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Eveline Gibson, Anastasia Veneti and Savvas Voutyras¹

‘Daughters of Europe’: The Psycho-Cultural Motivations of Young Women Joining Generation Identity

In the last few years, we have experienced a rise in the popularity of far-right movements, as well as their significant renewal. Often captured by the term ‘alt-right’, this renewal is evidenced in shifts in style, discourse, aesthetic, and membership composition. A notable such shift is the increased female membership, including the presence of young women in important roles and leadership positions in several of these movements, something that remains underexplored. This article aims to contribute to an understanding of the factors that attract young women to the contemporary far right by focusing on Generation Identity (GI), a group that has been active and influential in Europe. Drawing on psycho-cultural theory, we conduct discourse analysis of data from interviews with female GI members, GI social media, and other material related to the group, to uncover and understand the factors that are most important to young female ‘identitarians’.

Keywords: Generation Identity, Far Right, Alt-Right, Identitarianism, Women, Psycho-Cultural Theory

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INTRODUCTION

The alt-right is characterised by what James (2001: 24) calls “belligerent nationalism”: an amalgam of the far-right movement and traditional conservatism characterised by mistrust in government and an emphasis on identity. It is also represented by a changing, millennial demographic. Its presence has swelled in online spaces from chatrooms and social media pages to encrypted messaging platforms, contributing to its nebulous and transient qualities. Much of the alt-right position themselves away from the discourse and aesthetics of the traditional far right, such as explicit anti-Semitism and anti-black racism. They have adopted an ‘identitarian’ ideology, prioritising the promotion of ‘white identity’, i.e. European Christian heritage (Reid and Valasik, 2018). Previous research on the UK far right focused on working-class street movements (EDL, Britain First, PEGIDA), identifying key motivators and contexts behind their ideology (Winlow et al 2017; Bartlett and Littler

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2011). The decline of these movements – often a result of infighting, poor organisation, and low commitment – has also been discussed (Morrow and Meadowcroft 2018). The new, younger alt-right looks different. Whilst most of the extreme right is still characterised by loose organisation, some groups are working differently to avoid the same fate as the EDL. GI is one of the most successful amongst them.

The term ‘alt-right’ reached peak popularity in 2010, when far-right leader Richard Spencer launched ‘AlternativeRight.com’. In the interlocking spaces of the Internet, the phrase ‘alt-right’ was able to attach to a wide range of ideas, from traditionalist conservatives to Neo-Nazis. Concordant to this, identitarianism draws on ‘New Right’ theorist Guillaume Faye, and adopts a biological and territorial basis of identity strongly based in ideas of homeland and tradition (Willinger 2013, Generation Identity 2019). Identitarianism has grown quickly, enabled by the Internet and social media. They avoid anti-fascist laws designed to prevent neo-Nazism by rejecting Islam rather than Judaism, and adhering to the idea of protecting a ‘European identity’ rather than race (Cox, 2018). In 2012, Martin Sellner, formerly a Neo-Nazi, created the pan-European identitarian movement ‘Generation Identity’. In the same year, Richard Spencer closed ‘AlternativeRight.com’, stating his preference for identitarianism (Wendling, 2018). In 2012, Breitbart News was taken over by Steve Bannon, who welcomed the alt-right to the platform. Such developments, as well as the convergence with other parts of the right on key agendas – notably islamophobia (Pertwee 2020) – would give a mainstream boost to the alt-right, including GI.

GI would go from strength to strength, developing a strong social media presence. Their imagery and branding – a black and yellow ‘lambda rune’ – unites the various movements. Sellner quickly became a transatlantic ‘far right poster boy’ (Cox and Meisel, 2018) through his relationship with popular US blogger Brittany Pettibone and the co-creation of videos with famous Canadian white nationalist Lauren Southern. Such international collaborations between far-right figures is considered to have sped up the spread of alt-right ideology (Ebner in Dearden, 2017b). GI has attracted significant media attention in the past couple of years, with flashy media stunts, and larger-scale campaigns, such as chartering a boat to block migrants crossing the Mediterranean. GI can best be described as an ‘ethno-nationalist’ or ‘ethno-cultural’ identity movement, that seeks to protect an ideal of an ethnically and culturally white Europe, following ‘traditional’ values, normative gender roles, and strong anti-immigration stances (Dearden, 2017b). They deliberately appeal to educated young people and have a strong social media presence (Wilson, 2019). GI avoids overt references to biological racism, anti-Semitism, or fascism.

