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PERSONALIZING THE POLITICAL
IN THE WAKE OF THE ISLA VISTA MURDERS

by

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Under the Direction of Megan Sinnott, PhD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

This thesis identifies a political tactic I call “personalizing the political.” Personalizing the political inverts the responsibility of social ills from social institutions, the economy, and governance into personal problems created by individuals. Personalizing the political inverts the Marxist feminist understanding of “the personal is political.” Ultimately, neoliberal feminism has prompted personalizing the political and weakening feminist praxis. I identify personalizing the political in the response to the “incel killer,” Elliot Rodger, who committed a spree-killing in Isla Vista, California in 2014, which frames him as a “lone-wolf terrorist,” or mentally ill, rather than a fascist political actor. I take on analytic philosopher Kate Manne’s response to Rodger, who also finds him a political actor. However, Manne too personalizes the political through her lack of feminist praxis. I argue for a robust socialist feminist praxis in the face of 21st century fascism.

INDEX WORDS: Fascism, Elliot Rodger, Feminism

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2021

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CHAPTER 1: FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROCEEDING ANALYSIS

This thesis identifies and names a bourgeois, capitalist force called “personalizing the political.” Personalizing the political is a reactionary strategy that inverts the feminist concept of “the personal is political.” I define personalizing the political as transforming negative social and material consequences of capitalism and patriarchy into the personal problems of the working class. In other words, personalizing the political transforms the structural problems of capitalism and reshapes them into individual problems, vices, and solutions. However, the tactic of personalizing the political is not locatable or expressed within only a single political ideology. Rather, personalizing the political can be found even within the most disparate political ideologies. Implicit in my research is to question if perhaps supposedly “disparate” politics aren’t so different after all. Perhaps personalizing the political is one of the many things that goes across far-right, liberal, and leftist politics.

This thesis explores the function of personalizing the political in three ways. In chapter 1, I present a framework for the proceeding analysis of fascism, liberal feminism and neoliberalism, “the personal is political,” incels, and misogyny. I outline my methods for analyzing Rodger and later, the fictional protagonist of *The Feminist*. In chapter 2, I overview the Isla Vista murders through the eyes of the perpetrator, Elliot Rodger by analyzing his manifesto/memoir, *My Twisted World: The Story of Elliot Rodger*. The response to Rodger, by framing him as pathological or a lone-wolf terrorist exemplified personalizing the political by turning a highly political event, the spree-killing of a self-proclaimed fascist who targeted women. In chapter 3, I analyze analytic philosopher Kate Manne and parts of her book *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, a book partially written in response to the Isla Vista murders. Kate Manne’s work presents some of the most important feminist work on Rodger, as she analyzes Rodger as a

political actor. However, Manne too is guilty of personalizing the political. Manne personalizes the political in her own work by failing to have a corresponding feminist praxis for tackling the misogyny that she outlines in *Down Girl*. Rather, Manne's feminist response to misogyny relies on depending on the Democratic establishment, whose most powerful women are also heavily incorporated in her theory of misogyny, exemplified by Hillary Clinton and Kamala Harris. I then engage in a socialist feminist critique of Manne. In chapter 4, I show one possibility of liberal feminism without praxis, of personalizing the political to the extreme: the synthesis of liberal feminism and inceldom as represented in the short story by Tony Tulathimutte, "The Feminist." Finally, in chapter 5, I conclude by arguing that socialist feminism theory and praxis is the best tool against fascist sexual politics as represented by the inceldom of Rodger.

Literature Review

I. Fascism

Elliot Rodger was a fascist; thus we need to know more about what fascism is before proceeding. Defining what generic fascism "is" or what necessary characteristics are necessary for something to be considered "fascist" has troubled fascist studies in the academy. Preeminent comparative fascist studies scholar Roger Griffin has argued the difficulty defining generic fascism comes from its origins in Italian Fascism. Griffin writes, "One of the reasons for this semantic house of mirrors, I suggested, was the fact that the term 'fascism' was derived from Mussolini's movement and regime which themselves defied a simple definition because they conflated so many rival visions of the new Italy."¹ Mussolini's movement included many contradictory positions, followers with diverse beliefs, and alliances with the bourgeoisie,

¹ Roger Griffin, *Fascism: A Quick Immersion* (New York: Tibidabo Publishing, 2020), 54.

Catholics, paramilitaries, national syndicalists, and so on. Because Italian Fascism held onto contradictions and “rival visions,” generic fascism has also been difficult to define.

However, as early as the 1920s Marxists such as Antonio Gramsci and Clara Zetkin were theorizing about Mussolini’s Fascism and used that interpretation to define generic fascism. It is Clara Zetkin’s definition of fascism that I maintain in this thesis.

Fascism is a characteristic symptom of decay in this period, an expression of the ongoing dissolution of the capitalist economy and the decomposition of the bourgeois state. Fascism is rooted above all in the impact of the imperialist war and the heightened and accelerated dislocation of the capitalist economy that it caused among broad layers of the small and middle bourgeoisie, the small peasantry, and the ‘intelligentsia.’²

Zetkin’s definition of fascism binds capitalism to fascism, making fascism an expression of both capitalism and the bourgeois state. As I will explain shortly, liberal commentators of fascism had to come up with a definition of fascism that was different from the Marxist definition. Liberal definitions of fascism avoid directly tying fascist politics to its relationship with capitalism. Instead, liberal theorists have to come up with a list of characteristics to explain fascist politics. Zetkin’s definition of fascism can still be applied to the rising tides of fascism today, just as well as in 1923.

I define fascism similar to Zetkin. I argue that fascism is a politics based on the most extreme functions of capitalism—repression of the working class through social control, economic precarity, and violent suppression, juridical and extrajudicial. I see 21st century fascism in the United States as being hyper-accelerated by the War on Terror in the Middle East, then brought home after the 2008 Great Recession. Rodger, an alienated middle bourgeoisie millennial, became radicalized during this time, as with many other young men that make up

² Clara Zetkin, “Resolution on Fascism,” Communist International Executive Committee, June 23, 1923, Marxists.org, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/zetkin/1923/06/fascism-report-comintern.htm>.

male supremacist movements and the Alt-Right. Years later, Kate Manne, Cornell philosophy professor, begins to identify with Hillary Rodham Clinton and sees the leftist backlash against Clinton as inherently misogynist. The stifling of radical and revolutionary forces by fascists and liberals in tandem has brought us to this, now post-, Trump Era.

While Marxists quickly were able to define generic fascism by tying its origins and functions to capitalism, liberal theorists had difficulty saying anything about fascism at all. As Roger Griffin explains, "...There was a whole raft of coherent Marxist theories of fascism. Academics and commentators committed to liberal democracy still could not make head of tail of the new enemy... Thus, each liberal humanist academic or political commentator had to operate in isolation without a consensual working definition."³ In his latest book published in 2020 and titled *Fascism: A Quick Immersion*, Griffin maintains his characterization he developed in 1991 in *The Nature of Fascism*, as the standard liberal definition of fascism. "Fascism is a political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultranationalism."⁴

Fascist studies and commentary on fascism still has a range of writings from the liberal and leftist perspective. Philosopher Jason Stanley identifies fascist politics as having "...many distinct strategies: the mythic past, propaganda, anti-intellectualism, unreality, hierarchy, victimhood, law and order, sexual anxiety, appeals to the heartland, and dismantling of public welfare and unity."⁵ Kevin Passmore argues for a more complex understanding of fascism than a single definition could provide due to the disagreements about what features are included in a politics or movement to be considered fascist or not. Features of fascism include Jason Stanley's

³ Griffin, *Fascism*, 38.

⁴ Ibid, 81.

⁵ Jason Stanley, *How Fascism Works* (New York: Random House, 2019), xiv-xv.

“distinct strategies,” or Umberto Eco’s 14 general properties of fascism from “Ur-fascism.”

Passmore asks scholars, “Must a movement display all these features to be fascist, or just some of them? If the answer is ‘some’, then which ones?”⁶

Passmore pushes us further, arguing that “we readily accept that ‘socialism’ or ‘liberalism’ can mean many different things in different circumstances, that they can overlap with other ideologies, and that activists can differ fundamentally on what their ideology means.”⁷

I agree that there is a pluralism in fascism and the far-right as a whole. However, I see how everyday understandings of fascism are inhibited not by the confusion about pluralism. I believe that people are fearful of diagnosing a political program, figure, or policy as “fascist” because they’re scared to be hyperbolic. Fascism is something deeply serious and not to be taken lightly. I agree, which is why we must take the fascistic features of our society like prisons, ICE detention facilities, mass surveillance, and the existence of the police as threats to everyone’s freedom and livelihood. Or, put another way, people are only able to define a politics, policy, or figure as fascist after the damage is already done in order to not disturb the seriousness that we should be attributing to the horrors of historical instances of fascism, ignoring the present and the future. As anthropologist Marilyn Ivy challenges,

Just like the question “Are we having fun yet?” the question “Is it fascism yet?” spurs us to wonder, “Well, is it?” (“Well, *are we?*”) Or, alternatively, of course, with the barb already embedded in the question, we feel sure of the implied irony: we know that it is fascism, already. How much fascism is necessary before one can answer the question in the affirmative? When do we know fascism is fascism? One possible answer is that we know fascism is fascism when it’s too late, always after the fact.⁸

⁶ Kevin Passmore, *Fascism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 5.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁸ Marilyn Ivy, “Foreword: Fascism, Yet?” in *The Culture of Japanese Fascism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), vii.

There is debate as to whether the Trump Era signals fascism currently existing within American politics, or even more simply, questioning whether Trump is a fascist or not. Jason Stanley argues “we need to think about fascist social and political movements and fascist tactics, and then all the background conditions that make these tactics effective,” and fascist leadership before we can worry whether a regime is fascist or not.⁹ Ultimately, Stanley does believe that Trump’s politics are fascist.¹⁰ Political scientist Corey Robin disagrees with Stanley. Robin argues,

It’s ironic to me that people would choose this moment, and Trump’s presidency, to assign the label “fascist” to the right, for what fascism is about, above all else, is a politics of strength and will. That’s why fascists traditionally loathe the constitutional order: because they think it constrains the assertion of political will. The irony of Trumpist/GOP politics is that it is completely dependent upon the constitutional order. In that regard, it’s almost the complete opposite of fascism.¹¹

Robin argues that Trump and Trumpism are not fascist. Robin sees the Trump regime as ultimately weak and reliant on the Electoral College, courts, and Senate rather than populism.¹² . Back to Zetkin’s definition, I see 21st century fascism in the United States as being hyper-accelerated by the War on Terror in the Middle East, then brought home after the 2008 Great Recession. One of my subjects, Elliot Rodger, an alienated middle bourgeoisie millennial, became radicalized as a fascist during this time, as with many other young men that make up male supremacist movements and the Alt-Right. The stifling of radical and revolutionary forces by fascists and liberals in tandem has brought us to this, now post-, Trump Era.

II. Liberal feminism and Neoliberalism

⁹ Jason Stanley, interview by Sean Illing, “American fascism isn’t going away,” Vox.com, January 29, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2021/1/29/22250294/trump-american-fascism-jason-stanley>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Corey Robin, interview by David Klion, “Almost the Complete Opposite of Fascism,” Jewishcurrents.org, December 4, 2020, <https://jewishcurrents.org/almost-the-complete-opposite-of-fascism/>

¹² Ibid.

Identifying the insidious aspects of liberalism brings more challenges than identifying the ill-will of fascism. Fascist bad faith is the way that fascists avoid culpability and accountability. Liberals also have strategies of avoidance and these strategies are what I'd like to identify in this section, along with how liberalism personalizes the political. In particular, I am looking at *liberal feminism* as one political strain of liberalism. Feminism must overcome liberalism, in any form including feminist, in order to reach feminisms revolutionary potential.

Liberal feminism is ultimately a feminist politics that supports and is supported by bourgeois class interests. However, there are aspects of liberal feminism that I identify as integral to personalizing the political: feminist alliance with capitalism and neoliberalism and promotion of capitalist ideology via economic and political advancement for mostly white women which is the result of liberal feminist activism and politics.

Rosemarie Tong and Tina Fernandes Botts in their book, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*, locate liberal feminisms roots in liberal thought and politics. In particular, Tong and Fernandes Botts identify liberalism having two large paradigms, classical liberalism and egalitarian liberalism. "Classical liberals believe we achieve the ideal of equality through equality of opportunity. In contrast, egalitarian liberals believe the state should focus on minimizing economic disparities as well as protecting civil liberties... Most contemporary liberal feminists favor egalitarian over classical liberalism."¹³

In their manifesto, *Feminism for the 99%*, Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser argue that feminism currently has two opposing paths in the face of capitalist crisis. First path has feminism being a "handmaiden of capitalism" in which "the task of managing exploitation in the workplace and oppression in the social whole is shared equally by ruling-class

¹³ Rosemarie Tong and Tina Fernandes Botts, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 18.

men and women.”¹⁴ The second path is an internationalist, socialist feminism that is, as the title suggests, for the 99%. But how and when did feminism become implicated into capitalist power?

