The Propaganda of TradWives and ShieldMaidens: A Critical Analysis of the Far-Right Radicalization of Women and its Connections to Right-Wing Extremist Theory

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts, Honours
Political Science
Women and Gender Studies

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Abstract

Early research on right-wing extremism failed to address the roles of women in these far-right movements. Women's agency as participants was falsely determined to be caused by their close relationships with far-right men and their assumed compliance. This entirely disregarded their personal ideological beliefs and convictions. As the normalisation of far-right rhetoric in Western democracies continues to materialise globally, it is necessary that women's roles in the far-right begin to be re-examined academically. The aim of this research is to identify how far-right women and their online communities relate to discourse created by far-right theorists with a particular focus on the resulting demarginalization of right-wing extremist thought. This thesis employs a critical discourse analysis of two far-right women's case studies, Lana Lokteff and Ayla Stewart, representatives of the far-right movements TradWives and ShieldMaidens respectively. The aim is to identify the parallels between far-right theories and these movements' online discourse. Subsequently, the resulting alternative counterculture space and its long-term implications will be explored, with the goal of recognizing how far-right women play a critical role in the normalisation of far-right theoretical discourse in the public sphere.

Acknowledgements

"And I do this, not in isolation, but in community" (Merle Woo 1980). The past five years of my life have shaped my *becoming* as a feminist, an aspiring scholar and a woman. As I navigated my way through moments of pain, joy, grief and fear, the consistency was my community. Without the support I have had from so many, I would not have been able to be where I am today. Although I recognize that this is seemingly a cliché, nothing else could reflect my journey in a better light.

To my parents, thank you for the consistent encouragement and (never-ending, sometimes unsolicited) advice. You hung the moon. To my partner, thank you for bearing with me through the last five years. Your support got me through my darkest days and I am so excited to go on to my next journey with you. To my mentor, thank you for your indispensable advice. To my honours cohort, I am so grateful we got to get through this together. Godspeed in your future endeavours. I have no doubt you will all do amazing things. To Dr. Julián Castro-Rea and Dr. Chloe Taylor, your guidance and understanding was invaluable to this project and my growth as a scholar. I am so grateful for the time you spent with me developing and guiding this project. Finally, to my friends and colleagues at the University of Alberta, it has been such an honour to have you all in my circle. Your presence has meant the world to me.

This thesis would not have been accomplished without you all. I will always be indebted to my community. Thank you for everything.

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Preface

Firstly, I would like to begin with my positionality as a researcher. I currently settle on Treaty Six Territory, more formally known as Edmonton, Alberta. I am a White, able-bodied, cisgender woman who has had the privilege of accessing a post-secondary education that has equipped me with the tools necessary to write this thesis. My positionality grants me the privilege of safety and expression. As I go on to discuss the role of agency in this thesis, I urge the readers to evaluate their own positionalities and agency.

Chapter One

Introduction

1. Research Significance and Thesis Aim

In 2022, Canada faced a rude-awakening as the Freedom Convoy, a protest against COVID-19 health measures, became clearly associated with nationalist and populist political forces. More notably, this movement prominently featured White supremacist symbols, such as swastikas and confederate flags, as well as leaders of the movement who were tied to the far-right political milieu (Gordon 2023, 280). Prior to the convoy, many considered Canada an exception to the rise of the populist and extremist political traction that had been prevalent around the globe, particularly in the United States of America, Brazil and Hungary (Gillies et al. 2023, 2). Today, the prevalence of radical, far-right thought and movements is not unusual in Canada. Rather, it has been gaining significant traction among the Western provinces. In Alberta, grassroots movement Take Back Alberta has strongly established itself as a resource for the mobilisation of harmful far-right conspiracy narratives, like the Great Replacement theory. Moreover, it maintains prevalent influence over the Alberta elections as it played a central role in previous premier Jason Kenney's resignation from the United Conservative Party's caucus, as well as the current premier, Danielle Smith's election. This is all to state that the far-right is no longer an outside phenomenon in Canada, instead a phenomenon that has become too close to home and especially visible in the Canadian socio-political landscape.

As Canada, and other countries, began to see a rise of far-right movements being mobilised and supported by women, particularly online. It is critical that their involvement be analysed. This is not only to understand why they chose to be involved, rather to also challenge the potential implications of a "far-right utopia" which these women help construct (Leidig 2023, 3). My research is significant as it establishes that women of the far-right have played critical roles in the normalisation of this movement's discourse and agenda by linking it to its theoretical origins. The further normalised this discourse becomes, the further we may be confronted with what can be described as a new face of fascism, or rather a post-fascism situated in anti-egalitarian, anti-modernist viewpoints. Key social science research that situates these far-right actors is crucial to deconstructing the framing of far-right discourse from being perceived as a valid political opinion, despite its evident dangerous threats to diverse identities.

Far-right movements, in the public sphere and online, use a variety of highly-gendered messages, with a tendency to advocate for traditional ideologies (Blee 2021, 417). Moreover, much of this discourse and action expresses intensely hetero-patriarchal and misogynistic positions. Consequently, these movements have traditionally been understood as very male-dominated, especially in regards to their leadership, advocacy and mobilisation. Despite this, scholars have recently taken into account the prominent roles played by women in attracting and mobilising participation, as well as taking on key speaker roles (cite). Tamara Lich, one of the leaders of the Freedom Convoy, is a critical example of this phenomenon. Furthermore, recent scholarship on the far-right has examined the role of social media within the dynamics of culture, power and discourse (Leidig 2023; Urman and Katz 2022; Gagnon 2020; Marcks and Pawels 2020). However, there is only little research to date that has examined the role of women

in advancing far-right discourse and political action through the online sphere. Moreover, there is a significant gap in contemporary scholars' understanding of how far-right discourse online relates to far-right theory.

As a result, this thesis seeks to argue that the radicalization of women online has functioned to de-marginalize far-right rhetoric socially and politically. Additionally, I argue that women's involvement in this demarginalization has a role in creating an alternative counterculture space for extremism and anti-feminist discourse consistent with far-right theories. These trends are visible in two currently existing online far-right archetypes: TradWives and ShieldMaidens. Accordingly, this thesis aims to answer the following research question: *how does women's participation in the far-right political movement demarginalize far-right theoretical discourse within the public sphere?*

1.1. Thesis Structure

In order to answer the aforementioned research question, this thesis is divided into seven chapters. This first chapter of my thesis will provide the research significance in our socio-political landscape and in the online public sphere. Furthermore, it introduces the contemporary gaps in research on women in the far-right alongside the research questions I plan on addressing and my overall hypothesis seen above.

The second chapter of my thesis will begin by situating the definition of far-right on the right-wing spectrum. This will address the increasingly blurred line between conservatism and

the far-right. Furthermore, it will address why I have chosen to use the term far-right to understand the vast network of right-wing thought online, rather than alt-right or radical right. It will additionally begin to situate the role of affect in far-right online media. Importantly however, this will be further explored in chapter seven.

Chapter three of my thesis will provide the groundwork for understanding gender, feminism and Whiteness in relation to the far-right. Firstly, it will dismiss the argument that women in the far-right do not have agency in their actions, or that they are subservient to the partners who already are involved in the movement. Accordingly, this chapter will provide contemporary literature on why women are agents within this movement whilst further expanding on the roles that these women undertake. Lastly, this chapter will situate the theoretical frameworks I employ in this thesis.

The fourth chapter of this thesis is crucial in providing the background of the two archetypes fulfilled by the far-right case studies. To be further specific, this chapter will first discuss the origins and roles of TradWives and ShieldMaidens in the far-right online sphere. Following this, it will provide a background on the two women in the far-right, Ayla Stewart and Lana Lokteff, who fulfil these roles on their online platforms.

Chapter five of this thesis discusses the methodology used in the analysis of the case studies and the far-right theorists. It will expand on how I used both inductive and deductive coding to represent the normalisation of far-right theory through women's discourse online. It additionally provides backgrounds on the theorists used and definitions on the codes derived

from the theorists. The theorists' works used are Patrick Buchanan's *The Death of the West*, Jared Taylor's *White Identity* and Guillaume Faye's *ArcheoFuturism*.

The sixth chapter presents the findings and implications of the research done. The aim of the implications section of this chapter is to discuss how the results show that a counterculture of far-right discourse has been normalised through women's activity on the far-right. I will also discuss women's influence on politics and the power of discourse and social media. This chapter will heavily focus on the role of affect in online discourse and how it has been a tool of the far-right in its normalisation of theory and discourse. Finally, chapter seven will demonstrate a summary of the topics and findings discussed in this thesis. Additionally, the limitations of this research will be explored in alignment with its potential future avenues of research.

Chapter Two

Defining the Far-Right

2. The Far-Right

For the purpose of this thesis, I will take up "the far-right" as the key topic of analysis. The concept of the far right as a right-wing ideology is complex since it is an umbrella term for several distinct but overlapping sects. Before diving into the term, however, it is pertinent to situate the increasingly blurred line between the conservative and the far-right. According to Kathleen M. Blee and Kimberly A. Creasap in their article "Conservative and Right-Wing Movements," there remains a lack of uniformity in how scholars, across various disciplines, define and characterise the right in contemporary Western societies (Blee and Creasap 2010, 270). This is also true for those who align themselves with right-wing movements. Where conservatism as a political ideology has traditionally been associated with preserving the past, James Alexander likewise asserts that this ideology views change as a negative necessity (Alexander 2015, 989). This suggests that change in accordance with this understanding is forced and looked down upon. Further components of conservatism include religiosity which expresses itself through traditional family values and ethnonationalism, "nastiness" which involves unmitigated self-interest and social cynicism, and social morality which consists of endorsing and appreciating the (conservative) values and moral principles that preserve social order (Stankov 2021, 4). Although Blee and Creasap may use conservatism to describe movements that support patriotism, neoliberalism and/or traditional moral hierarchies, they note in their article that contemporary movements are difficult to label as either conservative *or* far right-wing

(Blee 2010, 271). Current movements that may fall into either category often contain aspects from both. This presents a difficult and blurred line between what should be considered a social conservative movement and what can be considered a right-wing, or rather far-right movement.

Understanding the differences among these right-wing ideologies becomes even further complicated as scholars have begun labelling the resurgence of right-wing politics as "the Global Right" (Varga and Buzogany 2022; Bob 2012). Presently, scholars have indicated that the Global Right movement, although it does maintain conservative ideals, should be labelled as a far-right movement due to "a common set of ideas that are interchangeably termed as 'nativist', 'sovereigntist', 'illiberal', 'nationalist' 'populist' or 'far-right civilisations'" (Varga and Buzogany 2021; Bob 2012; Doval and Souroujon 2021; Stewart 2020). Although this suggests that being undemocratic separates conservatism from the far-right, the existence of right-wing populist parties that fit into the Global Right movement, like the National Rally Party of France, suggest otherwise. All this to say that contemporarily it is challenging to differentiate traditionally conservative parties and movements from those of the far-right. Hence, it is clear that narrowly defining the term far-right is necessary for this thesis to limit the scope of analysis among these overlapping categories/ with regard to its overlaps with conservatism.