A core focus for identitarians, as with the alt-right, is resistance to the perceived ‘Great Replacement’ of white European cultures through immigration and declining white birth rates (Wendling, 2018). Moreover, they share many other characteristics, such as resistance to immigration, Islam, ‘political correctness’, and protection of European identity. However, a distinct feature of the identitarian movement is its direct appeal to a younger, and more mixed gender audience than the traditional far right (Bocci, 2017). There are estimations that up to 20% of the alt-right are women, and GI has been facilitating prominent positions of leadership for its female members (Dearden 2017a; Peled 2017). Therefore, the role of women is of great importance to reach a fuller understanding of the motivational forces driving the new generation of the alt-right.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The Context: Generation Identity and Alt-Right

The alt-right is characterised by what James (2001: 24) calls “belligerent nationalism”: an amalgam of the far-right movement and traditional conservatism characterised by mistrust in government and an emphasis on identity. It is also represented by a changing, millennial demographic. Its presence has swelled in online spaces from chatrooms and social media pages to encrypted messaging platforms, contributing to its nebulous and transient qualities. Much of the alt-right position themselves away from the discourse and aesthetics of the traditional far right, such as explicit anti-Semitism and anti-black racism. They have adopted an ‘identitarian’ ideology, prioritising the promotion of ‘white identity’, i.e. European Christian heritage (Reid and Valasik, 2018). Previous research on the UK far right focused on working-class street movements (EDL, Britain First, PEGIDA), identifying key motivators and contexts behind their ideology (Winlow et al 2017; Bartlett and Littler 2011). The decline of these movements – often a result of infighting, poor organisation, and low commitment – has also been discussed (Morrow and Meadowcroft 2018). The new, younger alt-right looks different. Whilst most of the extreme right is still characterised by loose organisation, some groups are working differently to avoid the same fate as the EDL. GI is one of the most successful amongst them.

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audience than the traditional far right (Bocci, 2017). There are estimations that up to 20% of the alt-right are women, and GI has been facilitating prominent positions of leadership for its female members (Dearden 2017a; Peled 2017). Therefore, the role of women is of great importance to reach a fuller understanding of the motivational forces driving the new generation of the alt-right.

The Dual role of Women in the Alt-Right

Historically, work focused on gendered aspects of fascist and Nazi women in the period 1920-45 and identified key motivations and roles for women in these movements. Berntson and Ault (2018: 1193) utilised an 'expanded interest-based model' of wider socio-psychological incentives for women joiners of the Nazi party in the 1920s. They found that participation motives were much more complex than previous economic-based models had suggested, involving familial and emotive rhetoric designed to appeal to women. The Nazi party at that time also focused heavily on incorporating single women into the workplace. They simultaneously appealed to the 'modern', emancipated woman, as well as those in normative roles – all of which was underpinned by a deeply nationalist discourse. Research on early 20th century reactionary movements on the other side of the Atlantic presents many key similarities. Most notably, through her interviews with members of women's organisations of the second Klan, who were active as early as the 1920s, Kathleen Blee (1991) showed that Klanswomen were maintaining a balance between reactionary (regarding race, religion, family) and progressive (regarding women's suffrage and legal rights) ideas and practices. This dual emancipatory-traditional rhetoric has echoed through the extremist Right into the present day and is still key to shaping women's roles within the movement.

However, there is an additional motivation that separates the women of the alt-right from most of those involved in the early far right movements: the desire to be active in the shaping of the political groups and agendas through recruitment, political action and debate - traditionally male roles. Women must situate themselves as legitimate participants within a deeply masculine environment without being seen to compromise their commitment to traditional gender roles. They must maintain a balance between a commitment to being a caregiver, mother, and wife, and a lifestyle of political activism (Downing 2018). Female-led anti-feminist groups exemplify well the attempts to balance these tensions and articulate a coherent narrative and vision through their reconciliation. An oft-mentioned 'pioneer' figure, when it comes to this is Phyllis Schlafly and the 'Stop ERA [Equal Rights Amendment]' campaign she led. Schlafly's strategy involved a sophisticated reclaiming of the idea of 'women's emancipation' from the feminist camp, rhetorically reconstructing traditional gender roles as liberating, and the Equal Rights agenda as a plan to damage both families and traditional female 'privileges'. Schlafly's legacy remains an influence in right-wing and reactionary movements and campaigning in the era of 'culture wars' (Miller 2015), even when not explicitly acknowledged.

Nevertheless, there is still little research directly focusing on the development of the role and ideologies of women in today's alt-right. Work on the contemporary far right has identified the dual appeal to women in these movements. Bowman and Stewart's (2017) research on the processes that facilitate and draw women to alt-right groups found that they are motivated by two main factors: a rejection of feminism, and a reaction to fear. They do not feel that contemporary feminism includes them, perhaps due to increased representation of minority women, or a lack of representation of women who do not choose the career ladder. Fear is related to negative discourse around immigration in mainstream media and politics, and emphasised as threat by the alt-right. Blee (2007) has identified a lack of coverage of the emotional drivers of individuals in the far right, specifically women.