The United States shifted away from Keynesian economics towards being the militia force for neoliberalism after the CIA’s experiment of implementing a military junta and neoliberal policies in Chile under the reign of Augusto Pinochet, who replaced democratically elected socialist president Salvador Allende. Hester Eisenstein argues that the rise of neoliberalism in the 1970s and the women’s movement in the United States eventually has led to feminism acting as a “cultural solvent” to some of the most heinous economic and political policies in the 20th century: abolishment of the family wage as more women enter the workforce, use of microcredit for women in Third World nations, use of exploitable, cheaply paid female labor in duty-free locations like maquiladoras, and of course, using feminism and women’s empowerment as a justification for the War of Terror.¹⁵

In “The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism,” Catherine Rottenberg argues that manifestos and texts such as Sheryl Sandberg’s *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* represent a new type of feminism called neoliberal feminism that is replacing the paradigm of liberal mainstream feminism.¹⁶ Rottenberg finds liberal feminism a good and positive force, one that provides an immanent critique of liberalism while neoliberal feminism is completely accommodating to the neoliberal project with a veneer of feminism.¹⁷ “Neoliberal feminism... offers no critique—immanent or otherwise—of neoliberalism.”¹⁸

¹⁴ Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser, *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* (New York: Verso, 2019): 2.

¹⁵ See: Hester Eisenstein, “A Dangerous Liaison? Feminism and Corporate Globalization,” *Science and Society*, Vol. 69, No. 3 (2005), 487-518.

¹⁶ Catherine Rottenberg, “The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism,” *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (2014): 419.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Rottenberg criticizes neoliberal feminism for appropriating and twisting liberal principals such as “freedom,” but the fact is that capitalism drives inequality and liberalism’s allegiance to an inherently hierarchical and exploitative system means that liberal feminism is bedfellows with neoliberal feminism in producing inequality, and not the radical social transformation necessary for women’s liberation. If the best liberal feminism can do is provide a tepid immanent critique of liberalism by saying “maybe women aren’t included in liberalism’s concept of equality,” the need for liberal feminism has long passed when capitalism has, once again, brought fascism to the fore. As Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser argue, “In general, then, liberal feminism supplies the perfect alibi for neoliberalism. Cloaking regressive policies in an aura of emancipation, it enables the forces supporting global capital to portray themselves as ‘progressive.’”¹⁹ Liberal feminism cannot fight capitalism while upholding its doctrines and authority.

Key Themes and Concepts

I. Personalizing the Political

What does “the personal is political” mean? What are the origins behind the personal is political? Its origin’s in Carol Hanisch’s essay, “The Personal is Political.” Thus, this is where we will begin. Hanisch begins with discussing a common debate in 1969, when she wrote “The Personal is Political” of whether consciousness raising was “therapy” or “therapy and politics.”²⁰ .²¹ Hanisch argues that the word “therapy” suggests that the person discussing her life is sick and that there is treatment via a personal solution.²² Hanisch argues that through consciousness raising, women began to understand that problems that initially seemed “personal” were political problems. “One of the first things we discover in these groups is that personal problems are

¹⁹ Arruzza et al, *Feminism for the 99%*, 12.

²⁰ Carol Hanisch, “The Personal is Political,” (1969) <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html>

²¹ Carol Hanisch, “The Personal is Political,” (1969) <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html>

²² Ibid.

political problems. There are no personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for a collective solution.”²³ Through consciousness raising, women began to understand that problems women faced daily were *structural, institutional, and political*. As bell hooks argues:

Revolutionary feminist consciousness-raising emphasized the importance of learning about patriarchy as a system of domination, how it became institutionalized and how it is perpetuated and maintained. Understanding the way male domination and sexism was expressed in everyday life created awareness in women of the ways we were victimized, exploited, and, in worse case scenarios, oppressed.²⁴

Through consciousness raising, women were able to see how their lives were shaped by systems of power, like patriarchy and racism, that worked through institutions (law, education, the workplace) in women’s everyday lives. This connection to the everyday experiences of women is important and emphasizes how deep the reaches of power go. It was through these consciousness raising sessions that women were able to see how their “personal problems” were actually structural, which means there needs to be mass action as a class. Consciousness raising helped women form a class for mass mobilization. Consciousness raising groups helped women from diverse backgrounds meet, but this type of congregation of women got replaced by the women’s studies classroom where only a privileged few could access.²⁵

So, consciousness raising helped women understand how sexism and misogyny worked within patriarchal society. Myths of natural male dominance began to become seen as exactly that—myths that need to be fought *as a movement*.

Recognizing the need to fight male supremacy as a movement... challenged the old anti-woman line that used spiritual, psychological, metaphysical, and pseudo-historical explanations for women’s oppression with a real, materialist analysis

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ bell hooks, *Feminism is For Everybody: Passionate Politics* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000), 7.

²⁵ Ibid, 9.

for why women do what we do... [and] by materialist, I mean [it] in the Marxist materialist (based in reality) sense...²⁶

The materialist base of “the personal is political” allowed women to join together and build coalitions to fight against patriarchal, anti-woman myths. It was through communal activity that women were able to understand each other and begin organizing.

Personalizing the political is the exact opposite of the praxis Hanisch describes. Rather than bringing women together to dispel sexist myths, personalizing the political internalizes sexist, neoliberal myths that further divide us. The division brought about by personalizing the political is done through taking on the crises of capitalism and democratic failure as personal failings for suffering and oppression.

Feminism has a hand in the creation of personalizing the political. In “The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism,” Catherine Rottenberg examines the neoliberal feminist manifesto *Lean In* by Facebook COO, Sheryl Sandberg. Rottenberg argues that neoliberal feminism creates not a new female subject (like the radical woman), but a specifically feminist subject that is amenable to neoliberal failures.

Individuated in the extreme, this subject is feminist in the sense that she is distinctly aware of current inequalities between men and women. This same subject is, however, simultaneously neoliberal, not only because she disavows the social, cultural, and economic forces producing this inequality, but also because she accepts full responsibility for her own well-being and self-care, which is increasingly predicated on crafting a felicitous work-family balance based on a cost-benefit calculus. The neoliberal feminist subject is thus mobilized to convert continued gender inequality from a structural problem into an individual affair.²⁷

So, not only does the idea of “the personal is political” stem from Marxist, radical feminism, it’s direct inverse Bizarro twin, “personalizing the political,” is birthed from neoliberal feminism.

²⁶ Carol Hanisch, “Introduction to The Personal is Political,” (2006), <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html>

²⁷ Rottenberg, “The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism,” 419.

In *Lean In*, Rottenberg provides several examples of Sandberg's personalizing the political when it comes to her own "success.": "Sandberg even gestures towards the structural inequalities that still exist in the USA. "She [Sandberg] tells her reader that she is aware that institutional barriers remain and admits that there is a need to eliminate them. But these remarks are limited and made in passing, while the vast majority of the book focuses on what are considered the more substantial barriers to women's success: the internal ones."²⁸ For Sandberg, for women to "gain" "equality" with men means to play at the patriarchy's and capitalist's game, which is set up to disenfranchise women by Sandberg's own accord. But by giving passive lip service to structural inequalities, Sandberg is able to avoid any real acknowledgement to what drives inequality.²⁹ In other words, neoliberal feminism and personalizing the political both advocate for self-transformation over political mobilization by assuming the system is livable and decent, and that we ultimately need to change the self in order to achieve a more "equal" society.

II. Incels

Incels are an online subculture which can be found on the "manosphere"—a loose collection of forums, subreddits, and other communities of men whose explicit purpose is to repudiate women and promote misogyny. The word "incels" is a portmanteau of the phrase "involuntary celibate."³⁰ Incels believe the world is inherently structured by a hierarchy called "lookism." Lookism means the more attractive you are, the more successful you'll be in life, particularly

²⁸ Ibid, 423.

²⁹ As does Rottenberg, through her ideological analysis for the purposes of neoliberal feminism solely being for the reproduction of US superiority and imperialism, with no word on capitalism's violence against the poor, who are so frequently women.

³⁰ The term incel was coined by a bisexual woman attempting to describe the lack of sexual interest she received. "Incel" has only recently become loaded with its current misogynistic meaning. See: Jim Taylor, "The Woman Who Founded the 'Incel' Movement." BBC News. BBC, August 30, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-45284455>.

successful in having a satisfying sexual life. Lookism is invested in a racial hierarchy of attraction where white men and women are at the top while men of color, particularly South Asian men, are deemed the least attractive.³¹ Obviously, this is an extremely sexist and racist form of heterosexuality. However, I believe incels have a truly radical vision of sexual liberation. By “radical”, I do not mean a moral marker of political righteousness. For example, incels and some sections of the manosphere advocate for lifelong male separatism.³² However, because incels frame male sexuality as a losing game for most of the male population, there is an inherent aspect of mourning and loss embedded in how incels see themselves sexually. This feeling of sexual loss or sexual death often gets mediated through anger or aggression towards women.

III. Misogyny

Although Kate Manne is one of the subjects of critique in this thesis, I also rely on her framework of misogyny found in her book *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*. Manne attempts to understand misogyny from an “inside” perspective, but this inside perspective is not a psychological one.³³ Rather, Manne argues that misogyny is “a social-political phenomenon with psychological, structural, and institutional manifestations.”³⁴ In order for misogyny to manifest materially and affect women, society must be structured by a patriarchal order that will incentivize misogyny.³⁵ Manne’s interpretation of misogyny is importantly distinguished from what she calls a “naive conception” of misogyny. The naive conception of misogyny is how

³¹ South Asian men on incel forums are called “currycel” and some men take up this phrase for themselves. Racist and ableist nicknames (like mentalcel for those too mentally ill to be in committed relationships) proliferate the incel, often with the -cel suffix indicating the “reason” why incels are celibate.

³² The association Men Going Their Own Way or MGTOW also believe in male separatism and there is overlap with incels and MGTOW.

³³ Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 27.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 27.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 33.

misogyny is normally understood: when an individual feels hatred and hostility towards all women because they are women.³⁶

To counter the naive conception of misogyny, Manne develops an “ameliorative feminist conception of misogyny” in which misogyny is a property of both environments and social systems in which women will face hostility because they are a woman in a man’s world or because they fail to live up to the patriarchal standards of the environment.³⁷ This framework allows for selectivity to target specific women in certain situations rather than the naive conception of misogyny. In other words, intersectionality is a factor in Manne’s ameliorative feminist conception of misogyny because other aspects of women’s life (race, geography, class, sexuality, ability, etc.) will alter how misogyny is expressed.

As patriarchy creates a “man’s world” women face discrimination through their comparison with patriarchal expectations of women and with comparison with men— this becomes the distinction between sexism and misogyny. For Manne, misogyny is the “law enforcement” branch of the patriarchy that polices gender norms and expectations.³⁸ Sexism is then the “justificatory” branch of the patriarchy, naturalizing sex differences in order to justify patriarchal social order.³⁹ Women’s subordinated position is formed under a general framework of unequal moral subjectivity where men are moral beings and women are moral givers. Unequal moral subjectivity is how many women face hostility from men— men are assumed to be entitled to moral goods and services from a gendered moral economy and when denied by women or women ask for moral goods and services in return, outrage and hostility occur.⁴⁰ As

³⁶ Ibid, 32.

³⁷ Ibid, 33-34.

³⁸ Ibid, 78.

³⁹ Ibid, 79.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 107.

misogyny and patriarchy are inherently political categories for Manne, women's demand for political justice, social access, or resource distribution are part of the moral goods and services which is necessarily denied to women under patriarchal social order.

Methodology

My methodology stems from two feminist sociologists of far-right activism, Klaus Theweleit and Kathleen Blee. In particular, I am influenced by Theweleit's method used *Male Fantasies Volume I: Women, Floods, Bodies, History* and Blee's "life histories" approach used in "Becoming a Racist: Women in contemporary Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazi groups. Both scholars approach the direct writings and/or testimony of racist activists and political actors, which is also what I am doing with Elliot Rodger's manifesto.