It is often the case that scholars will focus on a few variables as a determinant of whether a movement or party can be considered more radical or extreme (Durham 2007; Eatwell 2004; Mudde 2019). Considering that this thesis plans on heavily focusing on the gendered aspects of these movements, I will be taking the same approach. The concept of "far-right" exists as an umbrella term for the several sects of right-wing extremism that are visible both online and

offline. As argued by Andrea Pirro, until recently the division between what was considered radical right collective actors (primarily political parties) and extreme right actors (movements and groups) was defined by its expression and compliance with either democratic or undemocratic values (Pirro 2022, 102). These distinctions can no longer be applied to contemporary understandings of what constitutes "extremism" or the "far-right" as extremist and far-right subsect movements have both taken up these contradicting values. As a result, this thesis will use political scientist Cas Mudde's ideological definition of 'far right' written in his book *The Far Right Today*. In this book, Mudde states that the far-right is defined as both the radical and extreme right. He explains:

> "…only with those on the right who are "anti-system," defined here as hostile to liberal democracy. This is what I call the far right, which is itself divided into two broader subgroups. The extreme right rejects the essence of democracy, that is, popular sovereignty and majority rule. The most infamous example of the extreme right is fascism, which brought to power German Führer Adolf Hitler and Italian Duce Benito Mussolini and was responsible for the most destructive war in world history. The radical right accepts the essence of democracy but opposes fundamental elements of liberal democracy, most notably minority rights, rule of law, and separation of powers. Both subgroups oppose the postwar liberal democratic consensus but in fundamentally different ways. While the extreme right is revolutionary, the radical right is more reformist. In essence, the radical right trusts the power of the people, the extreme right does not. (Mudde 2019, 15)

Importantly, Mudde's definition does not mean that the far-right, more specifically its subgroups, do not share interchangeable ideas and forms of participation. Instead, understanding the different approaches to far-right politics provides important insights into the actors that will be analysed throughout this thesis. Although I will be using the term far-right, the actors I will be looking at fit more comfortably into Mudde's definition of the radical right. Despite this, it will be very clear within my analysis that the two women whose ideas and activity I analyse,

although they represent different sects of the radical right, maintain values and share discourse that is amplified within the extreme right. This is why I have chosen to primarily use the term far-right, rather than limiting my analysis to that of the radical right.

2.1. The Contemporary Far-Right

It can no longer be stated that right-wing extremism is on the rise as it is fairly apparent that these movements have become highly mainstream, influencing day-to-day policy decisions in the West and blurring the lines further between conservatism and far-right. As a result, several scholars continue to debate what event marked the current normalisation of right-wing extremist ideologies. According to Raffaello Pantucci and Kyler Ong in “Persistence of Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism in the West”, the 2019 Christchurch attack in New Zealand, which claimed 51 lives and directly inspired six further shootings, marked the beginning of an onslaught of White supremacists, racists, anti-government militias, misogynists, anti-globalizers, and antivaxxers, amongst other right-wing extremist groups (Pantucci and Ong 2021, 118). In contrast, scholars Ulrike Vieten and Scott Poynting argue that nationalist, far-right movements were already on the rise in 2012 “from the upsurge of Golden Dawn in economic crisis-ridden Greece, to the arrival of English Defence League (EDL) thugs on British streets" (Vieten and Poynting 2016, 533). The presented scholars limit the reasons behind an increase in far-right activity and support to events and movements, however, other scholars have argued that much of the recent rise can be attributed to contemporary political economies and populist politics.

Many political scientists have begun to link the rise of right-wing populist politics as a direct, reactive response to the neoliberal international order (Mair 2013; Krastev 2011; Tarragoni 2021). According to political theorist Wendy Brown in her book *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West*:

> "liberal political agendas, neoliberal economic agendas and cosmopolitan cultural agendas generated a growing experience of abandonment, betrayal, and ultimately rage on the part of the new dispossessed white-working-class and middle-class populations of the First and Second Worlds" (Brown 2019, 3)

Brown's statement in this paragraph suggests that much of the rise in early Western populist politics should be associated with sentiments of relative deprivation, a feeling of loss of privilege. Interestingly this theory on the rise of the far-right lends itself to what political scientist Cas Mudde calls the global locus of explanation (Mudde 2019, 71). This theory, also known as the modernization theory, further suggests that globalisation has caused economic and cultural winners and losers, whilst the latter vote for far-right parties (Mudde 2019, 71). Alongside what is described as a "hegemonic crisis", this theory recognizes the far-right social forces growing discontent with the current neoliberal political order (Stewart 2020, 1209). Other explanations credit the charisma of the leader or the local political opportunity structure as being the root of the increase in far-right support, this paper however will situate itself within the global locus of explanation. This is because attributing the mobilisation of anti-democratic forces to a shift in political, social and economic culture felt among White working-class and middle-class communities presents a strong case for why racism, White supremacy and traditionalism shape the politics of right-wing extremism both offline and online, particularly in the two cases of women's participation that will be explored in this paper.

"The far-right is plural rather than singular" (Mudde 2019, 108). The far-right indeed continues to be discussed as though it is a homogenous entity, however, as argued by Mudde, these movements differ significantly, mobilising through a vast variety of organisations and various types of activities (Mudde, 2019, 108). Despite this, this diverse spectrum of political thought contains parallel themes of racism, White supremacy and traditionalism that have remained consistent within Western radical right-wing movements and parties. Contemporary far-right parties openly advocate White supremacy, though their understandings of race are often mutable. Kathleen Blee and Elizabeth Bates, in their article "The Place of Race in Conservative and Far-Right Movements", argue that the aspiration of far-right movements to recruit larger numbers has resulted in a fluid sense of race, tracing the racial culture of Whiteness to values like perseverance, achievement and adherence to the rule of (Western) law (Blee 2015, 131). As a result, the groups who are villainized in far-right narratives vary quite significantly, most commonly targeting African Americans, non-White immigrants and Jewish people.

A familiar narrative that has functioned to produce a radical right-wing hegemony across populist far-right movements and parties has been that of anti-immigration. Weaponizing White fragility and moral panic around orientalist perceptions of immigrant 'cultural' behaviours and assumed violence has functioned to amplify xenophobic sentiments, furthering support for far-right discourse (Yilmaz 2012, 377). The themes explored above are extremely prevalent in the discourse of the far right, however, they are often softened to allow for further recruitment online.

2.2. The Online Radical Right Landscape

The two cases of women's participation in the far-right that are analysed in this thesis have successfully weaponized an online presence for recruitment and mobilisation purposes. As a result, this section discusses the online radical right landscape where far-right actors, particularly women, have situated themselves. Sharing xenophobic and fringe sentiments has been made much easier through the use of online tools, particularly social media platforms. Reddit, 4Chan, and Telegram are only a few examples of platforms that have been used by diverse sects of the far-right to recruit and mobilise vast networks of individuals. Moreover, there exists a significant amount of research that has analysed the effectiveness of far-right tactics, through the use of memes, propaganda, algorithms and social media discourse, to mainstream harmful political sentiments (Caiani et al 2021; Davey et al 2019; Devries et al 2021). Social media content that is "dependent upon oppressive political traditions and current far-right movements that forward ethnonationalism, misogyny, [and] xenophobia" has advanced an *Othering* of those deemed outside of 'the White race', the nuclear family and the nation (Devries et al 2019, 3). Sarah Ahmed in her article "Affective Economies" demonstrates that a political affect that is a result of the sharing of posts produces a sense of familiarity and a desire to protect and defend (Ahmed 2004, 134). The affective environment created online within far-right communities validates and normalises the rhetoric that is shared, thus mobilising support for anti-democratic values while spreading far-right theories.

The online movement that will be explored in the context of this thesis and the radical, far-right is called the alt-right. Notably, The Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in

2017, was the result of the online activity of those who identified themselves with this movement. In her book *The Women of the Far Right: Social Media Influencers and Online Radicalization*, Eviane Leidig categorises the alt-right as a *movement* rather than an ideology (Leidig 2023, 21). Alongside this, Leidig states that women who represent the alt-right "can thus be considered both alt-right and far right in the sense that their political careers originated in the alt-right, but their ideologies represent the broader contemporary far-right movement" (Leidig 2023, 21). As noted previously, the alt-right community utilises online communication through social media platforms to reproduce and circulate far-right political ideology consistently. What is most important to note and will be explored further in chapter 3 is that the women of this movement embrace traditionalist and racist, White supremacist ideological beliefs and practices. Moreover, they utilise their roles within the alt-right to construct and share sentiments of nativism, authoritarianism and extreme nationalism.

Chapter Three

The Women of the Far-Right

3. Women, Agency and the Far-Right

Briefly, I wanted to contextualise my understanding of women's agency among the far-right. Throughout this thesis, I stand firmly alongside the argument that women's choice to participate in far-right movements is rooted in their personal and political agency. Although many scholars have taken this stance (Tebaldi and Baran 2023; Kisyova 2022; Blee 2020), it would be irresponsible for me to disregard the broader implications of agency, particularly in reference to women's participation in the far-right. Transactional sexuality in far-right movements is an evident result of the hyper-masculinist culture existing within these spaces. Unfortunately, this means that women's sexuality is perceived as an entity that can be sold and owned. Interviews done by scholar Mehr Latif with women previously involved in white supremacist movements suggested that the "movement men traded drugs or alcohol for sex with vulnerable women who were then absorbed into racial extremism as interchangeable and exploitable sexual bodies rather than as actual or potential ideological adherents" (Latif et al. 2023, 424). Moreover, in the article "Why White Supremacist Women Become Disillusioned, and Why They Leave", it is noted that 40% of interviewed women who left far-right groups "hoped that white supremacism would provide them with a substitute family; this was especially true for young women who entered racist groups as a substitute for destructive families or life on the streets" (Latif et al. 2021, 377). It is not my intention to suggest that women do not have agency in their decisions to actively participate in extremist movements, especially considering that the two cases I provided are not representative of the entire demographic of women who

chose to participate. Instead I wanted to emphasise at the beginning of this section that far-right women's agency is shaped by notable structural and individual factors that determine the extent to which this agency is practised.

Nevertheless, although early research has not often recognized women's roles and the role of gender, this does not indicate that women were not involved in right-wing extremism in the past. Rather, women have historically held a space in fascist and extremist organisations. According to historian Julie V. Gottlieb, in the 1930s 25 percent of membership to the British Union of Fascists party consisted of women; this would significantly increase in the early 1940s (Gottlieb 2002, 30). Moreover, this organisation, like many others, weaponized traditional women's roles in the private and public sphere as a site of moral and ideological reproduction (Gottlieb 2002, 34). Another historical case of women's support of right-wing extremism is unsurprisingly found within the early 20th century United States of America. According to Blee, in the 1920s, a women sect of the Klu Klux Klan (KKK) consisted of five hundred thousand active members (Blee 2002, 101). In this case, women were rarely given any positions beyond subordinate roles as a result of overarching narratives within the KKK that uplifted traditional notions of femininity as subservient and passive (Blee 2002, 113). These two examples, though there are many more, demonstrate that the phenomenon of women's involvement in the far-right is not novel. Instead, these examples demonstrate that some of the contemporary roles of women within these movements can be traced back to earlier forms of involvement among right-wing extremist organisations and movements.