GI promotes a discourse that protects and venerates a specific expression of femininity that is deemed overlooked. This expansion of the alt-right can be regarded in the context of a 'reconfigured orientalism' (Bilge 2012: 305) within the West. In this reconfiguration, the migrant woman is redefined as sexually limited and oppressed by their religion – namely Islam. This perceived oppression is set at odds with the sexually liberated West, with formally established gender and LGBT equality. In this way, discourse around immigration is gendered in two ways: (a) The positioning of female migrants as passive and oppressed; (b) The positioning of male migrants as a threat to domestic (white) women, through rape or sexual assault, or corruption through mixed-race relationships (De Lange and Mügge, 2012). This positioning of white femininity as

something to be protected is inherently linked to ideas of the nation-state and the protection of national culture, a combination termed 'femonationalism' (Farris 2012; Seth-Smith 2017) or 'Alt-Maternalism' (Mattheis 2018) and features strongly in identitarian rhetoric. Women's position in past racist movements has been characterised as a unique form of 'passive activism' (Blee 2002), rooted in traditional values, in which members view their participation as an altruistic 'choice' to protect these values (Ebner, 2017). For Mattheis and Winter (2019) 'Alt-Maternalism' functions as a 'call to arms' for women to spread traditionalist ideals through public appeals and the indoctrination of children. In the identitarian context, in particular, women are framed as Nordic 'shieldmaidens' – who must take part in alt-right activism to stop a 'crisis' of European identity – in order to return to a preferred way of life at home (Mattheis 2018: 139).

GI utilise social media to harness these messages of resistance and crisis, strengthening their appeal. The group is banned from Facebook and Twitter (Al-Jazeera, 2018) but heavily utilises Instagram and YouTube, in addition to alt-right portals, such as Gab. They thus reach mainstream audiences, and can also draw interested parties into more extremist environments. Their cohesive image and brand (Blum, 2017) fosters a culture, identified by Blee (2007) as an important factor in maintaining momentum and loyalty for political movements. GI's framing of women in the movement echoes previously identified patterns. Darby (2018) has shown that, although women often take up leadership positions within GI and are presented as equals, their identity as fertile, attractive white women remains fundamental to their role. Combatting 'white replacement' remains the key goal for GI, and situating women as both political activists and vessels for white children places them in a dual role of activism and subservience. GI consistently utilise images of young, attractive activists, to advertise youth-group-type community, as well as reinforce set images of what men and women should look like within traditional gendered roles. To fully understand how this combination of rhetoric, aesthetics, and societal factors contribute to motivating identification and activism, a psycho-cultural approach is employed.

Psycho-Cultural theory and the Alt-Right

The alt-right showcases, in the most potent way, how divisive, visceral, and seemingly irrational politics can become. This can be seen as part of the broader discussion about the eruption of emotion in the public sphere (Richards, 2007). Following this, we are adopting a theoretical lens inspired by psychoanalytic and psycho-cultural theory. Psychoanalytic theory understands human interaction as often driven by unconscious reactions to the outer world. Drawing on it, psycho-cultural analysis interprets the emotional shaping of an individual worldview, and their self-understanding within it. This section will identify key themes from these frameworks that will aid in providing context and explanation for these expressions of far-right politics. This will also inform the methodology and analysis of the collected material.

We are focusing on Kleinian theories of 'object-relations' and the 'paranoid-schizoid position' (PS), as well as the defences of 'phantasy' and 'splitting' (Amos 2015). The key feature of the PS position is the splitting of the world and the self in 'good' and 'bad', in an attempt to keep anxiety and negative emotions away, and avoid ambivalence (the co-existence of positive and negative emotions). As such, it is 'characterised by intense feelings of love and hate' (Frosh 2012: 153), as well as loss, shame, envy, and aggression. The unconscious deploys shielding mechanisms, i.e., 'defences', to protect the ego from destructive emotions (Klein, 1946). Splitting is one such defence mechanism within the PS position. Out of which the ego restores a sense of coherence (Segal, 1991). Breton (2014: 115) identifies the object as 'anything that has meaning, and therefore an emotional connotation'. The object is then incorporated into individuals and informs their perception of the self in relation to the world, as a form of emotional regulation (Frosh 2012: 156). The 'idealised' and 'denigrated' objects are created by the infant through fantasy, or 'phantasy'. Phantasies are parts of psychic life closely linked to processes of introjection, projection, and the creation of self-identity (Spillius et al, 2011: 6-7). (Outer) world and (inner-world) phantasies become interconnected, with the inner world predicating how individuals see themselves in the external world and external factors influencing internal-psychic reality (Klein, 1940). Splitting projects negative/unbearable emotions onto containing or 'transitional' objects. Subjects use such objects to hold their emotions until they are able to process them and help orient themselves in

the external world (Winnicott, 1957). As our individual identities are informed by this cycle, so are our group identities (Minsky, 1998).

Scholars drawing on psychoanalysis have come to highlight that nationalism is driven by unconscious factors interacting with economics and politics. A common affective driver is widespread anxiety, in this case operating at group level (Figlio, 2017). The mechanisms of splitting and projecting can also be identified at the group level – particularly in the ‘in-group/out-group’ rhetoric of racism (Rustin, 1991).