In *Male Fantasies*, Theweleit's examination of Freikorpsmen, a nationalist paramilitary force that eventually became the foundations for the Sturmabteilung (also known as "Brownshirts") in Germany after World War I. His work is genre bending—part literary analysis, part historical sociology. Theweleit's methodology approaches fascist diaries and literature influenced by psychoanalysis, yet avoids direct application of psychoanalytic systems. "In the following pages, I will not attempt to apply one psychoanalytic system to fascist texts; I will however look at psychic *processes*," including projection, object relations, emotional responses and their intensity, and different psychic defense mechanisms.⁴¹ Theweleit analyzes the Freikorpsmen in relation to their life as soldiers and identification as warriors, and how this identification ultimately shapes how the Freikorpsmen see themselves in relation to women, which when sexual, is seen through class status and is always bloody and deadly. As Barbara Ehrenreich says in the foreword, "Here Theweleit takes us beyond any ground so far explored by

⁴¹ Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies Volume I: Women, Floods, Bodies, History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 56.

feminist theory: from the dread of women to the hatred of communism and the rebellious working class. Ultimately, what Theweleit is able to produce is a theory of fascism based on male desire and revulsion of women by men, in which women represent dirt and sexuality, represented by the prostitute, who is always working class. Put even more simply, Theweleit charts out the relationship of identification fascist men have between women, sex, and fascist politics.

Erotic male-female relationship – violent, unfeeling woman – threat to the man – dirt, vulgarity – prostitution – proletarian woman – communism

As I analyze Rodger’s manifesto, it will become clear the relationship between his sexual desires and fascist politics.

Sociologist Kathleen Blee’s research has largely focused on women’s participation in organized racist, far-right, and neo-Nazi movements. However, Blee’s focus on women does not limit her use for my methodology. On the contrary, Blee makes clear that her research on women does not narrow the scope, but rather ameliorates methodological problems researchers faced when focusing only on men’s participation in racist social movements.

In “Becoming a Racist: Women in contemporary Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazi groups,” Blee outlines the problems when researchers focus only on men’s participation in organized racist groups. Blee argues, “the exclusive attention to men in organized racist movements has deformed theoretical understandings of the process whereby individuals become racist activists.”⁴² Previously, researchers have focused on social-psychological factors for participating in racist activism, theories of reactionaries activism due to perceive loss in “status

⁴²Kathleen Blee, “Becoming a racist: Women in Contemporary Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazi groups,” in *Understanding Racist Activism: Theory, Methods, and Research*, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 127.

politics”, and “interest-based” theories in which activists participate in racist movements out of individual’s perceived “best interest.”⁴³

Blee uses a “life history approach,” when analyzing testimony from racist activists. As Blee explains of her life approach,

By beginning with the respondent’s own life story rather than with questions of belief or organizational commitment, respondents are less likely to present group dogma as personal sentiment. The focus on life histories is particularly well-suited to understanding the sequence and patterning of life events and thereby untangling causes and effects of political affiliation.⁴⁴

In this particular study, Blee interviews 34 women in a range of racist movements, including Ku Klux Klan members, neo-Nazis, and skinheads. The life history approach allows the women interviewed to curate their own personal history, the personal and social context in which their racism developed can illuminate motivations in ways that direct questions cannot, especially considering the secrecy of the groups participants are members of, and also that interviews often lead to misleading conclusions due to intimidation and group propaganda.⁴⁵ In other words, a life history approach reveals how participants in Blee’s studies “‘make sense’ of their world and their place in that world.”⁴⁶

It is with both Theweleit and Blee’s theories of desire and political motivation that structures my research. When examining Elliot Rodger and Kate Manne, I understand their motivations in their writing and politics in light of their own desires and psychic processes, projections, and attachments. When considering Rodger’s *My Twisted World*, I will be reading it coming from a life history approach. Of course, in Blee’s research, she interviews participants in her study, asking them questions that lead them to narrate their life and world view. I do not have

⁴³ Ibid, 127-129.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 132.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 131.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

the luxury of talking to Rodger because he is dead. However, Rodger's text, as part memoir and part manifesto, already provides such rich narration of his life and how his experiences lead him to fascism and inceldom that deserves careful attention. In the life history approach, each of Blee's interviewees would narrate and connect events of her life were most significant in the direction of her life, implying the moments which directed them to the present.⁴⁷ In a similar manner, Rodger's text provides us a guide leading to his "Day of Retribution," which will be detailed at length in chapter 2.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 132.

CHAPTER 2: HIS TWISTED WORLD: UNDERSTANDING THE ISLA VISTA MURDERS

Elliot Rodger, as a political activist, spree-killer, and writer should interest feminists and anti-fascist political theorists. Before his spree-killing, referred to as his “Day of Retribution,” Rodger released his sprawling manifesto titled *My Twisted World: The Story of Elliot Rodger*, a text that writer Mike Crumplar called “The *Aeneid* for Incels.”⁴⁸ This manifesto is actually more of a memoir, as the first 135 pages are dedicated to detailing Rodger’s life, a life he believes justifies his political violence. It’s only in the epilogue, only a little over 2 pages, in which Rodger details his real political vision: men unite politically as a class in order to starve most of the world’s female population, while the remaining women are sent to concentration camps in order to continue providing reproductive labor for men.⁴⁹ These concentration camps filled with pregnant women will be overseen by Rodger himself, as retribution for his sexless life. It is these unresolved sexual grievances that are the foundation of Rodger’s fascist politics.

Rodger begins his memoir at *his* beginning, at “Age 0” and moves up to Rodger’s present day, sometime in 2014. The autobiographical memoir is a reflective genre, and Rodger uses the memoir to try to show us his steps of escalation, how he reached the point of mass murder. But although each page represents time passing for both the reader and Rodgers, he’s aging when we’re reading, even though the completed nature of the autobiography and the last events of Rodger’s life clearly pointed to his death. There is also the present hanging over the reader of *My Twisted World*, Rodger’s present. Rodger, while writing *My Twisted World*, was not only

⁴⁸ Mike Crumplar, “The *Aeneid* for Incels,” *Jacobite*, May 21, 2018, <https://jacobitemag.com/2018/05/21/the-aeneid-for-incels/>

⁴⁹ Elliot Rodger, *My Twisted World: The Story of Elliot Rodger*, 135-137.

looking backwards in his life, but also looking forward to what he planned to do. There is an important temporal structure to the autobiography/manifesto/suicide note.

On the first page we can begin to see how Rodger conceptualizes his world, the world which we all live in. Elliot Oliver Robertson Rodger was born on July 24, 1991 in London, to Peter and Li Chin Rodger. Rodger does not only tell the reader about his birth, but also his conception, which is his “real” beginning.

My father, Peter Rodger, was only 26 when he impregnated my mother, Chin, who was 30... In fact, her pregnancy was an accident. She had been taking pills to prevent pregnancy, but when she visited my father on one of his film sets, she fell ill and the medication she took for that illness thwarted the effect of the anti-pregnancy pills, and so their lovemaking during this period resulted in my life.⁵⁰

Life starts at conception, but this is not an anti-abortion stance. This is a stance about how sex is the origin of power, the control and ownership of life itself (birth), thus control over the fate of humanity. In other words, sex is the foundation of all power, women as birthers have control over human destiny writ large, meaning control over men via sex.

Childhood, then, becomes a sacred time for Rodger. Childhood represents life *before* sex becomes the center of existence. Rodger spends the first 5 years of his life in England, where most of his family resides. He is particularly attached to his Ah Mah, or his maternal grandmother. When he is 4, his mother gives birth to a daughter named Georgia. At the age of 5, his family moves from London and immigrates to the United States to Los Angeles, where there is more opportunity for Peter Rodger, a filmmaker.

As soon as the fifth page, Rodger’s misogyny becomes explicit. Rodger is still waxing poetic on childhood bliss at this point, but it becomes clear that he is dysfunctional and lonely in

⁵⁰ Ibid, 1.

his reminiscing. Rodger notes that when he starts kindergarten, he makes his first friend, a girl named Maddy Humphreys. He finds his past as ironic and cruel.

She was the first female friend I've ever had, and she would be the last... I was a 5 year old boy playing with a girl my own age... I was enjoying life in a world that I loved. I was happy, and completely oblivious of the fact that my future on this would only turn to darkness and misery because of girls. This girl who was my friend, Maddy Humphreys [sic], would eventually come to represent everything I hate and despise; everything that is against me, and everything that I'm against.

Rodger can only be happy if sex is unknown to him, meaning that women and girls are unknown as sexual objects. Girls and women can still be human, or like boys and men, at this point. A girl close to Rodger, Humphreys, turns from a childhood friend into a future representative of *all women*. Women are often interchangeable in violent fantasies and representations to misogynists because they symbolize something like original sin or nature.

Rodger is, perhaps surprisingly or not, a bit of an amateur gender theorist. Gender is not inherent, our roles as men and women⁵¹ are learned as we grow. Once we learn our roles as men and women, our (sexual, material, political) interests diverge. Men and women cannot have the same interests, as controlling sex (thus life) is the origins of power for Rodger. Men, especially men that cannot find women to love them and reproduce with, get the short end of the deal. Men are the ones that are at a disadvantage when it comes to sexuality as they are not the owners, women are.

...All children, boys and girls, start out the same. We all start out innocent, and we all start out together. Only through experiences and circumstances of growing up do we drift apart, form allegiances, and face each other as enemies. That is when war happens, and that is when the true nature of humanity rises to the surface.

⁵¹ Rodger's world is entirely cisgender and straight. When thinking of sex, it's always m/f, no discussion of homosexuality at all. I will not read into Rodger's repulsion of women as a closeted homosexuality.

The structural, social *and* biological, relationship between men and women is framed in terms of *war*. There are enemies and comrades, winners and losers, good guys and bad women. Rodger frames sex as a battle against women, in which men can never be the victors.

Rodger must then become a warrior and a soldier in this war between men and women. As Rodger gets older, he becomes more political. He sees a direct relationship between his lived experience, his political beliefs, and his own individual power as a political agent. For Rodger, being political means being a warrior in a war against men and women. However, before he can kill, he steels himself by beginning to attack strangers at random. Rodger makes several false starts, and has to continually practice petty forms of vengeance to mentally prepare himself for future violence. In “Part 6, Santa Barbara: Endgame, Age 19-22,” Rodger is now living on his own for the first time, in Santa Barbara for college. His father comes to visit him to take Rodger out for dinner.

When we sat at our table, I saw a young couple sitting a few tables down the row. The sight of them enraged me to no end, especially because it was a dark-skinned Mexican guy dating a hot blonde white girl. I regarded it as a great insult to my dignity. How could an inferior Mexican guy be able to date a white blonde girl, while I was still suffering as a lonely virgin? I was ashamed to be in such an inferior position in front of my father... I wasn't the son I wanted to present to my father. I should be the one with the hot blonde girl, making my father proud.⁵²

After describing this incident, Rodger goes on to describe his first attack against a random couple kissing in public. He does not describe the race of this couple, leading me to assume that they are white. However, he does note that the man “wore baggy pants.”⁵³ Baggy pants here are an obvious dog whistle, that the white man is somehow negatively influenced by Black culture by wearing baggy pants. Also, this is a common feature for Rodger and some white supremacists: a bigot sees the possibility of miscegenation but would not confront a Black person or person of

⁵² Ibid, 87.

⁵³ Ibid.

color personally, fearing retaliation. So, what does Rodger do? Find a representation, a safe avatar for directing hatred, and punish them instead.

The day after the incident with his father, Rodger returns to the same shopping complex from the night before, but instead of the restaurant he goes to Starbucks for coffee. He notices the couple described earlier. “They looked like they were in the throes of passion...I was absolutely livid with envious hatred. When they left the store I followed them to their car and splashed my coffee all over them.”⁵⁴

Rodger splashing beverages on strangers is a petty and pathetic thing to do. However, we underestimate the severity of these events if we do not see them as Rodger testing the waters for inflicting pain. After he describes the attack, Rodgers recalls what he learned from the event.

What follows is disturbing:

I wanted to do horrible things to that couple. I wanted to inflict pain on all young couples. It was around this point in my life that I realized I was capable of doing such things. I would happily do such things. I was capable of killing them, and I wanted to. I wanted to kill them slowly, to strip skins off their flesh. They deserve it. The males deserve it for taking the females away from me, and the females deserve it for choosing those males instead of me.⁵⁵

Rodger soon perpetrates his second attack, on two girls that didn't smile at him at a stoplight.

After the light turned green, Rodger does a U-turn in order to pour his latte over the two girls.