Early research on the fringe of the right-wing spectrum often failed to address gender and its implications at all due to the ideology's association with masculinity (Kisyova 2022, 38). However, in the book *Right-Wing Women: From Conservatives to Extremists Around the World*, it is clear that several feminist academics have identified women's participation in these movements as being a historical and present occurrence (Bachetta and Power 2002, 1). It wasn't until the 1980s that women and gender became a prevalent aspect of extreme right studies (Blee 2020, 418). This was primarily the result of gendered assumptions and stereotypes, not limited to, but including the assumption of women as "incidental political actors," and non-violent, heteronormative mothers and wives (Blee 2020, 418). Early scholars who focused on the gendered aspects of the far-right suggested that women's roles in these movements are limited to that of being a supporter of their male counterparts (Kisyova et al. 2022, 39). Ultimately, this encourages a conclusion that their participation was a result of close relationships and compliance, rather than their own ideological beliefs and convictions.

In contrast, more recent scholarly literature has begun to examine gender and its role in the far-right beyond the traditional binary norms (Tebaldi and Baran 2023; Kisyova 2022; Blee 2020). In a similar vein to early research on women's participation in the far-right, this brings up the question of women's agency. Scholars Catherina Tebaldi and Dominika Baran in "Of TradWives and TradCaths: The Antigenderism Register in Global Nationalist Movements" suggest that the use of traditional gender roles within the far-right allows for a perverse type of agency to be fulfilled by these female actors (Tebaldi and Baran 2023, 8). As a result, White women who take up this stereotype of being the traditional wife perceive a gained agency by upholding their nation's "purity" through their sexual and social restraint (Tebaldi & Baran 2023,

8). Similarly, author Maria-Elena Kisyova suggests that liberation and agency, in the perspective of far-right women, are gained through their commitment to "femininity, traditionalism and reverence for gender complementarity" (Kisyova 2022, 37). Kisyova's academic paper furthers this argument by stating that "women not only have agency but also are actively working as ideologues; creating content and mainstreaming ideology in efforts to recruit followers." (Kisyova 2022, 60). Importantly, both of these scholarly accounts situate a practice of traditional gender roles as a form of agency. This presents a somewhat limited understanding of the roles that far-right women may take on to practise their ideological convictions online, among similar-minded peers and in the public sphere.

Women do not always uphold the gendered categories that are preached within the far-right. Alongside the argument recognizing women's agency, it is imperative that the roles they take on are examined in relation to their practised agency. According to sexuality scholar Lisa Downing in "The body politic: Gender, the right wing and 'identity category violations'", recent identity trends in the West have led to over-simplified understandings of gendered, sexual, class and race-based identities and their assumed political affiliation (Downing 2018, 367). More specifically, Downing coined the term 'identity category violation' to represent how far-right women, especially those who hold leadership positions in political and social far-right organisations, challenge cultural imaginaries of the 'right-wing woman' (Downing 2018, 375). Accordingly, extremism researcher Kristy Campion states "[i]f ideology is a consequence of social formations, we must conceptualise women's participation in the ideology as a consequence of their interaction within those subcultures" (Campion 2020, 13). Consequently, recognizing the complex individuality of women and their chosen or ascribed ideological roles in

these movements becomes essential in understanding their agency as far-right subjects. This argument is well represented in Campion's article "Women in the Extreme and Radical Right: Forms of Participation and Their Implications" which examines six diverse forms of participation taken on by women of the far-right.

In her article, Campion describes the following as six diverse forms of participation by women of the far-right: violent actors, thinkers, facilitators, promoters, activists and gendered exemplars (Campion 2020, 5). Each of these roles range from non-violent to violent and can exist in the private and public spheres (Campion 2020, 14). More importantly however, Campion notes that these forms of participation are not deliberately constructed or assigned by their far-right male counterparts (Campion 2020, 14). Instead, due to the adaptive nature of ideology and identity, these roles are shaped and reproduce by far-right women "which positions them as the key to racial salvation or endangered womanhood, legitimises violent and non-violent action, and enables them to select and project an idealised and ideologically loaded expression of femininity" (Campion 2020, 15). Despite the invaluable and informative nature of Campion's article, this thesis will solely focus on expanding on the roles of *thinkers* and *exemplars* due to the case studies we focus on.

As explored above, women of the far-right can take on various roles. For this thesis, there is a concentrated focus on how two archetypes, TradWives and ShieldMaidens, normalise far-right theoretical discourse. These archetypes are visible in two case studies, that of Lana Lokteff (ShieldMaiden) and Ayla Stewart (TradWife). In Campion's article, she situates these two archetypes into two roles, thinkers (ShieldMaiden) and exemplars (TradWife) (Campion

2020, 7-12). In this context, thinkers "are heavily embedded in the creation and propagation of extreme and radical right ideas" (Campion 2020, 7). Thus, they act as intellectuals of the movement through developing and appropriating radical ideas, and sharing them among diverse right-wing networks. Importantly, thinkers play a role in constructing the ideology through countering left-wing progressivism and feminism, whilst additionally engaging with traditional and ethnonationalist discourses to situate "ideology in a landscape of meaning" (Campion 2020, 13). On the other hand, exemplars take on a different, non-intellectual role. Exemplars are women who practise 'acceptable' behaviour, values and virtues. As a result, they become glorified symbols of the movements, acting as "deliberate, symbolic and performative actors" (Campion 2020, 11). Narratives play a large role in the creation of idealised feminine models in the far-right particularly in the online sphere. This is due to the ability exemplars gain through social media that allows them to control what they share about themselves, their families and their values. The control they gain through social media grants them the ability to engage with nostalgic and traditional practices associated with White heritage and identity, such as women-centred homekeeping and childrearing. This engagement, however, is romanticised through how it is represented on social media leading to an ideological fantasy of the White nuclear family. Thinkers and exemplars are two critical roles in the mobilisation and recruitment of far-right movements. The significance of these roles being taken on by women represents the limitations of earlier research on the far-right. It additionally demonstrates the complex agency and power women can maintain in movements that advocate for hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal traditions.

Finally, despite this literature review presenting two opposing positions on women's agency within the far-right, much of it remains based on the difficulty of comprehending why women may participate in an ideological ecosystem that champions heteronormative, anti-feminist and male supremacist ideals. This thesis will situate itself alongside the more recent literature that suggests that women do utilise and weaponize their agency when participating in the far-right. Furthermore, through its focus on two different archetypes fulfilled by women of the far-right, this thesis will aim to go beyond over-simplified identity categorizations that have traditionally led to a misunderstanding of the roles and objectives of far-right women.

3.1. The Importance and Rejection of Feminism

Given the new scholarly-focused emphasis on gender and its implications among far-right movements and discourse, understanding the role of feminism in the contemporary rhetoric of women in the far-right is essential. This is particularly important to comprehend the far right's rejection of feminist values, the weaponization of the term *feminism* in the far right and how it has drastically shaped women's involvement in this movement.

Feminism as a concept gained traction in the West in the late nineteenth century (Freedman 2003, 45). Due to the fluidity and ever-changing conceptualization of the term feminism, this thesis will define the term simply as an "umbrella term for a number of cultural phenomena related to the ever deteriorating situation of [individuals] under the patriarchal status quo" (Malinowska 2020, 1). Moreover, when referring to feminist movements, this will represent all institutional and grassroots activities for abolishing intersectional social inequalities. As a

movement, feminism tends to be referred to through a wave narrative: first, second, third and fourth (Evans and Chamberlain 2015, 396) However, many feminist scholars validly critique the use of the wave narrative in describing feminist historiography; notable key flaws include generational barriers (Gillis and Munford 2004); excluding feminists of colour (Springer 2002) and privileging Western feminism (Hemmings 2005). Despite the strong critiques of the waves narratives, waves narratives are employed rhetorically by the case studies seen in this thesis. As a result, despite my personal recognition of the flaws of the waves narrative, it is important that this thesis present a brief description of the waves to ensure discourse presented by the case studies can be fully understood.

The first wave of the feminist movement was heavily inspired by the suffragette movement that came with a clear goal of gaining the vote for women. Unsurprisingly, the first wave of the feminist movement did not aim to include identities beyond being cis-gender, heterosexual, White and middle-class. Likewise, the second wave of feminism focused on White bodies and a binary of gender, however, it presented a shift in focus to the social and personal, particularly advocacy for equal pay and bodily autonomy (Evans and Chamberlain 2015, 399). The third wave of feminism was distinct from its predecessors which often saw women's experiences as universal. This led to an assumption that all women, regardless of class, race, gender, ability and sexuality, faced the same oppressions and inequalities. In contrast, third-wave feminism provided a critique of this ignorance. Importantly, it also embraced the need for feminists “to examine forms of oppression and discrimination that they have internalised”; this contributed to building a new face of the movement that involved intersectional and postmodern forms of analysis (Mann and Huffman 2005, 60). With the emphasis on racial, class and

(non-binary) gender oppression, this new iteration of feminism did not prioritise the struggles of White women, rather it debated various ways feminists could retain collectivity while avoiding essentialism and hierarchy. The focus on intersectionality and equity would continue into the fourth wave, however this new era of feminism would be largely defined by its activity online, consequently creating a new role for technology in its activism around the globe and in the academy. The role of the waves narrative will be further explored in the discourse analysis done in chapter 6.

Feminism plays two rather distinct roles in the discourse of the far-right. It has been used to recruit women into right-wing extremist groups and parties through both its weaponization and its rejection. Notably, feminism has been embraced by far-right women. More specifically, this phenomenon has been present to justify anti-immigration policies. In the case of the far-right political party Rassemblement National (The National Rally) in France, previous leader Marine Le Pen often weaponized anti-immigration sentiments and White, liberal feminist demands to secure the female vote and close the gender gap visible in the party's supporters (Farris and Rottenburg 2017, 6). More often than not, however, far-right women take an active role in rejecting feminism and values of gender equality.

The rejection of feminism is critical to the positions of women in the far-right. According to Worth, various forms of traditional paternalism have been used in the discourse of right-wing populist movements and parties that label themselves as explicitly "anti-feminist" (Worth 2021, 503). Concurrently, other far-right movements and parties have attracted women "often as figureheads, who have embraced this masculinity while contributing to, and in some cases

leading, far-right movements" (Worth 2021, 503). Worth makes a strong argument when discussing women's involvement in the far-right noting that "in much far-right discourse the feminist movement itself is targeted as constituting a significant part of the dangerous new world order" (Worth 2021, 509). Similarly, anthropologist Sophia Bjork-James argues that the far-right views its rejection of feminism as a morally-justified prejudice, often citing the cause as being the protection of women and children from feminism, racialized *others*, sexual deviance and queerness (Bjork-James 2020, 59). Thus, the rejection of far-right women solidies their commitment to traditional, hegemonically masculinist White values. This results in a solidification of their ideological commitment to the movement, particularly when they are in positions of leadership or positions of intellectual authority. Feminism and its rejection consequently plays a critical role in the populist discourse and involvement of women in the far-right.

In relation to the rejection of feminism, the politics of gender and Whiteness are critical aspects of far-right women's engagement with far-right ideology and movements. Bjork-James conceptualises the rejection of feminism as a morally-justified prejudice using the work of feminist Patricia Hill Collins, coining the term *White sexual politics* (Bjork-James 2020, 59). As she explains White sexual politics "suggests that racial politics are deeply entwined with sex and gender, particularly in the defence of white racial privilege" (Bjork-James 2020, 59). These politics in the discourse of the far-right are heavily constructed within the dynamics of the family. Alongside the rise of capitalist production and labour exploitation in the West, normative family boundaries became necessary to reinforce the moral order of Whiteness (Bjork-James 2020, 59-60). The nuclear family presented a " construction of a gendered social division

between private and public emerged with the splitting of reproductive from productive life (Bjork-James 2020, 60). This reinforced traditional gender binary roles of the male provider and the mother. Accordingly, it provided a symbolic notion of an ideologically imaginary of the 'ideal' Western nation, excluding sexual deviancy and non-White bodies. According to Leidig, the nuclear family acts as an "explicit political message [for the far-right]: to uphold and preserve Western civilization" (Leidig 2023, 100). Western civilization in the case of far-right ideology is submerged in White nativism and ethnonationalism. Whiteness and gender consequently excludes the Other who does not fit within the mutable boundaries of White, heteronormative bodies and culture. As a result, White sexual politics reinforce fascist notions of identity and can rapidly lead to violence against those who do not fit within normative, discriminatory standards of the Western body. Nevertheless, they are heavily present in the anti-feminist sentiments of far-right women who reproduce and uphold White sexual politics to reaffirm their dedication to far-right ideology and convictions.