In recent years, psychoanalytic perspectives in the social sciences have gained momentum, as part of a broader turn towards questions on emotion and affect that adds complexity to more traditional approaches. Recent work (Winlow et al 2017; Ebner 2017), has warned against the over-simplification of the causes of the resurgence of the far right, arguing that this is part of wider political and affective responses to a number of global conditions, including neoliberalism and multiculturalism. Hoffman (2018: 268), for instance, identifies that members of the population exposed to the force of such influences may be more susceptible to the ‘illusion of restoration of an idealised past’, and the ‘scapegoating of other groups’ (ibid: 279) as they ‘project’ their communities’ problems onto an ‘othered’ out-groups. Here, ‘true’ identity is idealised through its perception as lost or ‘blocked’. Martin (2015) points to the figure of the immigrant as a common example in nationalist manifestations of this psychological process, where the immigrants are perceived as blocking the fulfilment of the ideal version of our identity. Authors such as Blee (2017), Farris (2012), and Mattheis (2018) have noted that the place of gender within the far right is a complex issue. Psychoanalytic perspectives are useful in identifying and interpreting the concurrent idealisation and repression of women within the movement. For instance, Erős (2014), highlights this in the discourse of the Hungarian Jobbik party. Following the Kleinian emphasis of the figure of the mother, and pointing at Jobbik’s representation of the nation in biological terms, he notes: “The aim of every extremist ideology is to attain a union with the mother and to annihilate the paternal dimension of the psyche. Ideology is the promise of returning to paradise, to the mother’s womb.” (Erős, 2017: 32). Whilst the notion of women as mothers of the nation (Mattheis and Winter, 2019) is not unusual in the study of the alt-right, only few accounts have made such connections to the psychoanalytic understanding of the mother as an idealised and denigrated ‘holding’ object for relating to the outer world (Klein, 1946). Like Erős, Auestad (2014) notes how the nation sustains a link between equality and identity. The ‘imagined sameness’ of a national identity, reinforced by politicians and cultural imagery, solidifies difference, which in turn becomes a threat to the inner self-world of the nationalist. An example of this is the ‘Great Replacement’ theory (James 2001) – a core identitarian belief. Nationalist phantasies are closely associated with similar phantasmatic notions of gender and gender roles in the ideology of the alt-right. How this has evolved over time, since the early work on Nazis and British fascists (Gottlieb 2000), or the analysis of American white supremacy from the 1920s to the 1980s (Pinar 2001) is largely under-reported. Despite this, there is a burgeoning literature, mostly from investigative journalism (e.g., Bowman and Stewart 2017), identifying a new wave of female supporters of the alt-right. The present paper will contribute to such discussions by offering a psycho-cultural account of the motivating factors for young women joining GI.

METHODS

Researching the extreme right is a challenging undertaking, particularly when taking a participant-focused approach. Outreach and interviewing require balancing a complex mix of ethics, rapport-development and risk-management. To address our research question, we have combined semi-structured interviews with discourse analysis (Plano Clark and Ivankova 2016). A purposive sampling strategy was employed to interview female GI supporters aged 18-30. We conducted four interviews via Skype and email during March and April 2019. All participants were from the UK and Europe, and between 18 and 25 years old. Two of them were college students and two were undergraduate students. Participants were approached through social media and postering. Postering for

this project proved to be controversial and highlighted many of the ethical and practical difficulties noted by Massanari (2018: 1). Posters at the university campus were routinely removed, which limited reach and effectiveness. The recruitment poster was posted on Instagram periodically with 'alt-right' hashtags to attract engagement. However, the use of Instagram was time-limited, as the post was affected by algorithmic changes designed to limit the use of certain hashtags, a technique called 'shadowbanning'. The small number of interviews reflects the challenges of recruiting respondents on a sensitive and divisive topic. However, the interview material collected was rich, and sufficient for an exploratory study. Each participant was asked the same questions about their reasons for identifying with the movement, their experiences, their role and activity, political beliefs, and expectations from movement, among other things. To secure anonymity, the interviewees' names have been replaced by letters: I, E, T, C.

Moreover, discourse analysis was used to analyse communication of mediated communities. Through Instagram messaging and networking, the researchers obtained private links to groups on Telegram, an encrypted messaging service. Telegram groups provided access to explicitly gendered spaces (e.g. 'Modern Feminine'), as well as the GI news channel. Further data was collected from social media and two books written by GI activists: 'What Makes us Girls' by Brittany Pettibone (2018), and 'Barbarians: How Baby Boomers, Immigrants, and Islam Screwed My Generation' by Lauren Southern (2016). The use of 'female-voiced' discourse aims to supplement interview data in providing a more in-depth view of the motivations of female GI activists. While our interviewees are European, the two authors are American (Pettibone) and Canadian (Southern). While broadens the range of our material in some respect, we consider it appropriate since it reflects the nature of GI as a highly networked movement that originated in Europe but expanded to North America to achieve its stated goal of defending what is understood as European (white) heritage. To fully integrate the mixed methods (Creswell 2015), both discourse and interview data were analysed utilising the same open coding technique (Borgatti, 2019). Accordingly, reference to the above books using letters: S for Southern's, and B for Pettibone's book.