Rodger then laments, “Those girls deserved to be dumped in boiling water for the crime of not giving me the attention and adoration I so rightfully deserve!”⁵⁶

The last attack by Rodger was near Girsh Park where “fraternity jocks” and “beautiful blonde girls” were enjoying a summer day.⁵⁷ Rodger witnessing men and women enjoying time

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 87.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 100.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 106.

together is interpreted as an insult and attack on his life: “I couldn’t leave them without getting some form of revenge, so I drove to the nearby K-mart, bought a super-soaker [sic] , filled it up with orange juice... and drove back to the park.”⁵⁸ Afterward, fear: “After I had calmed down, I was overcome with worry and fear that I would get in trouble... but eventually I became relieved that no trouble came out of it.”⁵⁹ Here, we see a beginnings of a future that is now lost. I wonder what would have happened if Rodger were caught? Would he have stopped attacking people because he’s a coward? Possibly. Would he have felt vindicated about his pure victim status he clings to? Perhaps. But men acting out in sexual frustration against others is so normalized in patriarchal society that it probably doesn’t matter.

Fascist Desire: Rodger’s Day of Retribution

Before we turn to Rodger’s own Day of Retribution, it is important we have the theoretical tools to understand it. Rodger has inspired other men to kill out of sexual resentment and misogyny. There is even a colloquialism used by his followers to describe this phenomenon: “going E.R.,” the initials standing in for Elliot Rodger.⁶⁰ On October 1, 2015 Chris Harper-Mercer of Roseburg, Oregon killed 10 people (including himself) and injured 8 people in a shooting at Umpqua Community College. On December 7, 2017 William Atchison killed 3 people (including himself) in Aztec, New Mexico at Aztec High School. Nikolas Cruz killed 17 people and injured 17 more on February 14, 2018 at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Most famously inspired by Rodger, Alek Minassian killed 10 and injured 16 in what was called the “Toronto Van Attack” on April 23, 2018 in Toronto, Ontario. After the attack, Minassian posted the following on Facebook: “Private (Recruit) Minassian Infantry

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 107.

⁶⁰ Bruce Hoffman, Jacob Ware and Ezra Shapiro, “Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2020), 6.

00010, wishing to speak to Sgt 4chan please. C23249161. The Incel Rebellion has already begun!... All hail the Supreme Gentle Elliot Rodger!”⁶¹ In Tallahassee, Florida on November 2, 2018, Scott Beierle opened fire at a hot yoga studio killing two women, himself, and injuring four other women. Most recently in June 2020, Cole Carini of Richlands, Virginia was arrested after arriving at a hospital with one hand and fingers on the other hand blown off. Carini told police that he was injured in a lawnmower accident. Authorities searched his apartment where they found parts of a letter that stated, “I will not be afraid of the consequences no matter what I will be heroic I will make a statement like Elliott Rodgers [sic].”⁶² All of these men have reported Rodger as an influence.

If we want a better understanding of Rodger and his followers, we need to have a theory for understanding fascist desire. When it comes to explaining what “drives” fascists, or figuring out what fascists “want,” there are different theories. In “Becoming a Racist: Women in Contemporary Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazi groups,” sociologist Kathleen Blee attempts to fill the gap made by far-right research that primarily focuses on male involvement in racist movements. Blee argues that the focus on men in far-right research has “deformed theoretical understanding of the process whereby individuals become racial activists.”⁶³ Part of this “deformation of theoretical understanding,” led early theorists of the far-right to argue for psychological explanations for involvement in far-right activism, which are no longer popular.⁶⁴ Furthermore, Blee argues that far-right theorists attempts at explaining racial activism through

⁶¹ Aamer Madhani and John Bacon, “Toronto van attack suspect Alek Minassian’s Facebook account praised mass killer,” *USA Today*, April 24, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2018/04/24/toronto-van-attack-suspect-alek-minassian/544944002/>

⁶² Associated Press, “Man’s hand blown off; note references violence against women,” *Associated Press*, June 6, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/4aede80947dc6faead4c49a3ea15c840>

⁶³ Blee, “Becoming a racist: Women in Contemporary Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazi groups,” 127.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

status politics and symbolic politics theory also fail because racist groups recruit from mixed populations and that there is static rates of participation across time.⁶⁵

In her forward to *Male Fantasies*, Barbara Ehrenreich argues that Theweleit provides a theory of fascism that, "...sets forth the jarring—and ultimately horrific—proposition that the fascist is not doing ‘something else,’ but doing what he wants to do.”⁶⁶ What Theweleit is arguing is not representational or symbolic, but literal. The fascist kills Jews because he wants to, not because of earnest belief in a worldwide Jewish conspiracy, although he may happen think that. The fascist kills the woman because he wants to, not necessarily because she represents original sin, although he may also happen to think that too. The fascist simply *desires* a “bloody mass: heads with their faces blown off, bodies soaked red in their own blood, rivers clogged with bodies.”⁶⁷

Ultimately, I read as Rodger doing what he wanted to do. To read Rodger as doing what he desired, we push back against pathologizing him and whitewashing his politics. We now have a theory for understanding why Rodger, et al. did what they did. But that suggests the question, what *are* we to do? The liberal tactic of codifying more laws, criminalizing more behaviors, actions, and subcultures, expanding mass incarceration is not the anti-fascist solution needed. As Cinzia Arruza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser argue in *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto*,

Then, too, laws criminalizing gender violence are a cruel hoax if they turn a blind eye to the structural sexism and racism of criminal justice systems, leaving intact police brutality, mass incarceration, deportation threats, military interventions, and harassment and abuse in the workplace.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Barbara Ehrenreich, “Foreword,” in Theweleit’s *Male Fantasies*, xi.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Arruza et al, *Feminism for the 99%*, 15.

Anti-fascists in the United States can't turn to a government or justice system for a solution when, in conjunction with corporate capitalism, is the source of our (or Rodger's et al.) alienation.

What complicates thinking of Rodger in terms of Theweleit's definition of fascist desire is, as Ehrenreich argues,

When he [the fascist] throws a grenade at a working-class couple who are making love on the grass, he is not taking a symbolic stand against the institution of heterosexuality. When he penetrates a female adversary with a bullet or bayonet, he is not dreaming of rape.⁶⁹

As stated earlier, Theweleit's fascists desire a "bloody mass." With Rodger, there is no need for a theorization of symbolic sexual expression in violence—there are no undertones because sexual frustration is the motivator and male supremacy is the mode of violence and end result for his incel fascism. In the epilogue of *My Twisted World*, Rodger tells us exactly what he wants. Rodger dreams of a utopia for men, "an ideal world, sexuality would not exist."⁷⁰ Eliminating women means eliminating sexuality. "The ultimate evil behind sexuality is the human female. They are the main instigators of sex. They control which men get it and which men don't."⁷¹ For Rodger, male equality is only possible if women are not there to screw it up. Once men live in a "pure world" men will "expand their intelligence and advance the human race to a state of perfect civilization."⁷²

In the epilogue of *My Twisted World*, Rodger fantasizes mechanizing the genocide and control of women using mass starvation and concentration camps, which he wants to personally oversee.⁷³ This is his final solution, his bloody mass. What the concentration camp fantasy/male

⁶⁹ Ehrenreich, Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, xi.

⁷⁰ Rodger, *My Twisted World: The Story of Elliot Rodger*, 136.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

utopia represents for Rodger, in my view, is the closest he can get to a pre-sexual childhood through having complete control over sexual reproduction. In this sense, Rodger is a martyr for men, being the only man subjected to sexuality and living with women. Rodger must oversee the reproduction of men, meanwhile mankind must be kept ignorant of women's existence in order to maintain a "pure world." But this martyrdom isn't so self-sacrificing, as it's also a revenge fantasy. "*If I can't have them, no one will, I'd imagine thinking to myself as I over see this [concentration camp].*"⁷⁴

Obviously, Rodger's fantasy did not come to fruition. Instead, May 23, 2014 arrives. Rodger stabs and kills each of his 3 roommates in their Isla Vista, California apartment as they enter their apartment, separately.⁷⁵ Rodger leaves their bodies to go purchase coffee, where he uploads a video to YouTube and emails his suicide note to various people, including his therapist, parents, family members, and childhood friends. Rodger drives to the Alpha Phi sorority house and attempts to get in, fails, then shoots and kills two women while injuring another. Rodger drives again, commits a drive-by past a deli and kills a man inside. He continues shooting randomly from his car. Rodger uses his vehicle as a weapon, hitting a skateboarder and two cyclists. Afterward, Rodger is confronted by police, resulting in a shoot off. Rodger attempts to flee. Police find Rodger's car at 9:35 PM, with Rodger inside, dead from suicide—a gunshot wound to the head.

Why did Rodger do this? He asks this before he even stabs his first roommate, in *My Twisted World*.

Why do things have to be this way? I'm sure that is the question everyone will be asking after the Day of Retribution is over. They will all be asking why. Indeed, why?... Why was I condemned to live a life of misery and worthlessness while other men were able to experience the pleasures of sex and love with women?... I

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ One was a guest not on the lease but living at the apartment at the time.

am the true victim in all of this. I am the good guy.... I didn't start this war... I wasn't the one who struck first... But I will finish it by striking back.⁷⁶

Taking the victim stance is a common trope in fascist ideology and politics.⁷⁷ How is Rodger's excuses any different? What makes Rodger an example of personalizing the political? I think both Rodger's text and, more importantly, the responses to Rodger's "Day of Retribution," are uniquely based on our neoliberal conditions and place blame for male violence on individuals like Rodger rather than recognizing our society created the conditions for a "Day of Retribution."

We have a growing movement, not originating, but heavily inspired by Rodger of people identifying as "incels." It would be typical to think of Rodger, and his followers, as just mentally ill. This is a common American narrative on spree-killers, who are sometimes called "lone-wolf terrorists." The lone-wolf narrative absolves Rodger and his followers of responsibility. On this view, there are no political implications concerning his murders, and the fact there he inspired copycats is merely a coincidence. Society attempts to explain Rodger as a sick person who "snapped" because he was "crazy." The men that followed him, somehow, also all "snapped." That is one way to explain it. Yet, a more plausible explanation is that Elliot Rodger wrote a fascist political manifesto founded on male supremacy and misogyny and his political vision led him to kill. Rodger's manifesto and murders then inspired others to kill.

Mike Crumplar has written about the difficulty authorities have understanding, let alone approaching the problem, of incels as a community. Crumplar argues that the chief difficulty in understanding incels from the point of view of society as a whole is their designation as "lone-wolf terrorists."⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Ibid, 137.

⁷⁷ Stanley, *How Fascism Works*, 93-109.

⁷⁸ "An Interview with 'Incel Whisperer' Mike Crumplar," *Countere*, April 17, 2020, <https://countere.com/mikecrumplarincels>

It is very difficult for policymakers to address true ‘lone-wolf terrorism’ because its real cause are, in the absence of any outside entity to assign responsibility, necessarily embedded in the fabric of their own society. Associating the violent act with a tangible group, however vague or decentralized that group may be, offers a more satisfying explanation. But what this looks like to incels is that they are considered a hate group simply for being miserable and complaining about it on the internet.⁷⁹

I agree with Crumplar that policymakers don’t know what to do with so-called “lone-wolf terrorism.” Policymakers, government officials, and mass media want a tidy figure, ideology, or group to blame. The problem is the sick society we have that alienates people from themselves, each other, their labor so they no longer have value. Incels *are* alienated by society, subjected to male dominance and hierarchies in a game they can’t play, face impossible to achieve white beauty standards, and so on. Incels are allowed to complain on the internet like the rest of us. But here the issue Crumplar points to cycles back—we have men on the internet radicalizing each other in the name of misogyny in a world with rising right-wing movements.

I want to argue something that makes the government and criminal justice system more culpable. More than ever, the curtain that tries to shield its unreliability and violence from the public eye is being lifted. The uprisings that occurred in the summer of 2020 after the murder of George Floyd are a result of policy bolstering police discretion to kill, no protocol or safety nets given during the COVID-19 pandemic, lack of economic security, and white, male supremacist terrorism. In the media and by government officials, there is an attempt to sanitize the narrative of the past summer. In his lecture, “How It Might Should Be Done,” philosopher Idris Robinson argues in his first thesis, “A militant nationwide uprising did in fact occur. The progressive wing of the counter-insurgency seeks the denial and disarticulation of this event.”⁸⁰ We must push back against this denial.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Idris Robinson, “How It Might Should Be Done,” <https://illwilleditions.com/how-it-might-should-be-done/>, 2020.

The fact that what is called “lone-wolf terrorism” is called lone-wolf terrorism and the attempted whitewashing of the uprisings of 2020 are the same type of anti-revolutionary sanitization that liberal order (including the progressive wing, as Robinson argues) tries to clean up. The lone-wolf terrorist designation itself is personalizing the political by arguing that spree-killers like Rodger are men who snapped, instead of men put under patriarchal pressures in an alienating capitalist system, a culture that devalues and objectifies women sexually, a society and politics based on white male supremacy. Incels couldn’t exist if the cultural and economic conditions weren’t primed to create and reward violent men. Is Rodger responsible for his violence? Yes. But our response to incel violence can’t be premised on seeing this as a problem created by a disturbed, mentally ill individual. Rather, an individual pushed and primed by a society that alienates men, rewards them for violence, a society that exploits women and people of color, one that pretends like LGBT people don’t exist.

