to competition or self-expression, let alone a defense of some kind of bureaucratized planning. Instead, it points to a need for more democracy, when and where it can be manifested, from politics to parenting and from educators to economies, a position shared by many of the scholars and theorists mentioned throughout this work. *Democracy begins at home; justice begins at the interpersonal level.* In fact, Beckian thought is shot through with erudite optimism, challenging the idea of *methodological nationalism* if not the notion of a nation-state itself as a central unit of measure for politics, seeking a cosmopolitization that supplants the Western, liberal elitism of Kantian, Enlightenment *cosmopolitanism* (see Beck 2011). This approach involves apprehending the kinds of hazards that are likely to derail democratic governance and reverse trends in human freedom and wellbeing, of which COVID-19 represents a harrowing example, but is hardly the first or the last hazard to fit such a definition. Such work is likely to be facilitated by the new communication technologies available at present: however, the Internet and social media have thus far perhaps done more harm than good, fostering capitalist oligopoly, consumerism, the spread of misinformation, and increased state surveillance. A more authentically democratic technological framework yet awaits the legal, educational, and interpersonal frameworks, knowledges, and skills which remain beyond the edge of the horizon. Flickers of its possibilities occur here and there and can be tended by self-reflective publics or snuffed out by intolerance for ambiguity and infatuation with power.

In rejection of *methodological nationalism*, I should want to hold out a hope shared by the U.S.-American pragmatist tradition, that there is both conceptual room, and perhaps a necessity, for patriotism and national pride on the Left. With Rorty (1998) I wish to reject the "principled, theorized, philosophical hopelessness" (37) that has become fashionable in some parts of the Left. To do this work is to directly confront the brute fact that U.S. history includes a litany of unforgivable things. Drawing on Dewey, via Rorty, if one commits an act that one ought to rather die than commit, a truly unforgivable act, but does not die in so doing, there are but three ways forward. "At that point, one's choices are suicide, a life of bottomless self-disgust, and an attempt to live so as never to do such a thing again. Dewey recommends the third choice" (Rorty 1998:33). Whatever the future, this is the choice of the U.S. and its denizens for the future of this country. I hold out hope that the third choice will ultimately be chosen, that the work of living up to the radical promise of the Declaration of Independence, that *all person are created equal,* will be again be undertaken with stern sincerity, that the future, whatever political form it takes, will look back at the present and declare emphatically: *never again.*

Endnotes

1. After considering the use of "conspiracy theory" and "conspiracy story" or even "narrative," and in the wake of numerous conversations with self-styled "conspiracy analysts" over the past year, I have adopted this term based on the work of Robin Marasco (2016) for the sake of clarity, and to avoid the patrimonial and elitist connotations linked to "conspiracy theory" as a pejorative often wielded by intellectual elites.

2. Drawing on the social behaviorism of George Herbert Mead, human beings are shaped by their interactions with one another over time; it could be argued that society, at its most reductionist, is the sum result of these ongoing interactions and the symbolic meanings attached to them (Mead 1967). Through interaction, habitus develops; a durable collection of habits of mind and embodied skills which come to be second-nature and largely operate unconsciously. Out of habitus, culture, and cultural distinction, develops (see Bourdieu 1993, 2002). Both trust, and mistrust, of institutions is interactional and cultural; it arises, and changes, over time as a result of human beings interacting with one another, and becomes durable through repeated experiences and the symbolic meanings attached to those experiences. Trust, or mistrust, spreads and strengthens over time; the same everyday social-psychological mechanisms that make society possible and durable can also result in a process of ongoing unraveling that is difficult to arrest. Adequately exploring these cultural and interactional tendencies within the erosion of social trust is beyond the scope of this paper, as it would require greater engagement between the biological and social sciences than currently exists, among other things..

3. To clarify, I do, in fact, believe there is such a thing as human nature, which is connected to our biological inheritance and is irreducibly fallible. I have also argued elsewhere for an ontological position which takes for granted that world that is "broken" or irreducibly flawed actually facilitates the possibility of justice (Stock and Szrot 2020:98-100). My goal in this context, however, is to emphasize how the idea of human nature has been, and can be, used ideologically, foreclosing on rather than facilitating more substantive and actionable explanations for conspiratorial reason and the breakdown of social trust.

4. I am reminded of Aristotle, titan of Western philosophy, who both famously argued that slavery is justified, took for granted and explicitly argued for the natural inferiority of some human beings, and in doing so framed the "manual labor" of empirical, scientific work as beneath him (see Weinberg 1992; Sagan 2013; Szrot 2016). His thinking process was not "handed down to him" by some person or group in power; he was famously original in much of his thinking, including challenging the work of his own mentor, Plato. And he was not foolish or a "dupe" by any standard. His thinking process was interest-laden insofar as it reflected a commitment to both the ideology of his time and social-psychologically appealing insofar as it extolled the kind of intellectual work in which he engaged. I am not directly comparing friends and relatives who post dubiously-credible news articles on social media to Aristotle. I am arguing for a similarity in thought process, conditioned by perceived interest and standpoint, which simplifies human motives and serves inevitably to disempower. Not only did Aristotle defend the inherent inequity of human beings; he was unable to see the value of a more directly empirical method in addressing the scores of questions he spent his life pondering.