Chapter Four

Case Studies: Tradwives and Shieldmaidens

4. TradWives and ShieldMaidens

As noted above, women can play several diverse and overlapping roles in the far-right. However, this thesis primarily focuses on two archetypes that have been prevalent in the far-right's online discourse: TradWives and ShieldMaidens. Unlike other roles, notably the mother, whore and fighter, the archetypes that are analysed in this thesis have not been devised based on sexist depictions. To expand on this further, women in White supremacist movements are often limited by the expectations of the group to present themselves within the aforementioned gendered stereotypes (Latif et al 2023, 416). Although they may situate themselves in stereotypical gendered roles, the identities and dynamics of TradWives and ShieldMaidens are importantly defined by the women themselves. These archetypes validate the debate around women's agency that was visited earlier on in this thesis. These self-ascribed roles indicate that women in the far-right can maintain a sense of self-agency and exhibit this through the construction of archetypal roles that have been visible in the online realm of the far-right. This section of the thesis will first describe the roles and behaviour of TradWives and ShieldMaidens. Following this, the two case studies of this thesis will be presented and discussed. It is important to note that considering both of these roles are relatively novel in the far-right movement, current scholarly literature on this topic is limited.

4.1. TradWives

As presented clearly in its abbreviated form, TradWives is short for ‘traditional wives’. According to Telbaldi, this demographic can be easily conceived as “something from a Garden and Gun conservative’s fever dream, Southern belles defend the nation from homosexual, feminist, integrationist, communist totalitarianism by canning jam, wearing pearls and homeschooling.” (Tebaldi 2023, 15). Although seemingly unbelievable, this understanding of TradWives is applicable despite not all of the women who identify with this archetype being from the South of the United States. More specifically, TradWives are women found predominantly online, often platformed as ‘mommy vloggers’, who promote “staying at home, submitting to male leadership, [and] bearing lots of children” (Love 2020, 2). Tebaldi’s definition fairly summarises the roles of TradWives considering they construct their roles as mothers as being critical in protecting the ‘purity’ of the White nationalist state. Similar to attitudes and activism found among White women demographics during the civil rights era in the United States, TtradWives align their gender roles and sexual purity with particular racist prescriptions that include White supremacist values and goals (McRae 2018, 5). As a result, they advance nationalist narratives that suggest that Whiteness is under threat and encourage their female followers to take on the role of defending the ‘White family’. The threat to Whiteness is noted by Leidig to be feminism, modern gender roles and immigration (Leidig 2020, 100). TradWives have thus utilised motherhood to advance the goal of defending the White nation by advocating for women to have several children to support the White race. As a result, the adverse and racist sentiments found within these movements are hidden by the presentation of hyper-femininity and prosperity that fit into patriarchal and heteronormative hierarchies of race, gender and class.

The promotion of an aesthetically pleasing lifestyle visible through posted content allows TradWives to advocate for a Western idealised representation of femininity achieved through the practice of female submission, White nationalism and parochial moral traditionalism. This is iterated through their discourse that deems globalisation and feminism as the cause of contemporary social decline. Like many other women of the far-right (see chapter 3), traditional wives weaponize what they deem the 'failures of feminism'. It is often claimed that "feminism has failed white women, robbing [them] of the opportunity to have a male provider, a happy family, and a nice home." (Love 2020, 2). This argument reinforces the pre-feminist conception of the private and public sphere whilst simultaneously reproducing the narrative of the supposedly 'necessary' role of the patriarch in the private sphere. TradWives thus present a complex case of subservience and agency. These women believe they are gaining a perverse sense of agency through their alignment, subservience and celebration of misogynistic, patriarchal values that directly devalue their capabilities beyond assigned gender roles. Moreover, this lifestyle is advocated for as a way to not only defend race and Western tradition but also a guide to their freedom away from the current neoliberal, capitalist society. Although they may reject feminism and antagonise how it has changed Western society, in a similar manner to this movement, TradWives are attempting to gain a type of social freedom and agency.

4.2. ShieldMaidens

The term 'shieldmaiden' is relatively recent. However, scholar of communication Ashley A. Mattheis used her journal article "ShieldMaidens of Whiteness: (Alt)Maternalism and Women Recruiting for the Far/Alt-Right" to develop a critical framework that guides this far-right

archetype (Mattheis 2018, 136). Women in the far-right have to actively navigate gender dynamics in the various movements, particularly considering that in the majority of these spaces, they are regarded as secondary beings or an *Other*. Moreover, Blee in her article "Do White Supremacist Women Adopt Movement Archetypes of Mother, Whore, and Fighter?" notes that often there is an imbalance between how the (majority male) group ascribes the roles of women in the movement in comparison to how they ascribe themselves and their roles (Blee 2020, 421). Mattheis, in developing her framework, consequently notes that this is especially true for women who identify themselves or may be identified as ShieldMaidens considering they must balance their 'natural' gender submission with the desire to protect their White communities (Mattheis 2018, 137). As a result, Mattheis concludes that the discourse used by this demographic finds balance in this contradiction through:

> "1) rooting women's power in a framework of gendered complementarity; 2) women's roles as homemakers and "life givers" of the Euro/white future, what I refer to as "alt-maternalism"; and 3) white men's ultimate romantic gesture to white women, the building and defense of Western Civilization" (Mattheis 2018, 138)

Despite both ShieldMaidens and TradWives ascribing to a similar White nationalist and heteronormative gender discourse, ShieldMaidens are not considered synonymous with the latter demographic due to their actions in the movement and their Norse symbolism. Firstly, ShieldMaidens do not typically present a similar narrative to that of TradWives. Instead, ShieldMaidens rely heavily on Norse mythology to validate the former framework described by Mattheis. A critical example of this is their reliance on this mythology to call for gender complementary, whilst ensuring "every call for women's action is paired with a marker or reminder of women's "true" place. This is where Norse mythology becomes an essential factor in

her arguments, particularly the figure of the shield maiden" (Mattheis 2018, 139). Secondly, the 'allowed' actions of ShieldMaidens are very different from TradWives, particularly considering that they can maintain key speaker roles and participate in recruitment. As a result, ShieldMaidens can act as *thinkers* (see chapter three) who can shape and decide on the discourse shared in their communities.

4.3. Case Studies: Ayla Stewart and Lana Lokteff

For this thesis, I chose to focus on two case studies, each representing one of the two roles I wanted to analyse. When considering which recent far-right actors to examine, I was looking for them to meet two sets of criteria: have an influential online media presence and have a significant amount of discourse publicly available online. These criteria were met by both actors, Lana Lokteff and Ayla Stewart. It is important to note that Stewart is not currently active online (since June 8, 2023), which I presume is due to the heavy backlash she received as a result of her politics. She did not announce her departure and her blog still states that she does plan on uploading more content, including her previously deleted blogs, in the future. I chose to continue to centre my focus on Stewart due to her heavy influence on early TradWife culture (since 2010) and since the majority of her content is still archived online. Lokteff on the other hand continues to maintain a heavy presence online and remains as influential as ever. For this section, I will first provide further context on Stewart and then following this I will discuss the case of Lokteff.

Stewart began her documented TradWife journey in 2010 using the pseudonym "Wife with a Purpose" (Proctor 2022, 8). She identifies herself as a Mormon mother of six children

who began her blog in October 2015 and continued it until February 2019 (Gawronski 2019, 8). Notably, however, she continued to use various other forms of social media, including Gab, Instagram and AltRight.com following the closure of her blog. Stewart has consistently identified herself as maintaining “alt-right” or “far-right” beliefs, which were particularly represented through her willingness and plan to participate in the “Unite the Right” White supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017. Additionally, this was noted in her early October 2018 blog tagline stating her content as “an online forum which brings together people interested in God’s plan for happy families and wives dedicated to traditional homemaking. It also serves youth interested in an alternative to feminism and liberal ideology.” (Proctor 2022, 11). Stewart claims she was an educated feminist, achieving both her bachelor's and masters, who saw the negative light in which feminist scholars viewed motherhood (Stewart 2015). More specifically, Stewart critiqued her academic peers as rejecting the natural importance of female biological gender roles as mothers. As a result, her belief and complicity in traditionalism and hegemonic masculinity were paired with her separation from her previously-held feminist beliefs. Once she began vlogging, she maintained an increasingly influential position, acting as an influencer who recruited and encouraged women to celebrate far-right patriarchal values that reinforced hegemonic masculinity and White femininity and called for further gender traditionalism. Stewart’s relevance and uniqueness present a strong case study for analysis, particularly due to her content’s emphasis on the importance of White patriarchal dominance, traditional gender roles and racial purity.

Lokteff has been noted as “the most prominent woman in the Alt-Right” (Mattheis 2018, 129). Maintaining a large platform on the far-right podcast and news source Red Ice TV, whilst

also being the only female speaker to be invited to the Identitarian Ideas IX Conference, Lokteff has a large mixed-gendered following. Author Seyward Darby noted in 2017 that Lokteff attracted more than 30,000 followers to her videos, podcasts and posts (Darby 2020). Moreover, according to the Extremist Monitoring Analysis Network (EMAN), her podcast platform, formed with her husband Henrik Palmgren, has over 330,000 subscribers as of October 31, 2023 (EMAN 2023). This ShieldMaiden is consistently noted to be a far-right White supremacist due to the ethnonationalist, populist and anti-Semitic content found within her array of platforms. Despite being born in Russia, the EMAN states that "Lokteff firmly believes that she is a "true refugee" while others are just fleeing poverty, and that diversity was forced into communities as an act of hate and that the US "can never, ever, ever be too white" (EMAN 2023). Although her content will be further explored in the following chapters of this thesis, Lokteff is a critical case of a ShieldMaiden and has identified herself heavily with Norse mythology to validate her violent political perspectives and ideology. Furthermore, her influence on the contemporary discourse of the New Right and far-right is critical to understanding how women normalise harmful, White supremacist, populist and traditional right-wing theory in the public sphere.

Chapter Five

Methodologies and Theory

5. Methodology

As will be further explored in Chapter 7 of this thesis, extremist and far-right groups have strongly exploited online spaces to mobilise engagement and recruit potential participants. Media scholars Valentine Crosset and Samuel Tanner in "Researching far right groups on Twitter: Methodological challenges 2.0" note that the online sphere once being seen as an "open and borderless space" which allows various far-right groups have recognized its potential through using it to platform themselves (Crosset et al. 2019, 940). This is done by weaponizing and exploiting new technologies which both directly and indirectly affect offline political processes in the West (Crosset et al. 2019, 940). Considering the relevance of far-right participatory culture online, it was clear that this thesis would best identify the normalisation of far-right theoretical discourse through a critical discourse analysis of TradWife and ShieldMaiden case studies. Throughout this chapter, I will first expand on the rationale behind my choice of the qualitative discourse analysis method. Following this, I will demonstrate my codebook and describe how I used both qualitative inductive and deductive methods to code the case studies' data. Finally, I plan on briefly outlining the theoretical authors and their books which informed and helped me create the codebook I applied to the data.