Both the far-right, for all its conspiracies and lies, and the liberals know that a radical movement against the bourgeoisie will end them. In the United States, the primary ideological investment for capital gain is in whiteness and male supremacy. In an interview with *Artforum*, Saidiya Hartman argues,

The possessive investment in whiteness can’t be rectified by learning “how to be more antiracist.” It requires a radical divestment in the project of whiteness and a redistribution of wealth and resources. It requires abolition, the abolition of the carceral world, the abolition of capitalism. What is required is a remaking of the social order, and nothing short of that is going to make a difference.

In other words, it requires revolution. A societal transformation that abolishing capitalism and divests from whiteness could bring a world that could not just respond to, but *prevent* Rodger’s brand of fascist political theory. In the next chapter, I will discuss Kate Manne’s diagnosis of

misogyny as a societal property and her analysis of Rodger's violence. I will also discuss how Manne's attachments to (neo)liberalism cannot adequately address Rodger as Manne, too, personalizes the political.

CHAPTER 3: ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY MEETS ELLIOT RODGER: KATE MANNE'S ANALYSIS OF MISOGYNY

In this chapter I will discuss Kate Manne's theory of misogyny and sexism through her diagnosis of Elliot Rodger. I find Manne's work important because she firmly rejects apolitical interpretations of the Isla Vista murders in favor of a feminist analysis of the misogyny that motivated the killings. Where I find Manne lacking, however, is in her analysis of misogyny. In what follows, I argue that Manne's analysis of misogyny reveals one important dimension of misogyny, but may in isolation occlude other more salient features of patriarchy, especially its relationship to capitalism. Alternatively, I draw upon the work of Carole Pateman and Luce Irigaray to describe important dimensions of misogyny, including the fraternal nature of patriarchy in liberal democracy and the sexual economy in which women are traded for their exchange value. I then argue that these features are essential to understanding Elliot Rodger and the incel phenomena.

In her book *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, Manne attempts to understand misogyny from an "inside" perspective, but this inside perspective is not a psychological one.⁸¹ Rather, Manne argues that misogyny is "a social-political phenomenon with psychological, structural, and institutional manifestations."⁸² In order for misogyny to manifest materially and affect women, society must be structured by a patriarchal order that will incentivize misogyny.⁸³ Manne's interpretation of misogyny is importantly distinguished from what she calls a "naive conception" of misogyny. The naive conception of misogyny is how misogyny is normally understood: when an individual feels hatred and hostility towards all women because they are

⁸¹ Manne, *Down Girl*, 27.

⁸² *Ibid*, 27.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 33.

women.⁸⁴ To counter the naive conception of misogyny, Manne develops an “ameliorative feminist conception of misogyny” in which misogyny is a property of both environments and social systems in which women will face hostility because they are a woman in a man’s world or because they fail to live up to the patriarchal standards of the environment.⁸⁵ This framework allows for selectivity to target specific women in certain situations rather than the naive conception of misogyny. In other words, intersectionality is a factor in Manne’s ameliorative feminist conception of misogyny because other aspects of women’s life (race, geography, class, sexuality, ability, etc.) will alter how misogyny is expressed. Also, Manne argues that the naive conception of misogyny has epistemological concerns that would make diagnosing misogyny inaccessible to feminist theorists as it would be a psychological concern of clinicians.⁸⁶ The psychological aspect of the naive conception of misogyny becomes pathological while the ameliorative feminist conception of misogyny allows societal and social explanations for misogyny under the main governing ideology of patriarchy.⁸⁷

As patriarchy creates a “man’s world” women face discrimination through their comparison with patriarchal expectations of women and with comparison with men— this becomes the distinction between sexism and misogyny. For Manne, misogyny is the “law enforcement” branch of the patriarchy that polices gender norms and expectations.⁸⁸ Sexism is then the “justificatory” branch of the patriarchy, naturalizing sex differences in order to justify patriarchal social order.⁸⁹ Women’s subordinated position is formed under a general framework of unequal moral subjectivity where men are moral beings and women are moral givers. Unequal

⁸⁴ Ibid, 32.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 33-34.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 44.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 49.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 78.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 79.

moral subjectivity is how many women face hostility from men— men are assumed to be entitled to moral goods and services from a gendered moral economy and when denied by women or women ask for moral goods and services in return, outrage and hostility occur.⁹⁰ As misogyny and patriarchy are inherently political categories for Manne, women’s demand for political justice, social access, or resource distribution are part of the moral goods and services which is necessarily denied to women under patriarchal social order.

Manne discusses Rodger and his manifesto through her ameliorative conception of misogyny vis-à-vis a slew of interpretations on Rodger based on a naïve conception of misogyny. The naïve conceptions of Rodger’s misogyny include claims that Rodger didn’t actually hate women because he was obsessed with them, or that Rodger actually hated men who had sex and not women, that Rodger didn’t actually hate women but was just severely mentally ill.⁹¹ For Manne, misogyny does not require women to actually break gender norms in order to be policed, or that some women who experience violence at the hands of men are symbolic of women who *have* supposedly committed gender violations.⁹² Manne views Rodger in more or less the same way that other feminist commentators have argued, that the women Rodger attacked did not necessarily violate any patriarchal norms but that the victims were “representative of the kind of women he felt neglected and humiliated by,” as proven by Rodger’s target on the Alpha Phi sorority house.⁹³

I am not necessarily opposed to Manne’s simple diagnosis of Rodger based on her ameliorative conception of misogyny. Manne is right to reject apolitical interpretations of the Isla Vista murders in favor of a political interpretation which highlights misogyny. What I am

⁹⁰ Ibid, 107.

⁹¹ Ibid, 40-41.

⁹² Ibid, 54.

⁹³ Ibid.

opposed to is Manne's solutions for tackling misogyny, especially because of Manne's commitment to the mainstream neoliberal feminist order as exemplified by Hillary Clinton. A more charitable analysis of Manne's politics might be closer to what Rosemarie Tong and Tina Fernandes Botts describes as "egalitarian liberal feminist," as opposed to a feminism influenced by classical liberalism. According to Tong and Fernandes Botts, classical liberal feminists political action begins and ends with changing sexist and misogynist laws and policies, while egalitarian liberal feminists attempt to "level the playing field," between men and women through both policy *and* socio-cultural change.⁹⁴

Manne's conception of misogyny is useful, but she uses it as a diagnostic tool to ameliorate a problem *within* existing capitalist society. There is no corresponding praxis to Manne's theoretical conception of misogyny, *except* to silence some criticism of women. This has the effect of sheltering women who are in positions of power, and who hurt other women. Manne accordingly seeks to alter the existing power structure rather than fundamentally change it. A typical "add women and stir" solution for structural inequality. For Manne, patriarchy and misogyny *go against* liberal order and democracy. They are somehow incompatible, while also currently and comfortably co-existing together. For Manne, misogyny is a *contingent property* of liberal society, not an inherent and structural property of liberal society. Accordingly, all that is needed according to Manne is to fix the patriarchal elements of existing civil society.

I believe that Manne's analysis of misogyny shows the limitations of the framework of analytic philosophy as opposed to structural and material interpretations of misogyny in relation to fascism. Manne is representative of a kind of liberal feminism that is ubiquitous in the current neoliberal moment—feminism without praxis due to a faulty understanding of power dynamics.

⁹⁴ Tong and Fernandes Botts, *Feminist Thought*, 30.

In the Preface, Manne argues that misogyny polices female public figures through “a deprivation mindset regarding women being giving, caring, loving, and attentive as opposed to power-hungry, uncaring, and domineering.”⁹⁵ Manne continues at the bottom of the same paragraph,

Women who compete for these roles [as public figures] will tend to be perceived as morally suspect in at least three main ways: insufficiently caring and attentive with respect to those in her orbit deemed vulnerable; illicitly trying to gain power that she is not entitled to; and morally untrustworthy, given the two other kinds of role violations.

Manne sees unjustified criticism of women in positions of power as major obstacles to feminist organizing. Accordingly, she focuses much of her chapter titled “Losing (to) Misogynists” mourning Clinton’s loss to Trump.

Manne’s emphasis on favorable reception for powerful women forecloses criticism of said powerful women. Manne’s analysis of the supposed misogyny powerful white women faces like being deemed “morally untrustworthy” forecloses *any* criticism of already powerful women seeking more power. It’s not that I find women who seek power over the world’s most powerful military and nuclear arsenal as the only people morally suspect. I find *any* person trying to “lead” a nation as morally suspect. *Any* politician that voted for the U.S. Patriot Act is morally untrustworthy. And, as a woman, I don’t find anyone who was so cruel to Monica Lewinsky as morally trustworthy.

Manne’s analysis does not take into account moral bankruptcy of liberal feminism, of the power wealthy white women hold over the vast majority of others, including many men. Arruzza et al has said that liberal feminism faced it’s “waterloo” in 2016, “And for good reason: Clinton personified the deepening disconnect between elite women’s ascension to high office and improvements in the lives of the vast majority. Clinton’s defeat is our wake-up call.

⁹⁵ Manne, *Down Girl*, xiv.

Exposing the bankruptcy of liberal feminism, it has created an opening for a challenge to it from the left.”⁹⁶ Almost speaking to Manne, Arruzza et al argue, “...liberal feminism steadfastly refuses to address the socioeconomic constraints that make freedom and empowerment impossible for the large majority of women... Rather than seeking to abolish social hierarchy, it aims to ‘diversify’ it, ‘empowering’ ‘talented’ women to rise to the top,”⁹⁷ These criticisms of Clinton, or liberal feminism, cannot be said to be the work of a “Bernie Bro” boogieman or a faceless Twitter misogynist—in fact, Manne’s analysis does not give us the resources to see the difference between the two.

In light of Joe Biden’s nomination of Harris for Vice President, Manne writes similarly about our current VP, Kamala Harris. Manne starts out her article listing different misogynist and racist attacks on Harris, from Donald Trump calling her “nasty” to Luray, Virginia Mayor Barry Presgraves calling Harris “Aunt Jemima.”⁹⁸ These are obviously bigoted statements. Manne then points out her own disappointment about Biden’s pick of Harris, claiming that “Harris seemed particularly ill-suited to the current political moment.”⁹⁹ But this vague sentiment then tumbles into gliding over the real issues with Harris’ record. Manne does admit that Harris did “far too little to support trans people,” that were incarcerated.¹⁰⁰ Yet, Manne doesn’t explain what this means. As transgender rights attorney Chase Strangio writes in his op-ed, “I’m Not Ready to Trust Kamala Harris on LGBTQ+ Issues,” Harris has argued in court to deny transgender people necessary care. Beyond this, in *Norsworthy v. Beard*, Harris denied health care to Michelle Norsworthy. “Harris’s office went even further arguing that the state would be harmed if forced

⁹⁶ Arruzza et al, *Feminism for the 99%*, 4.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 11.

⁹⁸ Kate Manne, “Should I Feel Guilty About Judging Kamala Harris?” *Theatlantic.com*, August 19,2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/08/america-will-want-too-much-kamala-harris/615388/>

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

to treat Ms. Norsworthy because, among other things, her medical care would “present serious safety and administrative concerns.”¹⁰¹ What could this mean other than Harris believes that transgender women are a threat to others? This is transphobia, plain and simple.

Manne says, “Are white leftists like me right to judge Kamala Harris for these and other reasons? Yes. Are we likely to hold her, as a Black woman, to unduly high and unfair standards? Also yes. We are too punitive toward Black women who are themselves perceived as punitive.”¹⁰² Manne seems to think, that for our current political moment, we can’t *even separate* legitimate criticism from illegitimate criticism. Even the suggestion that there *is* legitimate criticism, that it may be shrouded in potential misogyny, racism, or misogynoir. This is feminism without praxis, or perhaps feminism where the only stated praxis *is* defending women in positions of power.