DISCUSSION

Our analysis identifies three key psycho-cultural themes with regards to the motivating factors for young female GI members: 'Intolerable emotion', 'Loss and Grievance', 'Gender, mother, nation'. Each provides insight into the drivers for this group of young activists.

Intolerable Emotion and Political Disconnection

Underlying many of the statements in the interviews and texts was a complex web of emotional reactions to real and perceived social events. Whilst these varied, rage, jealousy, grief, and insecurity were prevalent; i.e., what Kleinians call 'intolerable emotion'. These are emotive reactions created by the 'splitting' of an object into 'good' and 'bad', and is what characterises thought patterns in the PS position (Frosh, 1946). Apparent at times of stress, this process helps organise intolerable emotion and aid in self-regulation. However, the nature of the PS position can impact the individual's 'reality appraisal beyond accuracy of perception' (Frosh 1995: 423), contributing to suspicion and conspiracy. Political insecurity or disengagement was a common theme. Lack of identification with mainstream political parties, as well as not feeling represented by mainstream politics, contributed to a palpable sense of political isolation. Another recurrent theme was a wider criticism of societal features such as 'mass consumerism'

and 'decadence' contributing towards societal ill-feeling. Isolation and resentment could lead to the perception of being under threat from political elites – another common target for anger or mistrust:

S: "Globalists hold contempt for citizenship, tradition, and national culture and religion...Destroying those unique identities is the key to submission [to the government]"

I: "... my own city being demographically changed beyond recognition, large corporations/ our own government/ our schools telling me and other... kids that diversity is a strength (without telling why), that our ancestors were evil, that we have to pay for their actions, that we MUST and WILL be a diverse country."

A cycle of threat and insecurity reinforces feelings of isolation, anger and political disenfranchisement evident in interview transcripts. In the quotations above, one can see that where the perceived threat is concentrated around diversity, immigration, and anti-globalisation rhetoric, the individual might seek to create a point of security and sense-making. This can take place through a phantasised idealised 'lost' object: 'identity'.

E: "[we have lost] A sense of identity, a strong, secure, socially cohesive community where everyone knows each other and takes care of one another instead of the government. It's not just immigration, it's also mass consumerism/ globalism/ capitalism that has caused these things."

A perception of loss has been positioned as a result of the threat (or blockers) of immigration, consumerism and globalisation. The perception that faults in society are caused by the political status quo prevents identification with mainstream political parties. Instead, GI is presented as the antithesis to them, thus being a source of security.

S: "The rotted timber of progressionivism [sic] is increasingly failing to break their [young people's] fall, so, eventually, they turn elsewhere."

I: "I liked the strong community links the activists shared, the political training, the ideal of life transmitted by Generation Identity..."

S and 'I' promote the idea of identitarianism as a response to insecurity. This functions as an incentive to both join the movement and to improve oneself – another common motivation for GI activists. There is recognition of a psychological 'inner discontent', to which GI is the solution. The emphasis of 'self' worth negatively affected by different factors echoes the psychoanalytic understanding of the organisation of the outside reality through the orienting and reorienting of the self-in-the-world (Frosh, 1995):

B: "Lack of self-worth can stem from lots of things. Among the most common are: negative comparison, rejection, bullying, inauthenticity, purposelessness, betrayal, and guilt... inner discontent."

The inherent insecurity read from the data is in many ways comparable with the psychoanalytic concept of the PS position. This can have a detrimental effect on the individual's sense of self, preventing their orientation to the outer world and the overcoming of Intolerable Emotions. GI is a community of like-minded friends who

mutually legitimate and reiterate their ideology. This helps alleviate the Intolerable Emotions of 'purposelessness... rejection... guilt', to create a stronger sense of self supported through feelings of belonging and purpose.

E: "I was also enthusiastic about meeting Europeans like me, with the struggle for Europe and its roots, but also united against mass immigration, islamisation, and globalisation."

T: "I have always been close to the form, the idea of this European identity... that actually made me decide to get closer to Generation Identity rather than some older, major nationalistic roles."

From the above, it can be seen that the identitarian sense of self is closely linked to three psycho-cultural concepts: the idea of national and European identity, Intolerable Emotions of rage, guilt and loss, and the idea of nationhood as expressed through specific forms of Object-Relation, Projection, and Phantasy. These themes also appear in our analysis of identitarian media. As this kind of discourse also serves for advertising and recruitment, it can be used to identify some key motivators for engaging with this content and joining GI. For instance, one of the Instagram posts wrote: 'Don't you think overfocusing in Islam overshadows big woke capitalism? They pay for Muslims. It does. You are correct. We as a movement try to move away from that'. Here, the conflation of anti-immigration and anti-capitalism creates a unified, denigrated 'other'. The protection of national identity and culture from Islam in particular, was a recurring theme.