According to authors Thao Le and Megan Short, critical discourse analysis as a methodology "is fundamentally critical social research aimed at better understanding how societies work and produce both beneficial and detrimental effects, and particularly how to end

or mitigate detrimental effects" (Le and Short 2009, 4). On a similar note, researcher Teun A. van Dijk defines this methodology as "discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (Van Dijk 2015, 466). This form of qualitative analysis is consequently an effective way of analysing far-right content as it allows for a focus on the dynamics of knowledge, ideology and power presented through the cases of extremist online discourse. As a result, critical discourse analysis is a popular method of analysing the far-right movement's communication online (see Colley and Moore 2022; Brown and Mondon 2021; Kryzanowski 2020). Due to the relevance and effectiveness of this methodology, it was clear that critical discourse analysis would allow for this thesis to demonstrate that the radicalization of women online has functioned to de-marginalize far-right-wing rhetoric socially and politically, while creating an alternative counterculture space for extremism and anti-feminist discourse consistent with far-right theories. These trends are visible in two currently existing organisations: TradWives and ShieldMaidens.

In order to evaluate the relationship between far-right theory and women's discourse online, I utilised an inductive and deductive critical discourse analysis approach. Importantly, I coded all the transcripts and literature for this thesis using the software available on MAXQDA. Firstly, I began by identifying three different authors whose literature reflected a theoretical framework for sects of the far-right movements. These authors are Patrick Buchanan, Jared Taylor and Guillaume Faye. The latter part of this chapter will further explore their work and why I defined them as far-right theorists. Using a key piece of literature from each author, I inductively analysed 822 pages of written extremist discourse. This analysis resulted in three

different coding themes which I then applied deductively to the online discourse of my two case studies, Lana Lokteff and Ayla Stewart. This discourse was derived from several online websites, notably Internet Archive, BitChute, AltCensored, YouTube and RedIce TV. In total, I analysed 139 minutes of data, which resulted in 8 transcripts, which were transcribed using the service provided by Rev.com. The findings from the critical discourse analysis of Lokteff and Stewart's transcripts is further explored in the next chapter. This chapter will begin by presenting the theoretical framework used in my analysis, followed by a discussion on the theorists and their works analysed. Finally, it will detail my inductive coding process and the definitions of the codes derived from the theoretical literature.

5.1. Theoretical Framework

When I originally began building this project, the most difficult aspect was settling on a theoretical framework. When studying the far-right as a feminist, it can feel as though there is an abundance of theories to work with. As I began writing my thesis, I believed that I had settled on using feminist theories of intersectionality and gender constructivism. And yet, as I coded for this thesis, it became abundantly clear that these theories did not adequately represent how I was analysing the case studies and the works of far-right male intellectuals. Instead, I realised I was applying feminist affect theory.

According to scholars Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, affect can be best summarised as the following:

> Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 2).

In lay terms, affect is our collective and individual physical and emotional feelings. It is to affect and be affected, thus "two sides of the same dynamic shift, or change, in the body" (Anderson 2006, 735). Situating itself within lived experiences of emotions, bodily sensations and feeling, affect as a theory is in interplay with phenomenologies of embodiment (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 6). It is a theory that is often undertaken by queer, disabled, feminist and subaltern theorists who evaluate the biopolitics of normativity in everyday life (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 7). Affect is thus a theory that questions the hierarchy of thought and reason by forcing others to recognize the socio-political role of feeling in the distribution and reproduction of power. Moreover, according to theorist Sara Ahmed's book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, affect theory through a feminist lens recognizes that "emotionality as a claim *about* a subject or collective is clearly dependent on relations of power, which endow 'others' with meaning and value" (Ahmed 2014, 4). An important aspect of feminist affect theory is the sociality of emotion. That is that feeling is shaped by that that comes in and that that moves outwards, while also being impacted by histories of affect that shape contemporary impressions (Ahmed 2014, 8). This results in economies of affect that are shaped and reshaped by conditions of subordination and normative social forms of power.

In Paula Ioanide's book *The Emotional Politics of Racism*, the author asserts that socially shared affect and emotions play a central role in reproduction of racially and sexually

discriminatory systems (Ioanide 2015, 2). She goes further to state that "[t]hey give people's psychic realities and ideological convictions (however fictional or unfounded) their sense of realness", impacting their conceptions of their individual and collective identities (Ioanide 2015, 2). Considering the reproduction of historical affects of White cultural dominance in the Global North, affect becomes a necessary framework of analysis when researching the far-right. As will be explored further in chapter 6, the affective economies of race, class, gender and nationalism actively shape the culture that has been created online and in the public sphere by far-right women. As a result, as I coded the intellectual work of far-right theorists and later, the discourse of far-right women online, feminist affect theory became a framework that I naturally applied.

5.2. The Theorists of the Right

5.2.1. Patrick Buchanan's *Death of the West*

Patrick (Pat) Buchanan began his political and intellectual career as an editorial journalist (Jamin 2022, 47). This would rapidly evolve into a political career as an influential staff member of the presidents Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan administrations and a multiple-time candidate for President of the United States (Jamin 2014, 90). As noted in Chapter 3 of the book *Contemporary Far-Right Thinkers and the Future of Liberal Democracy*, Buchanan's political positionality is debated among scholars, particularly due to his extensive history with the Republican party and his harmful positions on immigrants, the LGBTQ+ community and secularists (Jamin 2022, 48). Buchanan has been analysed through several right-wing lenses, positioning him as a traditionalist conservative, a conservative populist and a founding figure of

paleo-conservative thought (Drolet 2020, 36). Notably, however, many books that discuss the origins and contemporary theory of the far-right name Buchanan as a primary thinker (Bloodworth 2023; Jamin 2022; Davis 2018; Sedgwick 2019; Ashbee 2000). His political ideological ties become further obscured within the debate on whether paleoconservatism should be understood as a far-right sect. Political scientist Jérôme Jamin positions Buchanan as a far-right thinker due to his prevalence in three common themes in his work: inequality, nationalism and radicalism (Jamin 2022, 53). These are exhibited through his views that racial and gender inequality are a threat to the US identity and its traditions. Furthermore, his radicalism can be summarised within his glorification of a "predominantly white and Christian America" and his pervasive support of radical anti-immigration nativist networks in the United States" (Jamin 2022, 57). As a result, I situated Buchanan as an intellectual far-right theorist.

Buchanan's book *Death of the West*, published in 2001, is a clear example of far-right ethnonationalist rhetoric that expresses itself through colonial nativism and protectionism. In this title, the author situates contemporary rates of immigration, state secularism and left progressive policy as detrimental to the US nation. In his own words, he notes the threats to the West as the "Third World immigrant invasions, the dying out of European peoples, the menace of multiculturalism, [and] the rise of a world social superstate" (Buchanan 2002, 269). Moreover, he often lays blame for the contemporary socio-political environment on feminists, individuals from the LGBTQ+ community and racialized individuals. This allows him to justify his violent ideas of a White nation state rid of these communities through arguing for a return to a White supremacist civilization. Overall, it is argued that White culture and land is not only at threat, but at this rate is declining to the point of inexistence.

Although Buchanan's fear within his written work seems to be derived from high rates of immigration and diversity, he actively preaches the Globalist theory, also known as the New World Order theory. According to the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, this far-right conspiracy theory argues that the 'elite' is implementing a totalitarian one-world government through manufactured pandemics (often linked to the COVID-19 pandemic) and surveillance and mind control technology (ISD 2022, 3). This conspiracy theory alongside the Global Replacement theory, which argues that White people are being replaced through declining birth rates and high immigrant rates of individuals from the Global South (Camus 2011), is used by Buchanan as a populist rhetorical device to create an affect of fear amongst the reader. Furthermore, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) noted that Buchanan asserts that "cultural differences between non-White immigrants and White Americans, which he believes threaten to alter the "character" of the United States"; that of which is repeatedly villanizes Islamic, Black and Hispanic communities (ADL n.d.). Nevertheless, the proposed solution on the part of Buchanan to the declining White nation is a return to traditional values based in the Christian faith, heteronormative family roles and ethnonationalist attitudes. Buchanan's book thus presents itself as a prejudiced solution to White sentiments of erasure, relative deprivation and loss of traditional value. As a result, he has acted as a far-right thinker that has actively shared and created hateful rhetoric with the public sphere.

5.2.2. Jared Taylor's *White Identity*

Unlike Buchanan, Jared Taylor's ties to the far-right are not debated among scholars. This the result of his explicit involvement with the *American Renaissance* (AR). The ADL details this journal as White supremacist journal that "promotes pseudoscientific studies that attempt to demonstrate the intellectual and cultural superiority of whites…" (ADL 2013, 1). The AR is published by the pseudo-scientific thinktank The New Century Foundation, founded by Taylor, which hosts regular conferences for, as described by the ADL, "academic racists from the U.S and abroad" (ADL 2014). Taylor self-describes himself as a 'race-realist' (ADL 2014). He routinely weaponizes harmful racial stereotypes to justify eugenic ideas that advance the belief that society should be segregated due to White superiority in intellect and culture. It is important to note that his views have been noted to be the "kinds of beliefs that led to slavery, the Jim Crow system of segregation, and the racial views of the Nazis" (Nieli 2019, 138). As a graduate from Yale (BA 1973) and the Paris Institute of Political Studies (MA 1976), Taylor has remained in the academic realm regularly using his various White supremacist platforms to spread his White identitarian views and hate speech (Nieli 2019, 137). As a result, he can undoubtedly be named as a far-right thinker and intellectual.

Taylor is rather unique compared to the other authors explored due to his repetitive use of social media to share his radical White supremacist views. Most recently, Taylor visited Arizona State University in August 2022, invited by the student group College Republicans United (Right Wing Watch 2022). However, he has also routinely appeared on podcasts to share his harmful views, one example being *The Political Cesspool*, a White supremacist radio show hosted by James Edwards (ADL 2014). Notably, his most recent appearance has been in 2023 on the far-right media platform RedIce TV, hosted by one of this project's case studies Lana Lokteff

and her husband Henrik Palmgren. Thus, this prevalence on social media amplifies the conclusion that Taylor acts as a far-right thinker who influences the current discourse of the various right-wing sects.

Taylor's book *White Identity*, published in 2011, is a true representation of his racist and violent views. Similar to Buchanan's work, this title weaponizes racial stereotypes of Asian, Black, and Hispanic communities to validate an eugenicist and White supremacist position. This position is that races should be segregated due to White superiority and the human's 'natural' inclination to exist in their racial communities. Taylor attempts to regularly validate his arguments in this book through the citation of pseudo-scientific academic studies which demonstrate a viewpoint that White culture and intellect is superior to that of other races. Moreover, *White Identity* equally uses the affect of fear to engage the audience in far-right thought. He states at the end of the book that race segregation and White supremacy are necessary to " regain a sense of identity and the resolve to maintain their numbers, their traditions, and their way of life—or face oblivion" (Taylor 2011, 295). In effect, Taylor's *White Identity* exists as a piece of written work that validates and reinforces the harmful discourse found in the realm of the far-right, equating Taylor to being an influential and pervasive far-right intellectual.