Manne is concerned with men’s entitlement to women’s moral goods and services, but not of white women’s entitlement to national power. This makes me suspect of her treatment of Rodger’s action. This does not come out of concern for Rodger, but out of the fact that if Manne’s answer to misogynistic violence is white feminist violence, then why bother? “In general, then, liberal feminism supplies the perfect alibi for neoliberalism. Cloaking regressive policies in an aura of emancipation, it enables the forces supporting global capital to portray themselves as ‘progressive.’”¹⁰³ I want a solution to tackling fascism and patriarchy. Pining political hopes of Democratic elite is not the way. Putting women’s fate in the hands of Democratic elite is not a feminist praxis, it is a liberal way of politics that put the fate of other’s in legislative and executive power in the hands of elites. Manne does not have a solution for what

¹⁰¹ Chase Strangio, “Op-Ed: I’m Not Ready to Trust Kamala Harris on LGBTQ+ Issues,” Out.com, February 05, 2019, <https://www.out.com/news-opinion/2019/2/04/kamala-harris-lgbtq-trans-prison>

¹⁰² Manne, “Should I Feel Guilty About Judging Kamala Harris?”

¹⁰³ Arruzza et al, *Feminism for the 99%*, 12.

to do about Rodger. Manne is ultimately satisfied with the current political order, as long as it's reformed to be more friendly to women holding onto the nuclear codes. Manne wants to fight patriarchal fire with white feminist fire. As put simply by Fred Hampton, "We don't think you fight fire with fire best; we think you fight fire with water best."¹⁰⁴ We don't fight bloodthirsty and violent neoliberal patriarchy with bloodthirsty and violent neoliberal feminism. We have to change the very conditions that can produce men like Rodger, where misogyny can flourish under massive wealthy inequality. Where a wealthy young man can commit a drive-by in a BMW purchased by daddy.

Manne is personalizing the political by seeing (neo)liberal feminism as the solvent to men like Rodger. If Manne is so concerned with entitlement, how has she not analyzed the way that wealth factors into entitlements to public office? Why is creating a political dynasty not "entitled"? Manne has no conception of desire, and specifically desire for power. Women are framed as innocent go-getters when they try to climb the corporate or political ladder, instead of exploiters of the people laboring below them. This is because Manne is coming to feminism not as a transformative politics, but as an analytic framework. Manne's concern with the "asymmetrical moral support roles" women are placed into by men flattens the asymmetrical support roles that entitle the wealthy.

Even though Manne frames her ameliorative conception of misogyny as amenable to intersectionality, this does not translate to a nuanced understanding of power women can have. In his influential talk, "How It Might Should Be Done," Idris Robinson argues that intersectionality has its limits when understanding power dynamics. Robinson points out that there are more Black women prison guards than there are Black women going to prison. What does this say

¹⁰⁴ Fred Hampton, "Political Prisoner," Youtube.com, January 6, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wy1gveC3GVs>

about power dynamics? That the relationship between oppressors and the oppressed can be flattened when we frame women only through their status as victims of patriarchy. Robinson suggests turning to Toni Cade Bambara's *The Black Woman*, where Bambara refuses to define what a Black woman is and rather,

She does not say that a Black woman is the intersection of two oppressions; she does not say that Black women are in the margins of two different systems of hierarchy. What she argues, rather, is that Black women are an open possibility to be further understood through their revolutionary activity. In place of intersectionality as a discourse of systemic oppression, what we need to do is to bring back the idea of Black feminism as *a discourse of struggle*.¹⁰⁵

I believe Robinson's suggestion to think of Black feminism as a discourse of struggle, rather than a discourse of multiple oppressions, should be expanded to feminism writ large. Perhaps instead of centering oppression, we can center struggle and possibility of revolutionary activity as the site in which women organize.

Women need a way to tackle fascism. Feminism needs a way to understand fascist sexual politics in the 21st century. As Arruzza et al have argued, liberal feminism has reached its limits. As the next chapter will show, liberal feminism and the new fascist sexuality, represented by inceldom, aren't in political contradiction from each other. What Manne is missing about Rodger, and inceldom writ large, is that incels occupy a different political and class position than other men who have sexual access to women. Thus, feminists require a different understanding of misogyny and patriarchy to better understand the particular position of incels and their relationship to the sexual marketplace.

Carole Pateman's book, *The Sexual Contract*, argues that social contract theory has long ignored an *inherent component* of its theorization of political right—the sexual contract. Social contract theory describes how freedom is possible through an agreement between people and the

¹⁰⁵ Robinson, "How It Might Should Be Done."

state through contract negotiation. The social contract attempts to justify existing social arrangement of society by appealing to a “primal scene.” The primal scene is the tale of sons slaying their father and, free from paternal rule, can now build civil society. This is not an anti-patriarchal story though. There is temptation to see the slaying of the father as an establishment of a non-hierarchical (or at least, less hierarchical) society, democracy. The sons make a pact that guarantees them equal sexual access to women, through marriage, or sexual contract. Thus, the sexual contract has *always* been part of the social contract. Classical contract theorists have failed to account for the inherent sexual contract imbedded in the social contract that which, through marriage, “establishes men’s political right over women.”¹⁰⁶

I can see the temptation of calling the patriarchy a paternal structure. It would be very easy and misguided to say that President Donald J. Trump is the *pater familias* of fascistic sexuality in the United States. However, the patriarchy doesn’t function with a father that gives orders to his sons. It is a social agreement between men to maintain male dominance and sexual control. Patriarchal ideology benefits *all men*, not a single man. Patriarchy is a coalition among men, who may have contradicting political goals and ideologies, yet these different men obstruct women’s freedom in their communities. The hero figure is meant to be an inspiration to men, all men. Pateman makes clear that patriarchy is at the root of the social contract, or liberal democratic order. This is one of many reasons why I don’t find it possible to reinvest in American politics as we know it, especially electoral politics. More importantly, Pateman’s analysis shows that it is not a fundamental opposition of the patriarchal order to extend the “fraternal” order to some women.

¹⁰⁶ Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 2.

Pateman's analysis reveals how the social order is based on the ownership of women. But this phenomenon is not fully clarified until we understand the *value* of women for men. A naïve view would hold that it is in the reproductive capacity of (cisgender) women. Luce Irigaray's "Women on the Market," provides us with an understanding of how male desire functions like an economy. This is also useful in the discussion of incels. Irigaray argues that it is not women's reproductive capabilities which gives women value in men's desires, but that women's value is determined through comparison with other women and the value that other men see in the women being examined. Following Marx, Irigaray poses a theory that women are exchanged like commodities in the market of men's social relationships. Men possess women for their use value, or reproductive capabilities, but men require the continuous accumulation of women.¹⁰⁷ Although men do require women for their use value (reproduction), women's utility is not what counts the most. *Women's value lies in the relationships among men, rather than men's relationship to women.* In other words, women bear value by being the product of men's labor.¹⁰⁸ Put simply, women are commodities made through men's work, whether the father or other male family members to men who will reproduce with women. Irigaray thus claims that "As commodities, women are thus two things at once: utilitarian objects and bearers of value."¹⁰⁹ Women's value will ultimately benefit men in some way, which will not be reflected in the woman's use value, but through her social worth which is also known as her exchange value. When women are exchanged, women's bodies must be treated as an abstraction through which other men's desires can be projected through the comparison with other women.¹¹⁰ Thus, women's exchange value doesn't come from her singularity, but from her comparison against

¹⁰⁷ Luce Irigaray, "Women on the Market," in *This Sex Which is Not One* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) 174.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 175.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 175.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 175.

other women.¹¹¹ The value of women is made by and for men, where women are the bearers of cultural and symbolic capital.

Treated like commodities, women's bodies are made into two: her "natural" body and her socially valued body which is an expression of masculine values.¹¹² This second body is what gives her exchange value. *The materiality of women's bodies is the alibi for men's social relations.* Women's body is what prompts the exchange and gives value within the act of exchange instead of the value being in the relationship among men.¹¹³ Irigaray argues that women's value does not derive from her natural body, but because women represent a deeper male desire for sociality among men. "On this basis, one may affirm that the value of the commodity takes on *indifferently* any given form of use value. The price of the articles, in fact, no longer comes from *their* natural form, from *their* bodies, *their* language, but from the fact that they mirror the need/desire for exchanges among men."¹¹⁴ What is important here is that the "natural" body of women is not what the social world actually recognizes as what is worth value in the public sphere, but the desires of men in the social world gives women her social reality through her exchange and place on the market. I do not want to say that the woman's physical body is irrelevant—it is not—but it's the projection of men's desire that is socially relevant to women's constitution when in the public sphere.

Irigaray provides us with an understanding of the economy of male desire, that is an economy for men who have sex in the first place. I ask again, what about the men excluded from the sexual economy? How do their desires circulate? If Irigaray is right, incels *must* be incels because of other men, not because of women. But misandry is not at the heart of incel politics.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 176.

¹¹² Ibid, 180.

¹¹³ Ibid, 180.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 180.

Perhaps, if incels understood the nature of patriarchy, they could understand how their sexual class was formed, due to the fraternal, patriarchal exchange of women. If only incels could become feminists...

CHAPTER 4: A STRAIGHT FLUSH OF STABLE-PAIR-BONDING QUALITIES: ON THE “PAIR-BONDING” QUALITIES OF INCELDOM AND LIBERAL FEMINISM

This chapter is a close reading of Tony Tulathimutte’s short story titled “The Feminist,” for *n+1*’s Fall 2019 issue titled “Savior Complex.”¹¹⁵ The subtitle for Tulathimutte’s short is “A straight flush of stable-pair-bonding qualities,” an enigmatic mouthful representing the protagonist’s misogynistic neuroticism and low self-esteem. However, I use the subtitle in reference to the stable relationship between fascistic, incel sexuality and liberal feminism. The Feminist himself holds two seemingly irreconcilable political ethea: a liberal feminist ethos of diversity and “tolerance,” and the other, seething rage against women that have rejected him into adulthood virginity. I am using “The Feminist,” as (obviously fictional) evidence of the commensurability of inceldom and feminist thinking. These two distinct political positions couldn’t seem more different because of their supposed oppositional attitudes towards women. However, both politics are ones born out of neoliberal ideals of individuality and privatization. Inceldom empowers men to be men, to take out their sexual resentment against women, any woman, in order to balance the sexual hierarchy back in favor to men, who have lost power since feminism’s “first wave.” Meanwhile, liberal feminism (which is just neoliberal feminism these days) empowers women to be women in the footsteps of men—corporate bosses and leaders that ignore the plight of the working class, using the poor’s services through wage and labor exploitation. A key thing to note is that liberal feminism’s politics of empowerment is just a cover for not having a true transformative praxis. This is due to the overwhelming power of white supremacy and capitalism. As bell hooks explains,

¹¹⁵ Tony Tulathimutte, “The Feminist,” *n+1* Vol. 35, (Fall 2019): <https://nplusonemag.com/issue-35/fiction-drama/the-feminist/>

While it was in the interest of mainstream white supremacist capitalist patriarchy to suppress visionary thinking which was not anti-male or concerned with getting women the right to be like men, reformist feminists were also eager to silence these forces. Reformist feminism became their route to class mobility.¹¹⁶

These two positions, incelism and liberal feminism, become one in “The Feminist,” and with as deadly consequence’s in the fictional world as incelism and liberal feminism have in the real world, such as the dangerous ideological force of personalizing the political.

The nameless protagonist of this story is The Feminist of the title. The Feminist is like “The Everyman,” but also an anonymous figure, like his victims. As a boy, he went to a newly co-ed, formerly all-girls, progressive school. It was here, surrounded by girls and burgeoning adolescent sexuality, that The Feminist learned about feminism. Tulathimutte’s 3rd person narration reflects, “Still, the school ingrained in him, if not feminist values per se, the *value* of feminist values.”¹¹⁷ Knowing the value of feminist values has helped The Feminist curate a distinct persona of a non-threatening, liberal man of tolerance. The Feminist never had any sexual experiences in high school, although one girl approaches him, and he rejects her because he does not like her “curvaceous” body type.¹¹⁸ In college, The Feminist becomes insecure about his narrow shoulders as his female friends reject his romantic advancements. “This is fine: it’s their prerogative, and anyway, lots of relationships begin platonically—especially for guys with narrow shoulders.”¹¹⁹ The Feminist “agrees” to the romantic rejection of his friends, still holding out for a chance to have sex in the future. Top tier woman respecting from the hero of Tulathimutte’s story.

¹¹⁶ bell hooks, *Feminism is For Everybody: Passionate Politics* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000), 5.

¹¹⁷ Tulathimutte, “The Feminist.”