5. I am aware by using this term in this rather cursory context that I may myself be accused of a kind of simplification, given the vastness of work in the Marxian tradition that addresses this concept. My focus here is on both keeping open the possibility of false consciousness, so as to maintain the possibility of a depth model in thought, action, and social relations of the kind alluded to by Jameson (1985) while also holding that such a model is compatible with the pragmatist tradition in the regards spelled out here.

6. Jouet rejects the "both-sides-ism" of this conceptualization of the culture wars, and Jones focuses on the decline of hegemonic whiteness and Christianity as a driver. Eve and Harrold frame their work in terms of education, particularly the cultural (not scientific) controversy over creationism and evolution in U.S. schools. Hunter's conception of the culture wars is probably the most commonly cited in popular media, despite Jouet's work which argues rather compellingly for the problematic nature of the "both-sides-ism" of this definition of the problem, and also offers a deeper

historical perspective through which to understand the "exceptionalism" of the U.S. cultural and political right.

7. I introduce this quotation with some hesitation; it reflects, to a degree, the simplistic and intellectually elitist efforts I have elsewhere criticized, and tried to avoid. It is an effort to argue, from an enlightened vantage-point, that the mistrust is being deliberately fueled by the powerful and the "proles" are being duped. However, the thrust of Rorty's argument here seems compelling—that mistrust can be weaponized, and that social change can be, and is, arrested, by shifting attention away from the social and economic conditions that underpin precarity. It is to these conditions that I draw attention here, as fundamental drivers of mistrust, and therefore failure.

8. A process that is, in turn, variously called globalization and development, which is fraught, multifarious, and at once robust and fragile (Blumberg and Cohn 2016)

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Henry David Thoreau, The Beginnings of Fast Capitalism

Charles Lemert

Introduction

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) was born in Concord, Massachusetts, where he died in his 42nd year. Save for a few years infancy when his family lived in Chelmsford, then Boston, and his years at Harvard College, Thoreau lived in Concord his whole life. Concord was home even when he was away on his well-known short trips—to the Maine Woods and Mt Katahdin, Mt Monadnock and Mt Washington, a trip in 1850 to Canada and the St. Lawrence River, North on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers with his brother, Fire Island to search for the remains of Margaret Fuller who drowned offshore with her Italian husband and their child, up and down the River between Wayland and Billerica for a commissioned survey of all the bridges on the Concord River, and of course for his many lyceum lectures throughout the Northeast.

It hardly needs to be said that Thoreau is famous the world over for Walden, which began with his declaration of independence from the world as it was becoming:

> When I wrote the following pages, or rather the bulk of them, I lived alone in the woods, a mile from any neighbor, in a house which I built myself, on the shore of Walden Pond, in Concord, Massachusetts, and earned my living by the labor of my hands only.

Though indeed he returned to civilization—and regularly visited town while living by the Pond, once to get arrested for failure to pay taxes—life at Walden Pond from 1845 to 1847 stood for him as the measuring rod for life as it ought to be lived, as distinct from lives as they were lived in town and beyond. One of better-known lines from the book is a sharp criticism of civilized life: "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation."

Walden was anything but a personal memoir. In fact, Thoreau used his two years, two months, and two days in the woods by a pond as a token of everything in the world that should be avoided. In 1847, he returned to live in town where he solidified his friendships with Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, and the remarkable group of writers and intellectuals, including Louisa May Alcott and Nathaniel Hawthorne, which made Concord the town that gave Susan Cheever the title to her book *American Bloomsbury*. Thoreau was in the thick of all this, even while attending, as best he could, to a degree of solitary life.

Walden is a work of critical social theory. But of what? There is no single answer. Among his targets were slavery, especially the Fugitive Slave Law; mundane life that was preoccupied with news of the wider world; the infusion of the modern-thinking people who thought nothing of the native Tahatawan people who had farmed the land for hundreds of years; and of the first English settlers who brought with them premodern farming methods. Then, too, Concord was already becoming what it is now—a suburb of Boston, linked to the city by train and trails. Laura Dassow Walls puts this range of critical topics clearly in her *Thoreau: A Life*:

...[T]horeau witnessed the final collapse of this two-hundred-year old system. When he went to Walden Pond in 1845 change was visible everywhere: the new railroad cut right across Walden's prettiest cove; the subsistence farms failing, eroded away by the global marketplace. Few of his neighbors still ate "rye 'n' Injun" bread, or wore homespun "linsey-woolsey." Now they cooked on stoves, heated with coal, built with Maine white pine, cut their woodlots to fuel the railroads, planting them in English hay to feed new breeds of cattle they slaughtered for the Boston market and packed for the West Indies. They filled their pantries with China tea, slave-grown sugar, prairie wheat flour, tropical oranges and pineapples; they wore Georgia cotton, China silks, Canada furs, British woolens.i

So, in one sense, Thoreau was a critic of the modern world as it was invading Concord and, by implication, the simpler life in small towns and country villages.