5.2.3. Guillaume Faye's *ArcheoFuturism*

Guillaume Faye (1949-2019) was a well-known and studied far-right thinker. Importantly, as noted when I described the far-right, this concept acts as an umbrella term to

several sects of extremist right-wing thought. Accordingly, Faye is often cited as a critical thinker of *La Nouvelle Droite* (The New Right). Briefly, *La Nouvelle Droite* is a far-right sect that is anti-egalitarianism and embraces a pan-European cultural imaginary that maintains the goal of protecting a homogenous identity of Whiteness. Scholar Tamir Bar-On notes that this movement's positions "are consistent with insights about the ideological framework of fascism" (Bar-On 2008, 328). Unlike the other two far-right intellectuals examined in this thesis, Faye is a distinctive case of far-right thought that focuses on what Bar-On notes as

> "a more revolutionary, fascist, spiritual, elitist, hierarchical European empire that longs for the golden age before the Enlightenment and its egalitarian principles 'destroyed' the European continent and its collective cultural heritage." (Bar-On 2008, 331)

Thus, Faye's thought does not solely focus on the United States, like that of Taylor and Buchanan, but often centres an imagined pan-Europe as having the potential to reinstate White supremacy and traditional norms of White heritage.

Importantly, Faye acted as an important influence on the work of Taylor (Maly 2023, 35). Both far-right intellectuals view(ed) the decline of civilization to be directly linked to the decline of White culture and populations, whilst also maintaining that a racial war is necessary and imminent. Faye was a critical thinker and intellectual for the far-right. Following his passing, he maintained a legacy as much of his work has had a transnational uptake, particularly as the far-right began to further utilise contemporary social media platforms to spread discourse and political messages (Maly 2023, 39). According to Stéphane François in the chapter "Guillaume Faye and Archeofuturism", Faye was a key figure in the "dissemination of nativist and Conservative Revolutionary themes, including the defence of cultural and biological identity,

European nationalism, anti-Americanism, antiliberalism, and the dismissal of immigration" (François 2019, 92). Furthermore, Faye's influence persisted after writing *Archeofuturism* in 1998 were he became an influential figure amongst the various radical right networks through the organisation of several conferences (François 2019, 94). Ultimately, despite his passing, Faye's thought continues to influence many contemporary far-right thinkers, influencers and movements.

It is important to note that Faye's political positionality changed throughout his intellectual career. Early on, in contrast to his far-right peers, Faye supported a pro-Arab conservative revolutionary thought (François 2019, 91). However, by the time Faye returned to the political sphere and wrote *Archeofuturism*, his perspective had drastically changed as he took a nativist discourse focused on the destruction of the Islamic, Arab world (François 2019, 96). This is heavily reflected in this title. In Faye's *Archeofuturism*, he makes three arguments. First, he argues that the current framework of society that is guided by modernity and egalitarianism "has reached its final peak and is threatened by the short-term prospect of a global cataclysm resulting from a convergence of catastrophes" (Faye 2011, 9). Secondly, Faye argues that the modern and egalitarian ideology that guides the modern world cannot maintain the diverse cultures globally, thus there is a necessity for humanity to adopt a non-humanistic, non-egalitarian archaic mindset to reinstate hierarchies based on White heritage and hegemonic heteronormative practices (Faye 2011, 9). Finally, Faye's last argument in this work is that following what he predicts will be a racial third world war, there must be a pre-planned "post-catastrophic world" that should follow the principles of *Archeofuturism*.

A critical aspect of *Archeofuturism* is developed within the idea that globalisation and cosmopolitanism have functioned to create "a weapon of ideological warfare against Europe [and North America]" (Faye 2011, 104). As a result, the guiding principles of Faye's theoretical work lies in the conservative reconstruction of eurocentrist and White supremacist values and institutional power. This is justified through the continued villainization of non-White immigrants and members of the LGBTQ+ community in the work of Faye. *Archeofuturism* thus calls for a "European project" that unites the nations of the Global North to reproduce a homogenous culture and institutions based in White, heteronormative ideals. As a result, this theoretical piece promotes ethnonationalist and nativist ideas that reject diversity, equity and promote eugenic practices visible in the Nazi regime. This leading to my conclusion, and the conclusion of several other scholars, that Faye's ideology promotes a violent threat to contemporary democracy that I will argue alongside the work of Buchanan and Taylor is prevalent within far-right women's discourse online. The various theories' prevalence leads to the harmful, White supremacist ideas being normalised in the public sphere.

5.3 The Inductive Development of the Code Book

As noted in the former section, using a critical analysis, I inductively coded the far-right theoretical literature published by Buchanan, Taylor and Faye. Throughout my inductive analysis, major key concepts were coded for including *'culture war', 'traditionalism', 'anti-equality', 'racial-grouping', 'anti-social welfare', 'claims of reverse racism', 'loss of imperial/global power', 'affective statements', 'irony', 'anti-LGBTQ2S+ sentiments', 'globalist theory', 'religion' 'anti-feminist/marxist sentiments', 'gender essentialism', 'anti-immigrant*

sentiments', 'relative deprivation', 'racist sentiments', 'White supremacy', and *'loss of culture/nationhood'*. These themes were derived through an inductive critical analysis of the books. The inductive process resulted in 853 codes found in all the aforementioned concepts. Following this process, the key concepts were reviewed and collated together to generate overarching themes that could be applied deductively to the data. This resulted in the following codes and definitions: *White ethnonationalism, hegemonic heteronormativity,* and *relative deprivation.* These overarching themes were present in all the books and were broad enough to be applied to the diverse discourse found in the case studies. Accordingly, the themes derived from far-right discourse were deductively coded for in the transcribed content of Ayla Stewart and Lana Lokteff. The results of this are presented in chapter 6. In the following subsections, brief information on the theorists is expanded on and the definitions of each overarching theme is presented.

5.4. Codebook Themes

5.4.1. White Ethnonationalism

As I coded the far-right theoretical literature, White ethnonationalism remained one of the most consistent concepts in the work of Buchanan, Taylor and Faye. This is not surprising when considering the role that nationalist sentiments play in the construction of collective identity. Nevertheless, ethnonationalism (or ethnic nationalism) is not unique to European societies or settler colonial regions. However in the case of the far-right, ethnonationalism is heavily defined through these regions, Whiteness and its relation to nationhood. Unlike civic nationalism, this

concept does not embrace universalism or the liberal notions of tolerance (Thompson 2021, 34). Instead, ethnonationalism draws stringent boundaries around who belongs to the nation. These boundaries are determined by characteristics such as ancestry, shared customs and traditions, birthplace, and language (Thompson 2021, 34). These ethnic boundaries are particularly pertinent considering they are "delineated by the members of the group itself, and an external boundary determined by those outside the group" (Kaplan 2020, 146). In the chapter "The Five Pillars of Trump's White Ethno Nationalist Appeal" by scholar David H. Kaplan, it is importantly noted that the cultural identity constructed through these boundaries insist that the nation and the land have an "impermeable cultural identity" and those deemed out of this identity must assimilate, leave or accept fewer rights as a result (Kaplan 2020, 146). Accordingly, the practice of ethnonationalism in the discourse of the far-right often manifests itself through statements in favour of anti-immigration.

In the ethnonationalist discourse of the far-right, Whiteness plays a significant role in determining who is within and outside the boundaries of the nation. Many scholars contextualise White ethnonationalism through the settler colonial history of the United States (Kaplan 2020; Thompson 2021; Solomon 2021). This is especially necessary considering the role the country has played in constructing the ideological imaginary of Whiteness. This has been further explored in chapter 3 of this thesis. Importantly, when discussing the role of Whiteness in far-right ethnonationalism, the paradigms of native *ethnos* must be explored. Michael Feola in "'You Will Not Replace Us': The Melancholic Nationalism of Whiteness", explains the rise in native *ethnos* as stemming from "an age where national borders seem unable to stop the flow of migration or the dematerialized operations of capital" (Feola 2021, 530). The affect of a

perceived deterioration of the national borders reinforces a traditional *ethnos* that is composed based on who is considered the “genuine” people (Feola 2021, 530). In this case, nativist perceptions of “the people" are defined with the mutable boundaries of Whiteness. Using this information, White ethnonationalism in the context of this thesis is defined as the following: The politicisation and mobilisation of ethnic identities, that are conceptualised within the fluctuating boundaries of Whiteness, with the goal of fueling a collective response rooted in White supremacy to perceived group threats situated in ethnic diversity. This definition was coded in association with related concepts that exist within or are affects heightened by White ethnonationalism. These concepts are nativism, racial stereotypes, anti-immigration sentiments and Indigenous erasure.

5.4.2. Hegemonic Heteronormativity

As exemplified throughout much of this thesis, perceptions of gender, sexuality and reproduction are a necessary aspect of the far-right to analyse. This was further prevalent as I coded the work of Buchanan, Taylor and Faye; all of which had a significant amount to say on gender politics. More specifically, all authors reiterated a need for enforced boundaries on gender and sexual expression. These boundaries entailed traditional gender roles that reinforced a binary of male and female, as well as heterosexual practices. Importantly, they also argued for a return to the nuclear family structure, dividing the reproductive and productive labour roles to the traditional notions of the male provider and the homemaker mother. This fits well within the concept of hegemonic heteronormativity.

According to feminist scholar Linda Peake, “heteronormativity [is] an ideology whereby heterosexuality is naturalised and seen as a fixed and stable sexual identity” (Peake 2016, 81). Moreover, heteronormativity entails three overlapping binary composites: gender binary, sexual binary and family binary (Oswald et al. 2005, 145). Each naturalises itself within a pervasive system that privileges cisgender bodies, heterosexuality and the nuclear family. The naturalisation of gender, sexuality and family binaries within the public and private spheres has quite literal consequences. That is reinforcing a gender and sexual hierarchy that suppresses bodies that do not fit into normative constructions of identity. In fundamental relation to heteronormativity, hegemony is the political, social, institutional and structural power and dominance of one or more groups and identities over others. Hegemonic heteronormativity thus suggests that heterosexual and cisgender identities are the institutional and social norm permeating individual relationships and determining the acceptance of individuals into White society. This further influences what is deemed to be acceptable behaviour. However, in a similar fashion to White ethnonationalism, the boundaries of ‘acceptable’ are consistently changing to fit the narratives of the settler colonial state.

Consequently, for this thesis, hegemonic heteronormativity is defined as: The political, social, institutional and structural power and dominance of heterosexual, cisgender identities and relationships. This definition was coded in association with related concepts that exist within or are affects heightened by hegemonic heterosexuality. These concepts are gender essentialism, anti-feminism, and homophobia.

5.4.3. Relative Deprivation

Relative deprivation was a significant theme that emerged from coding the theory of Buchanan, Taylor and Faye. It can manifest itself as individual relative deprivation (IRD) or group relative deprivation (GRD). Due to the context of this thesis, it will be understood through a GRD lens (Lüders et al. 2021, 509). GRD states that "people do not make judgements of fairness in absolute terms in the social context but by their perception of how they are treated and what they are entitled to in comparison to other people or groups" (Lüders et al. 2021, 509). Perceptions of deprivation related to social community function in coherence with populist sentiments that are routinely identified in far-right discourse. A clear example of this has been seen within the Trump presidential campaign in the United States and the support gathered in favour of Brexit.