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Sexual rejection is excruciating to The Feminist. He replays the rejection over and over in his head, dissecting whether or not the rejection was patronizing, giving justification to the anger he feels towards not getting sex. The Feminist feels like he has to be the bigger person and respect the woman's feelings just in case she changes her mind on him later. Of course, his insecurities trump everything else. The Feminist is "compelled" to write her a long email,

assuring her that he knew nobody was to blame for a lack of attraction, and that if it isn't clear, yes, he *is* interested in her, but he's not one of those fake-feminist guys who snubs any woman he can't fuck, so, sorry if this is *completely* graceless and exhausting, by no means is he making his embarrassment her problem, he just wants to get everything out in the open.¹²⁰

The Feminist hits send and an hour later, composes another email, but this time interrogating his suspect. "Just out of curiosity, could she say a little about *why* she rejected him? It'd be really helpful for him. Is it because he's narrow-shouldered?"¹²¹ The Feminist doesn't get a reply after 24 hours, incensing him, especially, "Considering his tremendous effort to be vulnerable, it seems unfair." This won't be the last time The Feminist goes through this scene, although with different women. He compares his rejection as the second worst possible relationship situation to be in, second only to "outright abuse."¹²² Domestic violence becomes equalized to loneliness, as just as violent as being told "no" by a woman.

The Feminist seeks reassurance on his attractiveness, his kindness, his entire existence from his female friends. He definitely does not want pity.¹²³ But he reflects on "the fact" that his female friends date men that are below him, his friends, "keep dating men with cratered skin, awkward manners, poor hygiene; talentless schlubs identified by their hobbies and tastes;

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

philandering worms; controlling, abusive dirtbags.”¹²⁴ How could it be possible, in the eyes of The Feminist, that these types of men are picked instead of him, a person that *definitely* respects women. In conversation with his female friends, the women gossip and complain about their relationship troubles as well, going so far to say, “Men are dogshit.” The Feminist doesn’t want to center his male feelings in the conversation, and instead, “files this incident away in a thickening dossier of unfairness, privately reasoning that if they’re going to keep dating assholes, what do they expect.”¹²⁵ Women deserve dog shit men if they won’t sleep with The Feminist, apparently. The Feminist’s solution is to watch labor and feminist friendly porn, “though he does not mention that he seeks out actresses that look like them.”¹²⁶

The Feminist, at work, plays defense for women everywhere when talking to his “bro”-like coworkers that laugh when The Feminist says he asks before trying to kiss a woman. His coworker then tells The Feminist to ask what his *female* friends think. So, what does The Feminist do? He calls his queer, *agender* friend, for advice on what they would like. The Feminist asks them if they would like if men asked them before a kiss. They respond, “No, but I’m not all women. I’m not even *a* woman.”¹²⁷ Of course, The Feminist “knows” this but doesn’t want to place the burden of his relationship issues on women, who already face the brunt of male privilege and entitlement. What a (supreme) gentleman. The Feminist falters after attempting online dating, so he returns to the advice of his QPOC friend (they have no name and are only identified by their gender and racial identity.) The friend reassures The Feminist that he isn’t a creep. Afterward the conversation, The Feminist, “relieved that someone who was once female-identified has given him a pass.” A pass, an alibi, same difference.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Finally, at 32 years old, The Feminist has sex. The twist is that it's with the girl, now woman, he rejected in high school. She no longer has a "curvaceous" body type. The two go on a date. The woman gets tipsy, makes self-deprecating jokes, her blouse gets untucked from her skirt. The Feminist ponders, "Lonely as he is, does he deserve someone unstable?"¹²⁸ Still, The Feminist sees this as his shot at getting laid. They leave the bar, and The Feminist asks if he can kiss her. She says no. The Feminist asks why not. "Because I don't *want* to. Who the fuck asks 'why not'? Fucking asshole."¹²⁹

He wonders if she is testing him. He asks if she is testing him. This time she gives him a two-armed shove, sending him to the ground, and instead of yelling, her mouth opens into a smile and she says, "Oh my god are you wearing *shoulder pads*?"

The woman laughs and laughs and asks, apologizing for shoving him so hard. She then asks The Feminist, "Come on, is this happening or what?"¹³⁰ The sex is bad and neither of them orgasm. The Feminist tells her she's beautiful. She says, "Yeah, well, uh, you have a beautiful mind."¹³¹

The Feminist, once again, seeks advice about what women want from his friend who isn't a woman. The two go on a picnic with some other friends, and The Feminist's "QPOC agender" friend asks why he won't call the woman from high school. The Feminist calls the woman a sociopath.

"See, you're moving the goal posts," his QPOC friend replies. "It's easy to feel sorry for yourself when you keep redefining rejection, because you won't let go of it. You refuse pity but crave it so much that you won't admit how strongly you invite it."

The Feminist accuses the friend of being facile. The friend takes a hit from a spliff, needing something to soothe the painfulness of this conversation, and continues.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

“I mean, what the fuck do you want? Somehow you got a shit deal. Nobody knows why. Maybe it’s like you never really grappled with this shit because you thought you were exempt. But you refuse to change and are *shocked* when nothing changes... Weird how you’re always right about rejection, since nobody’s ever had it worse, nobody’s as pure and as wronged as you. Yo everyone! Check out the Woman Respector! Last principled man right here!... And all of us,” they gesture around to other picnickers, “have to sit here and rubber-stamp your feminism. If we don’t indulge your wallowing, we’re being callous and, like, complicit with some diabolical global conspiracy that’s keeping you from getting laid. But if we do, then we’re ‘disingenuous’ because none of us will fuck you ourselves. Right? Am I right, everyone? Hands up, who agrees?”¹³²

The women raise their hands, followed by more rising. The friend finishes with the final blow, “I’m sorry your dick is sad or whatever. Suck it up, you bitter little boy, and move on.”¹³³ Here, we see The Feminist’s origin story, at least according to him. The last straw from “women,” even though his friend isn’t a woman, but that doesn’t matter. *They* (the agender friend) represent rejection from *them*, womankind. The Feminist says that they are “hey were minimizing his problems just because rejection wasn’t on some Official Registry of Politicized Traumas.”¹³⁴ He goes on, saying that he would never say to his “QPOC friend” that their anxieties about dating bisexual women aren’t important because they aren’t oppressed like queer people in Syria. “I’m not your ‘QPOC friend,’” they reply.

I will briefly pause my narration in order to point out a passage in this conversation, The Feminist’s response to being told off.

Are you fucking kidding me, he shouts, unsure if his exasperation is mock or real, you took it there, *you* made it about identity, all I’m doing is reflecting *literally the same exact* sentiment as you, so don’t evade the point, and don’t get the idea that framing it as a callout puts you in the right!

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

“The Feminist,” as in the short story, is ripe with personalizing the political. But in this passage, we see personalizing the political clearly, as pure ideology, as a politics with no friction, no praxis. A politics of resentment not based on material conditions of oppressions, but of bad feelings and sexual rejection. Sexual inaccess to women is oppression to men, who overthrew the Father of the primal scene in order to create a fraternal patriarchy gaining sexual access to men through the social and sexual contract.¹³⁵ Sexual inaccess to women becomes “literally the exact same sentiments” of queer people under the constraints of heterosexism, transphobia, male supremacy and racism. The Feminist constantly appropriates feminist language to hide their disgust and contempt for the people “below” their stature, similar to how Senator Kyrsten Sinema’s team derided criticisms of Sinema’s “thumbs-down” for a \$15 minimum wage vote, with Sinema’s press secretary claiming that it was “sexist” to comment on Sinema’s “body language”¹³⁶ Avoiding the reality of the working class’ poverty, including working women with families, feminism becomes a shield for anti-working class attacks. Liberal feminism becomes a pinkwashing tool for white aggression and now, male violence. On reflecting on the murder of Sarah Everard, Charlotte Shane reflects on how mainstream feminism use Everard’s death in order to flaunt their own fears against individual men, instead of reflecting on how the police violence brought Everard to an early death. Shane writes, “ I’m freaked out by women who hype each other up about [how easily they could be killed](#) and leave it at that. (With feminists like this, who needs misogynists?)”¹³⁷ In this vein, I ask with feminists that violate women’s livelihood and integrity, who needs incels?

¹³⁵ See: Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*.

¹³⁶ Hannah Hurley (@HannahLHurley), “I stand by what I said: commentary about a female Senator's body language, clothing, or physical demeanor does not belong in a serious media outlet.” Twitter, March 05, 2021, <https://twitter.com/HannahLHurley/status/1368037118262542336>

¹³⁷ Charlotte Shane, “A Woman is Afraid,” March 13, 2021, <https://tinyletter.com/CharlotteShane/letters/a-woman-is-afraid>

A friend of the “QPOC agender” friend, a large man, tells The Feminist it’s time to leave. The Feminist, a sensitive man with a READ MORE WOMEN tote bag, reflects on this man’s supposed white-knighting. “This was the male ally they preferred: not the intellectual who challenged them as equals in an open dialogue, but this muscle-confused fucking silverback *gorilla*. They’re all happy to hide behind patriarchy when it suits them.”¹³⁸ The Feminist leaves, tote bag in hand, fumbling with his phone in an attempt to block his “QPOC friend” on social media, seeing that they already have begun subtweeting about The Feminist. The Feminist reflects now, after losing his friend group, that making new friends in his 30’s is hard.

Due to stress, The Feminist is no longer able to maintain an erection. He goes to the doctor who diagnoses him with levator spasm. The Feminist researches online that loneliness (the cause of his stress) can manifest itself psychosomatically and even shorten people’s lifespan. During the same research session, “He also reads that children bear trace amounts of the DNA of all their mother’s sex partners in their own DNA—so it was true, confirming suspicions he didn’t even know he had, that sex partners matter *biologically*; they leave a mark.”¹³⁹ Now The Feminist has proof that he too is an oppressed class! That the stress of women rejecting him is enough to make his dick not work, meanwhile even if his dick *did* work, other men’s DNA would contaminate his future/imaginary children. Women’s sexual choices affect men badly, and here is proof!

With this newfound knowledge, The Feminist decides to start a self-improvement regimen filled with vitamins, exercise, improve classes, and a penis pump. The Feminist also starts seeing sex workers, partly out of being “pro-sex workers’ right,” however, “he still resents

¹³⁸ Tulathimutte, “The Feminist.”

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

having to pay for something that someone, somewhere, ought to offer enthusiastically.”¹⁴⁰ While having sex with sex workers, he imagines the worker is pregnant, and his sperm kills the sperm of all the other men inside her, replaced with his own and killing the embryo growing inside her. The Feminist wants to destroy traces of other men inside of a woman, proving his own virility and superiority over men.

The Feminist is now 35. He goes to his favorite restaurant for tapas, in his old neighborhood. He mourns how the restaurant used to be quite, but now it’s filled with couples and their children, “colonizing yet another space, basking in the triumphalism of love, instead of confronting the real ugliness of their prejudice and superiority and, yes, the *privilege* that they profit from.”¹⁴¹ The Feminist tries to enter the restaurant, but women keep pouring in. A woman exits in the restaurant pushing a stroller out the door, rolling over The Feminist’s feet, making him lose his big toenail. This is breeder violence to our protagonist.

“Years pass, all alike.”¹⁴² The Feminist’s dick still doesn’t work how he wants it too. The doctor tells him that his diagnosis isn’t a death sentence, but The Feminist doesn’t agree. Women are killing him. The Feminist begins to go onto the “manosphere,”—loose collection of online forums, subreddits, and other communities of men whose explicit purpose is to repudiate women and promote misogyny.

...he can declare that women in aggregate are just—wrong. That either they have failed feminism, or feminism has failed them. Yes, it’s complicated, and no, no woman in particular is to blame, but it’s irrefutable that in general, a *preponderance* of women harbor the very double standards feminism sought to eliminate and a narcissistic victim complex by which they tolerate and even solicit aggro misogyny in romantic partners, while relying on men of conscience to handle the emotional scut work. In his newfound online communities of narrow-shouldered men he finds life stories that align near unanimously with his, in the

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

comments of blogs like *The Empirical Agnate* and *Seneca's Revenge*, on message boards like *Rationally Rude* and *NSOM* (Narrow Shoulders / Open Minds), and while he disagrees with them about many things, they confirm that it isn't just him: the problem is systemic.

The Feminist begins posting long tirades on the manosphere. The Feminist claims he has keener insight than other men into the reality of women. "It's not that I haven't done the intellectual labor to empathize with a broad spectrum of female perspectives, I've read Sanger and Friedan and MacKinnon and Dworkin and Firestone and Faludi and Winterson and Butler and Solanas and Schulman and hooks and Greer." One can imagine Kate Manne among this list of The Feminist's favorite authors. However, The Feminist claims, that women haven't made any attempt to understand men and their troubles. The Feminist gripes that *he's* never catcalled or mansplained, and he's even donated to Planned Parenthood. How could women not appreciate all that? No one responds to any of The Feminist's posts. Rejected by men now, too.