Another post of activists dressed as Charlie and the Chocolate Factory characters (recognisable across the UK), provides a sense of whimsy and fun, as well as a point of recognition for the person browsing their Instagram feed. Yet the campaign topic was 'Remigration', a coded reference to the alt-right concept of the Great Replacement, its darker undertone hidden by golden tickets. The imagined replacement of the white demographic is created as a phantastical holder of threat and identitarianism as an idealised solution to this. The idea of the nation is intimately connected to the sense of 'self'. This is not inherently problematic, but in the context of the PS, the ability to orient the self in relation to the nation can become distorted. Feelings of social and political instability described by the participants reflect wider emotional characteristics of contemporary society, such as anxiety and cultural disconnection. In the absence of any real outlet for blame, and with no political body able to take responsibility for this social unease, the immigrant becomes the collective scapegoat. This is closely linked to the fear invoked by the imagined scenario of radical demographic change in the UK, a common theme in GI's discourse, and the frequent presentation of this as 'invasion' by GI social media (e.g., images of banners saying 'Mass Immigration Ruins Europe'). The image of the immigrant crossing the nation's border is perceived as an intrusion of the self. This sparks fear and anxiety, in turn pacified by the idea of a stronger national identification, a comforting ideal helping to resolve intolerable emotions.

Loss, Grievance, and Immigration

As shown above, national and European identity is a key facet of identitarianism and is opposed to the threat of immigration and Great Replacement (T). Here, this will be discussed in relation to perceived loss and the psychoanalytic term 'grievance'. Grievance is a psychoanalytic concept applied to an object perceived to cause the loss of an ideal. The ideal is, therefore, held in perpetual phantasy. This holding of the ideal in phantasy

prevents mourning (the resolution of grievance), contributing to the maintenance of idealisation and denigration (Weintrobe 2003, Glynos 2014).

T: “The problem of Islamization of Europe wasn’t discussed too much... Generation Identity was the only one bringing this topic up... the same goes for the concept of replacement of European Indigenous people.”

T: “I think the main topic Generation Identity discuss [that is the most important to women] is immigration, massive immigration, and, yeah, Great Replacement...”

In psychoanalysis, ‘loss’ refers to the loss of an idealised ‘good’ object, that has already been split from all ‘bad’ in the subject’s inner world. In our material, this ideal identity was often presented as taken away by ‘bad’ objects (social change, demographics, or multiculturalism). The notion of ‘grievance’ can be used to further understand this, how it relates to outer-world interpretations and political motivation. Across the data collected, the biggest threat to young people was perceived to be “immigration”, “mass immigration”, or “Islamisation” (C), despite acknowledgement of other concerns (climate change and overconsumption of resources). A brief search of the transcripts revealed 45 instances of the word ‘immigration’, or ‘immigrant’, and a further 52 instances of the word ‘identity’. Closer analysis of the content revealed that immigration was positioned most often as the blocker to a European identity. The ideals of a European way of life rooted in traditionalism are introduced and maintained through unresolved grievance against the immigrant (Weintrobe, 2003):

C: “To struggle for Europe and its roots... also united against mass immigration, Islamization, and globalisation”.

C: “The Islamization of our homelands.”

T: “The priority today and the direct impact in the lives of the Europeans is Islamization and terrorism which killed too many natives already. This has to stop.”

Our data shows that most identitarians perceive immigration, globalisation, capitalism, and liberal politics to be a threat to both a traditional way of life, and European culture more generally. Unable to reconcile an ideal way of life, it is possible that ‘loss and grievance’ provide motivating factors for GI activists, who hope to correct this dissonance and create an idealised lifestyle through means like remigration. A large part of preserving/reviving this ‘ideal’ is the creation of an in-group identity, and its consistent reinforcement.

T: “Globalists hold contempt for citizenship, tradition, national culture and religion. These things promote sovereignty of nations... Destroying those unique identities is key to submission.”

Nationalist movements are positioned as a natural response to demographic changes, developing and further restricting the in-group to membership groups such as GI:

C: “I think there will be more young people to join nationalist movements once they see their towns change before their very eyes and the baggage that results from that change...The Islamization of our homelands.”

This rhetoric of resistance to Islam and immigration is common across the alt-right. It creates in-group safety and ameliorates the sense of loss by offering a promise of resolving grievance. By rendering 'islamisation' and immigration as the causes of loss, GI creates an unconscious phantasy' (Klein 1946) of a world 'before' such processes began, or a 'golden era': an idealisation of the past common amongst conservative and alt-right rhetoric. This has been described as a form of projection in which an 'ideal' form of the past is split off and constructed as a reaction to perceived negative change and insecurity (Yates, 2015). Emphasis on the past, and traditional ideals and lifestyles are other key themes within GI rhetoric – particularly in regards to ideals around gender roles and the family, community, and their relationship to the nation. These will be discussed in more detail in the next section, but the following quotes show how grievance, too, is gendered:

B: "If we ever want to return to the days when we had communities full of healthy boys and men, first we're going to have to return to respecting them in the way we once did..."

S: "They attack the traditional family scheme, the natural order of society."