Nostalgia and emotion plays a central role in the populist discourse of GRD. In Peter Luca Versteegen's article "Those were the what? Contents of nostalgia, relative deprivation and radical right support", he importantly argues that:

> "[N]ostalgia creates an ambitious reference to which some individuals think society's present cannot live up to, even if it does in objective terms. In turn, individuals react to this temporal relative deprivation by supporting parties that pledge to restore the favourable past, such as the radical right." (Versteegen 2024, 260)

Consequently, nostalgia in the case of the far-right is heighterned through its advocacy for traditional norms of White heritage. Accordingly, the affect of White fear plays a large role in sentiments of relative deprivation. This fear is reiterated in both the fear of losing contemporary privileges and losing past culture practices, despite how harmful they once were. Embodied

sentiments of GRD function to both recruit and mobilise for the far-right, that of which was especially prevalent in the theories of Buchanan, Taylor and Faye. As noted above, all authors situated their arguments in the Great Replacement and Globalist theories that advocate the myth of the elite planning the global replacement of White bodies and culture with that of its non-White counterparts. This functions to create an affect of current and future loss of community and villanizes immigration, state governments and global governmental organisations. In effect, relative deprivation is defined as: the belief that a racial group is being deprived of past and current, social, culture and racial privileges, and as a result, had less privilege in comparison to another racial group. This definition was coded in association with related concepts that exist within or are affects heightened by relative deprivation. These concepts are the Globalist theory, and Great Replacement theory.

Chapter Six

Research Findings and Implications

6. Findings

As noted above in chapter 5, I identified three overarching themes through inductively coding the work of far-right theorists Guillaume Faye, Patrick Buchanan and Jared Taylor. Following the code's identification, I applied the three overarching themes, with their related concepts, to the transcribed discourse of Lana Lokteff and Ayla Stewart. This chapter will first present the findings derived from the deductive coding process. Following this, the implications derived through critical discourse analysis of the findings will be explored in the latter subsection (6.4) of this chapter. The implications of the findings will be further expanded on in relation to the normalisation of a far-right counterculture visible in the online sphere and normalised by women, notably TradWives and ShieldMaidens.

6.1. White Ethnonationalism

In the various transcriptions of discourse by Lana Lokteff and Ayla Stewart, White ethnonatonalism remained a prominent topic. Likewise to the work of Buchanan, Faye and Taylor, the women's discourse presented several nativist arguments. Much of these arguments were a result of fear used as an affect to engage the audience. Stewart stated:

> "I saw what was happening to ethnic Europeans or White people in our countries, both in America, Canada, Australia, but also in our homelands of Europe. Then, I began speaking out about that as well, to let people know they have the option of loving their ancestors and their heritage without shame and without guilt." (Stewart 2017)

The same sentiments were shared by Lokteff. In contrast, she often exhibited this fear through the affect of anger at contemporary egalitarian discourse which she felt failed to protect White civilization, instead condemning White heritage practices:

> "The most important and damaging reason for all White guilt. We are being programmed to hate ourselves, hate our ancestors, and feel shame for being who we are. We're told all White people are racist and that mythical White privilege and White supremacy is holding back world peace. All of these are disgusting, hateful lies, but they have done damage in the psyche of White people. Starting from a young age, we've been blasted with messages like this.White nuclear families uphold white supremacy, wanting to preserve your heritage and have children that look like you is racism and world war, so we should welcome and celebrate White people dying out. Celebrate our extinction from the face of the earth". (Lokteff 2021)

Both of these quotes coded from the transcripts of Stewart and Lokteff represent a sentiment that White culture is being eradicated by a perceived 'forced' White guilt. These sentiments fail to account or address the reality that Whiteness is not a culture, instead a constructed racial identity built to enforce racist hierarchies of power in the West. Nevertheless, both case studies maintain and seek an idealised ideologically imaginary of Whiteness which is represented well in the following statement by Stewart:

> " …always felt quite slighted as a young person, particularly being a white middle class American girl of a mixed European heritage. I wasn't just Irish or just German or just Swiss. I couldn't hold onto just the one. I kind of wanted a white culture and a white identity. But I was told over and over again, of course, that wasn't allowed." (Stewart 2015)

Hence, both case studies rely on an ideological fantasy that White culture is being threatened by feminism and immigration. For Stewart and Lokteff, White identity is intrinsically

linked to land. This is clear through Stewart's earlier quoted claim that the United States, Canada, Australia and Europe are all at threat of being taken away from the White population. She goes further to state that "[White civilization] deserve[s] a homeland. [It] deserve[s] a culture." (Stewart 2018). The threat to colonial notions of private property and racist constructions of Whiteness exist to justify White ethnonationalist discourse among Stewart and Lokteff. Equivalent perspectives are taken up by far-right male intellectuals. Taylor states:

> "Whites—but only whites—must never take pride in their own people. Only whites must pretend they do not prefer to associate with people like themselves. Only whites must pretend to be happy to give up their neighbourhoods, their institutions, and their country to people unlike themselves. Only whites must always act as individuals and never as members of a group that promotes shared interests". (Taylor 2011, 290)

A similar sentiment is taken on by Buchanan who states "Europeans have already accepted a twenty-second-century end to their civilization" (Buchanan 2001, 109). The positionalities presented by the far-right theorists and women of the far-right demonstrate a clear argument in favour of collective action against perceived threats to a White ethnic identity. However, this proposed ethnonationalist collective action manifests as support of anti-immigration policy and racial violence. Anti-immigration sentiments are dangerously held by Faye who argues "[t]he colonisation of the North by the South presents itself as a form of soft colonisation, one that is undeclared and hides behind appeals to solidarity, the right to asylum, and equality" (Faye 2011, 39). This suggests a common theme visible in the discourse of women in the far-right who deem egalitarian, pro-diversity discourse as the basis for White erasure. However, the women of the far-right do not only propose an end to immigrants as a solution to White ethnonationalist fear.

Advocacy for pro-life beliefs are visible in Stewart's Tradwife challenge in which she challenges her female audience to have more White children than she does as a mother of six. Lokteff additionally encourages women to take on gender essentialist roles in order to preserve White culture as she asserts that "we need to encourage white women not only for the preservation of our culture and our race, but for their own health and their mental health and their physical health" (Lokteff 2015). Buchanan reinforces similar gender essential narratives by stating that

> "By freeing husbands, wives, and children of family responsibilities, European socialists have eliminated the need for families. Consequently, families have begun to disappear. When they are gone, Europe goes with them."(Buchanan 2001, 13)

Buchanan takes a strict anti-abortion stance in relation to the far-right belief that women must reproduce to maintain White superiority. He states that abortion "represents [an] autogenocide for peoples of European ancestry and anend of their nations (Buchanan 2001, 24).Unsurprisingly, the regulation of women's reproductive abilities is inherently tied to hegemonic heteronormativity. Thus, demonstrating that the overarching themes inductively coded from the various theoretical works tend to overlap with the goal of reinstating White supremacy. Nevertheless, it is clear that Lokteff and Stewart discuss White ethnonationalist themes in relation to the theory relayed by Buchanan, Taylor and Faye.

6.2. Hegemonic Heteronormativity

As noted in the previous chapter, all far-right intellectuals studied in this thesis upheld hegemonic heteronormative views that reinforced the traditional concept of the nuclear family

with male superiority being attributed to their gender normative roles of ‘the provider’. In *Archeofuturism*, Faye states:

> “White males’ must be penalised so that others may find a place in the sun: but doesn’t this very idea entail that ‘White males’ are intrinsically superior? Hence, this alleged superman must by discriminated against by authority in order to make way for ‘others’.” (Faye 2011, 77)

Faye’s harmful statement evokes similar values of gender essentialism and male supremacy that are preached by Lokteff and Stewart. Both women often place blame on the decline of male gender norms as the cause of what they believe to be Western society’s collapse. In a similar vein to Faye’s statement, Stewart asserts that

> “We have these feminised men, these men completely stripped of their masculinity, these emasculated men, and we have women and they are dominating our culture right now. They're dominating our society and they're dominating our politics both in America and Europe.” (Stewart 2017)

The statements above suggest that White males are biologically responsible for the well-being and defence of Western society. The reinstatement of their traditional gender roles and behaviours, according to far-right theorists and the case studies, is implied to be the necessary step in returning North American and European civilizations to a White supremacist nation. However, it is critical to note that non-White and non-gender conforming individuals, as well as feminists, are seen as the cause of the ‘stripping’ of ‘true’ masculinity from society. Feminist, queer and egalitarian influence on social policy in the Global North is often framed in theoretical and online discourse as the catalyst for the destruction of White society.

Much of the analysed discourse often associates the decline of society to the contemporary societal acceptance of queerness and feminism. Routinely in both theory and women's discourse, trans and homosexual identities were spoken as though they were sexual deviants. Homophobic attitudes situate themselves well within the discourse of far-right women, particularly the archetype of TradWives, as they are outside the heteronormative nuclear family model. Lokteff demonstrates this point when referencing trans individuals by stating "I think that's satanic. I think that's a satanic transhumanist agenda to just attack your biology basically" (Lokteff 2015). Similar sentiments were also argued by Buchanan: "Nowhere is the overthrow of the old moral order more evident thanin how homosexuality is seen today, and yesterday" (Buchanan 2001, 44). Thus, homosexuality and transgender bodies are described by far-right male intellectuals and far-right women as disruptive to societal norms that are based within White conceptions of gender. Furthermore, queerness acts as a barrier to the female reproductive demands of far-right movements. More specifically, I am referring to the prominent argument explored earlier that biological White women must reproduce to counter the 'replacement' of White culture and the White population. This plays in part with the heavy focus in theory and in women's online discourse that feminism has stripped women of the responsibility to bear children.

There is a recurrent theme of blaming the 'second' and 'third' wave feminism for the separation of women from the private sphere. Stewart states "[w]e did not need certainly second, third wave feminism… And first wave is debatable" (Stewart 2015). Further context behind the quote suggests that she is blaming the 'waves' of feminism for the elimination of masculine power; in which she argues that each wave of feminism garnered further power away from men,

leading to a complete abolition of male privilege. Moreover, Stewart is not inattentive to what each wave represents considering her formal education in liberal gender studies. This suggests that Stewart also villainizes the supposed intersectional feminism of the 'third' wave. In her video "What I Believed when I was a Leftist", Stewart frames Indigenous and Black feminisms as movements that target White males and society (Stewart 2017).

The blame of the destruction of White society due to anti-racist policy and discourse is not solely seen in the discourse of Stewart. It is also prevalent in Taylor's *White Identity*. He argues that:

> Whites have gone to extraordinary lengths to advance the interests of minorities, to respect their cultures, to protect their sensibilities—and to what effect? How many minorities have ever shown gratitude for racial preferences, for public celebrations of their histories and cultures, for immigration and refugee policies that lifted them from misery? Instead, they resent America, and complain that whites never do enough. (Taylor 2011, 294).

The exemption of racialized and gender non-conforming bodies in the state reaffirms the hegemonically White heteronormative culture that the far-right seeks to reproduce. Consequently, the theme of hegemonic heteronormativity visible in the work of Faye, Buchanan and Taylor is prevalent among the discourse of TradWives and ShieldMaidens. Furthermore, Taylor's quote connects the themes of White ethnonationalism and hegemonic heteronormativity to sentiments of relative deprivation visible in these different discourses.