In *Walden*, Thoreau is clear as to his purpose by the Pond:

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.

This is the familiar declaration from the second chapter *Where I Lived, and What I Lived For. Walden* that began with an introduction, *Economy*, in which he described in precise detail how cheaply he could live in a cabin made by his own hands. *Economy* must be read as a stern critique of capitalism's dangerous excesses: "Most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind." Comments like this are one reason that Thoreau is rightly respected for speaking out on important public issues in his day in shorter essays: *Slavery in Massachusetts, A Plea for Captain John Brown, and Civil Disobedience* (an attack on taxation policies). But the most systematic of his critical theories is buried in a controversial chapter in *Walden, The Bean-Field*. Thoreau was clear about his narrative strategy. *Walden* was composed so as to condense his more than two years at the Pond into a single year of seasons. A first glance at the table of contents can disguise this story line under all the other of its narrative lines: a series of random topics: *Reading, Sounds, Solitude, Visitors; an apparent series on local geography: The Bean-Field, The Village, The Ponds, Baker Farm*; then, oddly: *Higher Laws,* which turns out to be a low-key transcendentalist exposition; after which *Brute Neighbors* is an unusual sequel to *Higher Laws* because it is a most particular commentary on his observations of the vicissitudes of animal life surrounding the Pond. Then, finally, amid all this the careful reader discerns the seasonal line with chapters on *Housewarming, Winter Visitors, Winter Animals, The Pond in Winter, and Spring. Housewarming* is the autumnal essay in which the focus is on the chimney he built, and the wood gathered for heat for the coming winter. Then, in time, the story of this year passed on to spring, unqualifiedly *Spring*. But, if the underlying scheme of the book is the four seasons, where is summer?

In this story of many twists and turns, summer is covered by the book's most controversial chapter *The Bean-Field* that turns out to be the hook on which hangs the fictional frame of *Walden* as an annual cycle of events in his story of Thoreau's life apart from civil society. *The Bean-Field* begins, however, in a strange way: "Meanwhile my beans, the length of whose rows, added together, was seven miles already planted…." Seven miles of beans in two and a half acres? Obviously far beyond what anyone could eat even in a year. Plus which, his bean field by the side of the road exposed him to rebuke from passersby: "Beans too late! Peas so late!"—comments, he means to say, that were more than passing observations.

The field side complaints are at the center of the controversy. Thoreau wrote the chapter as a response to Henry Colman, a one-time Unitarian minister who turned to the surveying of crop lands in Massachusetts, whereupon he became an authority on agriculture in the East. Colman intended to justify farming in Massachusetts by a method Thoreau strenuously opposed. Colman argued that farmers, even in the East, could be more productive if they would learn to apply scientific methods of cultivation. Thoreau would have nothing of it. His bean field was, he wrote, "one field not in Mr. Colman's report." In a journal entry of March 7, 1847, Thoreau explains that his attitude toward the field was also a response to actual scientific farmers who in the winter swooped down "on our pond—with many car-loads of ungainly-looking farming tools, sleds, ploughs, drill-barrows, turf-knives, spades, saws, rakes, and each

man was armed with a double-pointed pike-staff… as if they were bent on making this a model farm." *The Bean-Field* chapter is only apparently a simple story of farming in the summer of 1846, when in fact it is a political manifesto of the extent to which then modernizing science is ruining local well-being.

Thus, it is *The Bean-Field* that appears in Walden as the summer anchor in its annual cycle of life on the pond. *The Bean-Field* turns out be a running critical assault not just on Henry Colman's model farm but even more on the coming of scientific agribusiness. The chapter ends:

> The true husbandman will cease from anxiety, as the squirrels manifest no concern whether the woods will bear chestnuts this year or not and finish his labor with every day and sacrificing in his mind not only his first but his last fruits.

No one would blame those who read this as hopelessly naive. But then again, this could be radical anti-Anthropocene politics.

Walden was published in 1854 when the Kansas-Nebraska Act fixed the nation's destiny on a civil war of four bloody years in which the industrial capitalism on the American North defeated and all but ended the feudal system of the enslaved South that, in its way, was a form of industrial agribusiness when the cotton gin mechanized cotton production. The nation had long before been headed toward this conjuncture wherein modern industrial capitalism changed everything—not just in America but the world over. It was then that the Anthropocene that, though it had to wait more than a century for its name, thrust itself on a human world, a world Thoreau considered less human than it had been. The Anthropocene is a world in which man takes over and dominates the earth, its plant and vegetable life, its animal husbandry, its forests—all of which and more are depleted to the end of their coming destruction. The Anthropocene is post-geological and post-human because it is domination not by free and critical human being but by an avaricious capitalism that cares about nothing but surplus values that abolish living and breathing human values.

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