Negative constructions of immigration, Islam, and terrorism are consistently repeated throughout the data, constructed as threats to women and the family. Strong emotive language, and a sense of urgency, are clear motivating forces across the dataset, reinforced via repetition within the online mediated discourse. GI social media further promote this. One such example is an Instagram post portraying a parody of 'leftist' immigration supporters under guard from 'immigrants'. The caption describes the dangers and lives lost by open-border 'fanaticism'. The single hashtag: #remigration hints at the solution. Images from GI e-newsletter and accompanying YouTube links show a variety of anti-immigration and Great Replacement rhetoric. UK politicians and the Home Office are also targets of blame and anger due to immigration to the UK. GI presents itself as a solution to the unresolved grievance, providing a powerful affective motivation for those experiencing the loss of a 'White British Homeland.'

Gender, the Mother, and Nation

Conversation with activists and analysis of their literature provoked emotive, often lengthy discussions on gender, family, traditional societal roles, and the importance of maintaining these traditions when promoting nationalism and patriotism. It is clear that gendered narratives are important drivers for GI, in particular for female activists. Gender was utilised in a variety of contexts, evoking positions of mother and daughter, plus more general metaphors relating to sexual relations, caregiving, and activism. However, the main constructions of gender by GI can be summarised into two main categories: 1) The positioning of women in roles of mothers, daughters, and containers of the state. 2) The positioning of women as victims of immigration. The dual positioning reflects that of the limited literature, particularly that of Berntson and Ault (1998) and Downing (2018), whose work identified the multifaceted roles that women perform in the extreme right. They are situated as victims requiring protection, as well as agents in the 'fight'. This was echoed through much of the interview data and discourse from identitarian activists:

T: "Personally, I understand the idea of the traditional woman whose most important duty is to take care of her family because it is the inner base of society and that role is the most beautiful and fundamental. However, I think women have to

take place and raise their voices in politics nowadays, but as a counter argument for modern feminism.”

Although T enjoyed the social and political activities afforded to her by identitarianism, this was viewed as a means-to-an-end for a truer calling - a return to home. It is appropriate to suggest that the ideals of gender and nation, as with immigration, are forms of ‘phantasy’. The quote below from I shows that these phantasies are often related to constructions of the past, a time ‘before’ negative change. When combined with narratives of safety, threat, and community, these create powerful emotional reactions, and direct an individual along a particular ideological path.

I: “Gender roles mean to me that men should embrace their masculinity, (be fit, let women go first, do the heavier tasks) and women should embrace their femininity (take care of their appearance, be nurturing, embrace their emotions), instead of feminising men and vice versa.”

As illustrated by the quotes below, the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ projections are often intersected with idealised concepts of gender (e.g., mother and daughter). In psychoanalysis, these projections are directly related to the figure of the mother (Segal, 1991), who is sought out to alleviate anxiety. The ‘nation as mother’ is a common allegory within far-right discourse, as is the ‘daughter of Europe’ metaphor. This imagery is illustrated in the quotes below as well as images in the ‘Modern Feminine’ Instagram page, an identitarian page.

S: [Feminists] attack the traditional family scheme, the natural order of society, and pretend [to be] freeing the women by making them slaves of work and uprooted of the household.

C: I’ll always be very close to my local identity, yet I always felt like I was a daughter of Europe...

If the nation is consistently equated to femininity in this way, then those living within the nation may be driven to protect their idealised ‘good’ mother. Our data includes several instances of feminised constructions of ‘Europe as mother’, and the dual role of the female activist. This, and the strong reference to European and national identity, indicates a strong role for gendered idealisation and denigration – or ‘splitting and projection’ - within the discourse of GI and the alt-right more generally. This occurs at the level of the individual (Sa below) –the idealisation of the ‘traditional’ feminine figure and the denigration of the feminist – and the national (Sb below) –the idealisation of the mother nation/Europe, and the denigration of the immigrant. This way, gender roles provide the means of containment for the PS position, which manifests in a widespread level of political disenfranchisement, mistrust, and resentment - anxieties typical of modernisation and individualisation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001). It is possible that this method of containment provides a motivating factor for those seeking political stability and identification.

The symbolism continues through embodied metaphors in much of the data. As Mattheis (2018) notes, Shieldmaidens (the women of GI), are positioned in two ways: as vulnerable citizens and as necessary Valkyries in a war-like scenario. This duality can be seen in the quotes below:

Sa: “But if that girl lets all those guys into her, her body will get used up fast, and the same thing goes for a country. To borrow a line from the feminists, sometimes no means no. The Trump campaign was America’s rape whistle.”

Sb: “Importing huge numbers of men from such backgrounds can also mean importing violence. Which I mean, plays against... women can be victims of rape... and harassment.”

This metaphor for immigration positions women as the nation-state – at risk of rape by immigration and ‘using up’ from sexual assault. The metaphor is simultaneously impressing traditionalist sexual morals and positioning women as vulnerable victims. This rhetoric further provokes Intolerable Emotion, and people become afraid, angry, or resentful, further perpetuating divisive reactions. It also reinforces a narrative of strong gender roles – a concept important to most interviewees – along with ideals of the family:

S: “The answer is Nationalism... Nationalism is actually based on one of the most healthy parts of human nature: the preference for a group that supports each other, like a family.”