6.3. Relative Deprivation

In comparison to the themes presented above, relative deprivation remains a consistent theme among the far-right thinkers and far-right women. However, it is specifically amplified by the affect and reproduction of White ethnonationalism and hegemonic heteronormativity. Moreover, in a similar fashion to the other themes, it is intertwined with a White supremacy, yet relative deprivation does not exclusively express itself as a result of White supremacy. As a result, the theme of relative deprivation in this context is directly related to the goals of recruitment and mobilisation weaponized by the far-right movements to create an affect of fear and loss. This will be further explored in the following subsection.

Taylor states “As whites cease to be the mainstream, their interests become less important” (Taylor 2011, 254). This statement, and arguably the entire book itself, largely represent the main source of deprivation that far-right theorists and women use to engage their audiences. Lokteff makes a similar argument when discussing White immigration in comparison to non-White immigration through the statement that “it really struck [me] how hard white people from white countries have to work to get in here, even if they're scientists, doctors, lawyers, even if they have something really great to contribute to our society” (Lokteff 2015). The argument here being that White populations are losing social privileges due to racial oppression. Despite this clearly not being the case, far-right women and far-right thinkers have avidly evoked conspiracy theories that support a conclusion that White populations are being attacked and eradicated.

Conspiracy theories are critical to statements of racial relative deprivation as they provide a validation for ideological fantasies where violence and anger need to be justified. To further

expand on this, in the practice of far-right thought, violence is always targeted towards racialized and queer individuals. Conspiracy theories that invoke a sense of relative deprivation and fear of loss act as a justification for such violence. The Globalist theory and the Great Replacement work hand-in-hand to amplify White fear. Faye uses the Globalist theory to validate his argument that White culture and nationhood are being destroyed. He states:

> "Modernity consists of nothing but repetition, parroting, conservatism (of forms as well as values), and scholasticism, all under the guise of innovation and trendiness. A gap is growing between the ruling ideology, which repeats humanist dogmas, and the technological, scientific and demographic realities which follow in the mode of urgency. The situation is growing increasingly unstable and signals impending catastrophe". (Faye 2011, 74)

The perpetuation of blaming egalitarian discourse led by the 'elites' is visible in the theoretical writings of Buchanan and Taylor, as well as the online discourse shared to the public through the platforms of Lokteff and Stewart.

Using the platform of RedIce TV, Lokteff actively employs these conspiracy theories to gain viewerships and share sentiments of relative deprivation. Lokteff determines the replacement of White culture to be the consequence of an "act of occult or the state of being occulted, considering the various anti-white policies and act of plotting, which is conspiracy against European people. It's clear there's an organised hidden network of those warring against us" (Lokteff 2015). Stewart shares similar arguments through her statement that

> "these are scary times when if you are an ethnic European person, if you are a white person, if you are a Christian, because don't think they're going to stop with white people,

> don't think they're going to stop because the next thing they're going to do is come for the mixed race people." (Stewart 2017)

Thus, the role of conspiracy theories is critical in creating affective atmospheres of relative deprivation related to an imagined loss of social privilege based on race and egalitarian discourse.

Ultimately, the prevalence of conspiracy theories to validate relative deprivation, White ethnonationalist sentiments and reproductive of hegemonic heteronormativity in both theoretical writing and the online discourse of Lokteff and Stewart demonstrates a clear conclusion that there is an overlap of content in these supposedly separate spheres. As a result, it is evident that far-right women, particularly the archetypes of TradWives and ShieldMaidens maintained by Stewart and Lokteff, reiterate the knowledge produced by far-right male intellectuals. Thus, there is an intimate connection between the differing types of discourse, despite how they are shared and where they are presented. This suggests that far-right women's reiteration of far-right intellectual thought through their online platforms can function to normalise it within the public sphere.

6.4. Implications and Discussion

The findings presented in the earlier part of this chapter demonstrate that there are several intimate connections between far-right women's discourse online and the work of theoretical far-right thinkers. These act as a critical source of normalisation of far-right theory when taking into account the platform that TradWives and ShieldMaidens can have online. More specifically,

through the reiteration of far-right theory online, these women of the far-right play a critical role in sharing this violent knowledge with the public and making it consumable through affect and stories. This chapter aims to explore the role of affect and stories that have been used as a tool among far-right women to shape perceptions and acceptance of far-right male intellectual rhetoric.

6.4.1. The Role of Affect in Normalisation

Affect has been central to a variety of political discourses and movements. Affect has played and continues to take on a significant role in the creation and reproduction of contemporary Western neoliberal democracies (Bangstad et al. 2019, 99). Nevertheless, in the context of the far-right, affect routinely mobilises populist, White supremacist discourse through the portrayal of collective endangerment. As was repeatedly highlighted in the findings section of this chapter, the practice of hegemonic heteronormative roles and the sentiments of White ethnonationalism are directly attributed to emotions of replacement. This functions to engage the audience of TradWives and ShieldMaidens and create an affective economy of endangerment rooted in fear. However, it is important to note that fear is not the only motivating emotion in affective economics. Women of the far-right, particularly TradWive online influencers, actively create spaces of joy and sadness to recruit and mobilise their online communities. In the chapter "The Uncanny Political Involvement of Technologies", scholars Melody Devries, Judith Bessant and Rob Watts note that the affective economies of far-right social media communities draw individuals in through digital networks and infrastructures, resulting in violent mobilisation in defence of the familiar (Devries et al. 2021, 12). The familiar in this case being institutions that

reproduce and reinforce White supremacist cultural norms. Lokteff and Stewart routinely weaponized a sense of past familiarity, to engage their audiences. Notably, this was present in the work of Buchanan, Faye and Taylor as well. This results in the creation of affective economies that draw in support and normalise the ideas that are involved with these collective, populist feelings mobilised by women of the far right.

Leidig's recent publication *The Women of the Far Right* is critical in understanding the complexities of female far-right influencer engagement with their audiences. Leidig states that "perceptions of authenticity and accessibility serve as the most powerful tools of the modern far right" when referring to the utilisation of social media by women of the far-right who take on roles as exemplars and thinkers (Leidig 2023, 4). When applying an affective framework to this statement, it becomes clear that parasocial emotional bonds become essential in establishing a sense of community based in authenticity. Once these parasocial affects are ingrained within the audience, far-right women online can circulate far-right narratives, thus increasing the visibility of far-right theory within the public sphere. Furthermore, the affective notions of authenticity and accessibility create a practice of relatability within these online communities that Leidig states "cultivates [far-right women's] personal brands within online spaces and fosters a specific social and cultural identity that makes them immediately identifiable based on their political stances" (Leidig 2023, 6). Leidig also notes that there is often a creation of a fandom culture online for the TradWives and ShieldMaidens who take on roles as influencers with the goal of demarginalizing far-right thought (Leidig 2023, 6). This fandom culture is developed through the fact that a "part of their relatability stems from the unavoidable fact that the far right amplifies mainstream gender and sexuality norms, so what they say is a familiar refrain" (Leidig 2023, 216). Thus,

affect plays an important role in fostering a sense of community and authenticity within the online sphere.

Ultimately, when understanding affect and its role in engaging and recruiting supporters, it is clear that the relationship between the discourse of TradWives and ShieldMaidens and the work of far-right theorists demonstrates that far-right theories are becoming increasingly demarginalized. To expand on this further, social media grants a promise of accessibility, particularly when looking at case studies of open online communities, such as the platforms of Stewart and Lokteff. Far-right populism and nativist authoritarianism becomes further accessible through its collective approval throughout these women's platforms. As influencers, they also act as a voice of authority in what is and isn't in favour of the White nation, though this can be undermined by their gender identity. Thus, a counterculture to the contemporary Western liberal, egalitarian values is created to defend and reproduce a White ethnonationalist state envisioned by far-right theorists, like Buchanan, Taylor and Faye.

6.5. Conclusion

Each chapter in this thesis has been necessary in providing the groundwork for understanding how women of the far-right navigate their agency and roles in these hypermasculine movements, and how their participation is essential to the contemporary normalisations of the far-right. As a result, this thesis aimed to answer the research question: *how does women's participation in the far-right political movement demarginalize far-right theoretical discourse within the public sphere?* Through an identification of three overarching

themes, White ethnonationalism, hegemonic heterosexuality and relative deprivation, a clear link between far-right theory and the online discourse of far-right women was made evident. This was done with the goal of filling a critical gap in literature on women's participation in the far-right online that has to-date failed to address the relationship between far-right male intellectuals, TradWives and ShieldMaidens.

Following the recognition of the relationality between these different far-right entities, I analysed the impact of affect in the normalisation of far-right theory in the public sphere, led by TradWives and ShieldMaidens. Most importantly, I concluded that the use of affect allows for TradWives and ShieldMaidens, like Lokteff and Stewart, to engage their audience in an ideological fantasy that reproduces White nationhood and culture. However, this is rooted in White supremacist epistemologies that do not entail a return to the 'Golden Days' as often promised. The increase in this normalised discourse encourages political involvement that is guided by passion, rather than rationality; this resulting in a politics of cultural exclusiveness, bordering on eugenic practice, that enables oppression, discrimination and violence.

It is especially clear that normalising far-right discourse has broader consequences beyond what is shared in the online sphere. Infamous North American examples of real-life violence incited from normalised far-right discourse online include the Unite the Right Rally of 2017, the Capitol Attack in 2021 and the Freedom Convoy in 2022. Though, these are only examples that brought about a collective response, thus disregarding the numerous examples of individual violence against queer and/or racialized adults and youth that are prevalent due to the rise of far-right rhetoric in the public sphere. On a local level, far-right discourse that has

normalised anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes and racist behaviour has influenced public policy and the lives of many youth in Alberta. As I mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, a notable example of normalised far-right discourse is in the rhetoric of the Take Back Alberta movement. Its influence on a provincial government level has, as of April 2024, supported policy that disregards gender-affirming care and sex education and targeted academic freedoms (see proposed Bill 18). Moreover, this has resulted in the mobilisation of the anti-gender movement that has further heightened discrimination and violence against members of the LGBTQ+ community in Alberta. These examples are only a few examples of the role affect can play in demarginalizing harmful politics that cause exclusion and oppression within communities. It is my hope that further research can be done to address the increased polarisation that has been caused by various factors, including but not limited to the normalisation of far-right discourse online and in the public sphere.

6.5.1. Limitations of the Study and Future Research Suggestions

This study presented a significant amount of critical insights into far-right women's participation and agency in sharing and demarginalizing far-right theoretical discourse. However, when examining these movements, it can be difficult to analyse the totality of experiences within the far-right due to its positionality as an umbrella term for various sects; all of which maintain overlapping and diverse perspectives and goals. Even with an acknowledgement that this thesis focused on White far-right narrative, far-right movements and organisations remain ever-growing and changing, thus any analysis done within a short time period of a year cannot totally grasp the contemporary environment of the far-right.

As a result, despite my greatest efforts, this thesis cannot provide a large analysis of various far-right women and diverse far-right movements. Had I done this project in a large timeframe with funding, this may have been different. However, it is critical to note that regardless of the case studies, this qualitative research remains incredibly relevant contemporarily. This is not only due to the increasingly visible influence of far-right policy, parties and movements transnationally, instead it is because of the methodology developed. I hope that this methodology codebook can act as a guiding tool to future research that connects further case studies of women's participation in the far-right to other far-right male intellectuals, like Richard Spencer, Julius Evola, and many others.

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