The Feminist uses feminist theory as a tool for rape and apologia for murder. Our obligation is to prevent that. When politics gets extracted from feminism and becomes an aesthetic, a fan club, or the foundation of an identity instead of a political practice for liberation, feminism can become a tool for oppression. What The Feminist represents is something similar to what bell hooks calls "lifestyle feminism." The ideology of lifestyle feminism is, "there could be as many versions of feminism as there were women. Suddenly the politics was slowly being removed from feminism."¹⁴³ In other words, whether a person was conservative, liberal, or leftist, feminism could "fit" into any of these "lifestyles." Put succinctly by hooks, "Obviously this way of thinking has made feminism more acceptable because its underlying assumption is

¹⁴³ hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*, 5.

that women can be feminists without fundamentally challenging and changing themselves or the culture.”¹⁴⁴

Some weeks pass. The Feminist returns to the tapas restaurant. He holds the door open for a young lady. She thanks him. “In spite of his resolution he smiles back and nods courteously at this small final vindication, before pulling on his mask, shrugging the backpack from his narrow shoulders, and following her in.”¹⁴⁵ The short story ends before we can see his implied spree-killing.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 6.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

CHAPTER 5: “YOU WERE A SCHEMER, YOU HAD PLANS, AND LOOK WHERE THAT GOT YOU.”¹⁴⁶

Incels are not an island alone in a sea of male supremacy. They are just one ancillary unit to the entire systems of relation that support oppression, funded by capitalist exploitation. Part of the reason I wrote this thesis is to explore a particular kind of misogyny, based on incel men’s response to sexual rejection and social alienation that is somewhat unique to the 21st century. I think that feminism needs to reject turning to the state or state actors when dealing with incels, like Manne’s reliance on Democratic establishment and women’s capitalist empowerment.

Rather, I think socialist feminism is a way that can make all people less alienated through transforming our social and economic conditions that are governed by capitalism and patriarchy. Nancy Hartsock argues that feminism provides a model to restructure the entire left towards “the development of a revolutionary strategy.”¹⁴⁷ For Hartsock, feminism is a politic that “enables women to connect their everyday lives with an analysis of the social institutions which shape them. The institutions of capitalism (including its imperialist aspect), patriarchy, and white supremacy cease to be abstractions; they become lived, real aspects of daily life.”¹⁴⁸ Thus, a socialist feminist praxis needs to be the ones that connect to women’s daily lives and works towards the survival and liberation of women. During the COVID-19 pandemic, mutual aid groups are exemplary of a praxis that responds to the direct survival of people in need. Simple things, like giving women cash-in-hand can do more for their survival. Mutual aid groups provide a way for women to rely on each other’s direct needs without relying on the state.

¹⁴⁶ Joker to Harvey Dent in the hospital after a murder attempt by the Joker. Christopher Nolan, 2008, *The Dark Knight*, United States: Warner Bros.

¹⁴⁷ Nancy Hartsock, “Feminism and the Development of a Revolutionary Strategy,” in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, edited by Zillah Eisenstein, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979).

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 59.

My central goals are not to explain the whole phenomenon of incels, incel groups, incelism. Or even the life of Elliot Rodger. Incel forums present a clear picture of incel ideology. Elliot Rodger's memoir/manifesto tells the story of his life and beliefs. This thesis is not a cultural anthropology of incelism. This is not primarily a biographical analysis of Elliot Rodger. I wanted to look at a political formation and philosophy of organized, contemporary virulent misogynists in an age where fascism is on the rise. I wanted to connect incelism as a kind of incel sexuality, one much different than how we think of sexual and gender relations are in fascism ideology. I also wanted to show that socialist feminism is the best tool we have as women to tackle fascism, incelism, and even feminism when it is anti-revolutionary.

As an example, think of the Fourteen Words, a slogan created by white supremacist David Lane, founding member of The Order.¹⁴⁹ "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children." This slogan puts forth several assumptions about the trajectory of fascist social and political relations. It is the responsibility of white people to "secure" the future existence of whiteness. That this future is for white children, that come from white homes, with white parents. Reproduction is necessary in order to create white children. There is an implicit understanding of enemies in the slogan as well, that the white *present* is threatened and requires protection.

Jason Stanley argues that "The patriarchal family is one ideal that fascist politicians intend to create in society—or return to, as they claim."¹⁵⁰ The patriarchal family is nowhere to be seen in Rodger's vision. There is only Rodger as Jesus, burdened with the world's sin of sexuality, condemned to be a prisoner of *his* prisoners, the women kept alive for breeding

¹⁴⁹ George Michael, "David Lane and the Fourteen Words," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol 10 Issue 1, July 2009 43-61.

¹⁵⁰ Stanley, *How Fascism Works*, 6.

purposes in concentration camps. This is a completely radical vision of a potential fascist future, one where women are out of society completely, not just relegated to the private sphere. But relegated to the concentration camp.

The feminist response, exemplified by Kate Manne, to Rodger has been one framing him as a misogynist. There is no doubt of that. However, Manne's analysis of Rodger via her ameliorative concept of misogyny falls short politically. It falls short politically because Manne has no corresponding feminist praxis to tackle the problem of men like Rodger within a political moment of rising fascism. Similarly, other liberal responses to Rodger have been to frame him as mentally ill, a lone-wolf terrorist, a man who has "snapped." These responses to Rodger personalize the political, hiding the structural and ubiquitous nature of fascism and misogyny within current democracy.

Fascism *and* liberalism are products of capitalism. Liberals, when faced with fascism at the door, tighten their ties to corporate money and law-and-order ideology, the same thing that fuels fascism but in a different register. Securing corporate backing and being elected to office are the primary ambitions of career liberal politicians who do what needs to get done to make capital grow. Is there any wonder why liberals in the 1990s became vying for the title of the "law-and-order" party and the passing of the 1994 Omnibus Crime Bill, famously supported by Joe Biden? ¹⁵¹ Am I supposed to believe that *voting for Joe Biden can stop fascism?*

This is why I've argued for a better understanding of fascism, and of fascist desire in particular, in order to give feminists a framework for understanding incels as a type of fascism. Feminism has already entered a "dangerous liaison" with corporate globalization, from feminist ideas being used to end the family wage and welfare, to the use of microcredit in the the Third

¹⁵¹ See: Naomi Murakawa, *The First Civil Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

World, to justifying the War on Terror.¹⁵² Neoliberalism is a threat to women's liberation as neoliberalism, in conjunction with feminism, in warping the personal is political into personalizing the political.

Fascism, white supremacy, and capitalism are the roots of the most dangerously explicit violences in American life. Then why am I targeting and criticizing liberals at length? As philosopher and revolutionary Idris Robinson has said on his reflections on the uprisings of the summer of 2020, "I want the dialogue to be honest. There's a kind of prevailing posture of cynicism, nihilism, and democratic moralism that holds back insurrection."¹⁵³ Only communism will lead to the most drastic improvement for human survival and freedom as resources will no longer be hoarded and controlled by the bourgeoisie. The realization of communism cannot be without struggle against the capitalist state through subversion. What tries to snuff out revolution needs to be overcome for women's liberation and racial justice.

Liberalism maintains economic conditions that give rise to fascism, those conditions because strong class divisions, racial hierarchies, and male supremacy. Liberalism is able to maintain this status quo through deception of the working classes and having a strong bourgeois class line. Both liberalism and fascism, as politics that hold back insurrection and revolution, are reactionary politics. In *The Destruction of Reason*, Georg Lukács traces the seeds of German fascism, in part, to what he calls philosophical irrationalism, which is philosophy meant to obscure how political reality arises out of class struggle. Lukács argues:

For in the eyes of the reactionary bourgeoisie, one of irrationalism's most important tasks is to provide men with a philosophical 'comfort', the semblance of total freedom, the illusion of personal autonomy, moral and intellectual superiority—while maintaining an attitude that continually links them with the

¹⁵² See: Eisenstein, "A Dangerous liaison? Feminism and Corporate Globalization."

¹⁵³ Robinson, "How It Might Should Be Done."

reactionary bourgeoisie in their real dealings and renders them absolutely subservient to it.¹⁵⁴

I am not arguing that liberalism *is* fascism, but that liberalism *is* deceptive irrationalism that is the most prominent political ideology in the United States that actively suppresses *all* revolutionary action.

The maintenance of liberal democracy as we know it is one of the biggest myths, and suppressants of revolutionary consciousness, alive. In *A Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, Žižek discusses how the symbolic order functions in Gotham. Žižek says of *The Dark Knight*, “The truly disturbing thing about *The Dark Knight* is that it elevates lie into a general social principle, the principal organization of our social-political life. As if our societies can remain stable, can function, only if based on a lie.”¹⁵⁵ Žižek is correct. The entire plot of *The Dark Knight* is shrouded in secrecy and lies, even to the viewer. The plot of the film is complex, but I will give a quick synopsis. The new District Attorney, Harvey Dent, is an up-and-coming beacon of hope in Gotham, representing “legitimate” justice unlike the vigilante hero, Batman. The gangs of Gotham’s underworld need a way to keep their money safe after their accountant, Lau, fails. The gangs turn to the Joker, who wants half of all the money, even though he just burns his share. The Joker terrorizes Gotham and calls for Batman to reveal his identity, otherwise the violence won’t end. Harvey Dent lies that he is the Batman when Joker threatens to kill the citizens of Gotham each day the Batman doesn’t turn himself in. Commissioner Gordon fakes his own death in order to lure the Joker. Batman takes on the guilt for the crimes committed by Harvey Dent, who becomes Two-Face after being kidnapped by the Joker. Žižek likens this to Plato’s regulation of the poets in the service of the Gods, that noble lies must be maintained for social

¹⁵⁴ Georg Lukács, *The Destruction of Reason*, (Dehli: Aakar Books, 2016), 22.

¹⁵⁵ Sophie Fiennes, James Wilson, and Slavoj Žižek, *A Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, (2013; New York: Zeitgeist Films, 2013), film.

order.¹⁵⁶ If ancient Greek citizens started acting like the poet's description of the Gods, rape, murder, and violence would surely ensue. It is up to the poets to weave stories that can control people's behaviors to create order in Athens. Society is flimsily held together by mass belief in lies and order, in ancient Plato's *Republic*, fictional Gotham, and the actual United States of America.

Žižek's analysis implicitly asks us to consider the lies undergirding our own social order. It's unclear to me what liberals actually believe because they are motivated by capital while giving lip service to people's lives. What is interesting is that both the left and the right recognize the lies tying together our symbolic order *as* lies. Obviously, there is divergence in what is to be done about the lies propagated by liberal society. Liberals actually unwillingly play into the fascist's belief in "eternal truths" found in myth over truth based in material reality.

Former President Donald Trump speaks truth to power when he says, "drain the swamp." This Roger Stone strategy of "draining the swamp" means to eradicate anyone that doesn't toe the Republican party line. "Draining the swamp," in this Stone/Trump manner is perverted, because they intend to simply establish a *different* lie. However, and I do not intentionally mean to *defend* liberals per se, yes Washington D.C. is ground zero for political corruption in the United States of America. Something *should* be done about the corrupt United States government. But the United States government is not corrupt because of separation of church and state (is there such a thing?), Civil Rights Act (slavery is legal right now), legal abortion (which many women and teenage girls can't access), affirmative action (which helps white women more than anyone else), or whatever other dog whistle gets thrown around. Republicans, whether delusional or insidious, can recognize that *there is really corruption in government, that*

¹⁵⁶ Plato, Edited by John M. Cooper Associate Editor D. S. Hutchinson, *Plato: Complete Works*, Republic III, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 414 C.

liberals can be bought off and their gender, sexual, and racial politics are insincere lip service.

The far-right know that they have the upper hand by having the stronger party line even with smaller numbers.

What is interesting about Elliot Rodger is that he reveals how the extreme right response to the crumbling of liberal myths about civil society. Rodger, in fact, correctly sees that gender relations are asymmetrical, oppressive, and fundamentally incompatible with existing liberal democracy. It's because I believe we can better understand ourselves if we understand our enemies. This is why I criticize liberal feminism so harshly. At the same time, as an abolitionist, we cannot turn to a criminalizing mindset when it comes to political enemies. We cannot turn to the state to tackle fascism. Socialist feminism has the toolkit to understand incels and fascism better than any other politics. We need to continue developing robust understandings of the patriarchy, updated to our current political conditions. Feminists have the potential to becoming the most powerful faction of anti-fascism in the United States, as long as we embrace socialism as a politics that can transform our material conditions, break down racist and patriarchal control, and create paradigm shifts in ideology.

To conclude, I will simply present thesis 10 of Idris Robinson's "How It Might Should Be Done," states, "The fulfillment of the revolutionary project is ultimately an inescapable ethical obligation that each of us have to the dead and the exploited."¹⁵⁷ Feminism must be answer the call of all women who died at the hands of misogyny and fascism.

¹⁵⁷ Robinson, "How It Might Should Be Done."

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