As previously stated, in Kleinian theory, object-relating is a result of the process of splitting, where the good object (e.g. the mother, the nation) aids interpretation of the world (Breton, 2014). In this quote, the Nation becomes a phantasy, a family (S above), with the mother-figure at the helm, both protector and protected. This may also be compounded by perceived and real loss of the family unit, community, or even ideas of masculinity and femininity – any of which could provoke inner anxiety. C shows how the loss can be applied to traditionalist roles within the family:

C: “In short, left-wing politics had taken people whose natural calling was to be mothers... and turned them into surrogate parents/defenders of the most dysfunctional adult populations rather than of actual kids.”

Holding the nation as an Object through which to negotiate these feelings results in strong protective emotion, as well as over-emphasis of the importance of the concept of the nation itself. As well as the Object-Relation aspect of ‘mother-nation’, the ‘daughters’ of the nation are also presented as having a unique role in the protection of the nation-state, by using the ‘weapon’ of femininity. This is to be found, as B discusses, in the role of traditional forms of beauty (long hair, athletic body), and caring for activist spouses. This presentation of femininity also exhibits characteristic of phantasy. Women in the alt-right are presented with a role that is portrayed as agentic and vital, but also deeply rooted in comforting ideals of tradition.

Phantasy, therefore, can be seen as integral in the shaping of the motivational drivers for young women joining GI. It can create nationalistic ideals based on ‘good’ categories such as whiteness and femininity, whilst reinforcing projections of negative emotions onto immigration and other societal changes, such as those associated with feminism. Social media play a key role in reinforcing such ideals through potent imagery. The images and accompanying captions in Identitarian Instagram posts often show idealised versions of the self and lifestyle, whilst obscuring the links to the alt-right. For example, an Instagram post depicts a European-style couple, posed together above a caption detailing the strengths of traditional gender roles. Utilising the terms ‘strengths’ and ‘weaknesses’, the caption invokes an atmosphere of conflict like ‘battle’ references

elsewhere. Inferred here are distinct roles for men and women, forming a 'balance' in their combination (see quote by 'I' above). Not all accounts are so subtle in their references. Two other Instagram posts show how the rhetoric of nation, mother, and war-like defence are integrated in discourse to provoke an emotional affect. 'Defend our Motherland' and 'Defend her', accompanied by stylised images, including one of a child, are designed to evoke anger or fear, i.e. intolerable emotions. Consumption of such social media content aims at creating an emotional affect to drive user engagement, possibly contributing to further motivation for activism. For example, the highest engagement appears to be centred on explicitly gendered content, the above discussed posts appearing under the popular #identitariangirls hashtag. The images are clear in their western, feminine styling (e.g. long, plaited hair, dresses, and European mountain settings), and their links to the identitarian movement. This suggests that a certain ideal for the identitarians is portrayed not just through political ideology and action, but also image, home life, and culture.

CONCLUSION

Our data demonstrate that the factors driving young women to the alt-right ideology are deeply rooted in affective states and external forces and are linked to emotive reactions. This is not to say that female identitarians are solely motivated by emotion, nor is it to say that emotion impacts female extremists more. Instead, these findings should be taken as a prompt to look beyond simple cause-and-consequence. The findings suggest that groups such as GI, and 'traditionalist' rhetoric more widely, are positioned as a solution to feelings of loss, insecurity, and disillusionment.

This research has shown that the role of women within the far right goes back a long way and has gone through several transformations, at least since the involvement of women in the Klan of the 1920s (Blee 1991), as well as 1930s Germany, while also maintaining notable continuity in key aspects. Despite accepted changes in dress, education, and involvement in political activism, young women must still walk the line between homemakers, wives, and daughters, and fierce political protectors of heritage and resources. Considering these findings, we can argue that gender is a factor that has been underestimated as an influence and a driving force in alt-right ideology. More research is needed to study the demographics of alt-right groups and how intersections of gender, age, and race work within identitarianism. Whilst the research showed that identitarianism and political activism was an important part of the lifestyle and communities these young women inhabited, it was unable to show if its momentum was changing as their actions and protests attract media attention and controversy.

This study has examined some of the variety and scope of messages used online to attract users and create access points for harder-line exclusionary politics, such as the Great Replacement and white supremacy. Given the adoption of elements of the alt-right playbook by the parts of the mainstream right (e.g. of US Republicans and UK Conservatives), and their prominence in today's intensified 'culture wars', we would not expect exclusionary politics to lose momentum soon. In our analysis, we have highlighted how the rhetoric of GI puts into motion potent unconscious processes that allow the exploitation of anxieties (pre-existing or themselves a product of GI's rhetoric), something that supports the spread and appeal of their message. Both the strength, as well as the character of this appeal as unconscious, pose a real challenge for progressive politics and its proponents, that may call for new strategies for countering the new forms of reactionary and exclusionary politics.

Conflict of Interest Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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