

## Anti-Fascism Against Machismo: Gender, Politics, and the Struggle Against Fascism

### Introduction: The Rising Tide of Fascism

“It’s a naturalized, state-sanctioned, normalized and deepening fascism, whose waves of violence seem to measure the strides of a giant... So here this question is key: What do we mean when we speak of feminism? Feminism cannot be defined at the surface level...It’s a struggle that is only renewed by restoring the historical memory of our women fighters, those who have been forgotten in the dustbins of revolutions... We cannot think of a feminism, an anti-patriarchy, without anti-capitalism, without anti-fascism, without anti-racism and without class struggle...”<sup>1</sup>

In the spring of 2017, a video of an anti-fascist being beaten at a counter demonstration in Berkley went viral. The video depicted counter protestor Louise Rosealma being punched in the face and knocked to the ground by white supremacist and founder of Identity Evropa, Nathan Damigo. On social media, in major news articles, and within movement circles, the video was the subject of extensive commentary. This incident and the various reactions to it tell us much about our current moment. It reveals that we are living through a time where alt-right, white nationalist, and neo-nazi forces are gaining momentum and becoming emboldened. As the video circulated, the response of the far-right laid bare the depth of their misogyny and vividly illustrated the extent to which patriarchal ideology is a key component of their politics. Louise was doxed and viciously denigrated online – her personal information including home address and phone number was widely distributed and her career as a sex worker was publicised. She was called disgusting and a whore, and was inundated with both rape and death threats. Photos of her being punched, as well as photos taken from her work in porn became the backdrop for a plethora of memes appearing on both the internet and the streets. For example on the streets of Berkley, oversized posters appeared showing Louise’s naked body beside Damigo’s smiling face with the text “I’d hit that” written across.<sup>2</sup> Her attack and violence against women in general, was promoted and celebrated. Others chimed in on the video and their responses were equally revealing.

The reaction of liberal feminists was predictably disappointing and highlighted the many shortcomings of their political project. Some speculated about whether or not the attack would have happened under Hilary. Others, framed Louise as a victim and in many cases as non-violent. Narratives circulated claiming she was attacked while attempting to deescalate and prevent the violence of others, or was attacked unprovoked while peacefully protesting. A gendered pacifism was implied, and violence was presented as something done to Louise (as a woman), but not something that Louise (as a woman) could or would do. Hand-in-hand with these claims, were calls for police involvement and the arrest of Damigo. In the typical style of carceral feminism, increased policing, criminalization, and incarceration were proposed as the appropriate response to the incident. Reactions coming from the left weren’t much better, and exposed the sexism ingrained in anti-fascist politics. Posts, photos, and memes covering the incident were highly patronizing and critiqued Damigo on the basis that he was a coward for hitting a woman (assumed to weaker and less of a threat). Despite a long history of women putting their bodies on the line to fight fascism, physical confrontation was implicitly presented as the realm of men.

Even in supposedly progressive circles, the popular image of the anti-fascist is a male body; often a white male body that borrows heavily from the aesthetics of antifa movements in Europe. Based in a tacit denial of women's agency, conversations about Louise became a matter of identity (of her being a woman), rather than a matter of politics or activity. Last and certainly not least, this incident and the fact that it got so much attention speaks to the deep-seated racism that underlines both the left and the right. Women get attacked all the time, white supremacists beat women all of the time, and women of colour disproportionately face the brunt of it. Louise's experience went viral and garnered such broad interest undoubtedly because she is a white, conventionally attractive cis-women.

The far-right has been on the rise and over the course of the last several years their ideas have been gaining traction. First at the level of grassroots politics, and now more and more at the level of institutional politics, far-right ideology has a notable foothold. It isn't only that far-right movements have grown, but further, that far-right ideas from the margins have seeped into the mainstream. The situation is bleak, but not hopeless. We have to know our enemy and we have a lot of work to do; however, many of the options presented to us can be found lacking. We're given the choice between a pacifying liberal feminism of "pussy hats" and "protective policing", or a reductive anti-fascism defined by machismo and sexism. Against such a backdrop, this article seeks to examine the gendered dimensions of fascist movements and anti-fascist struggle, as well as to consider the possibilities for an anti-fascism rooted in revolutionary feminism. For the purpose of this article, I use the term fascism/fascist broadly to refer to a complicated and diverse phenomenon that includes a plethora of far-right groups, ideologies, and movements, including white nationalists, neo-Nazis, ultra-patriots, the alternative right, identitarians, and traditionalists, amongst others.<sup>3</sup> The article is divided into three distinct, yet interrelated parts, intended to cover the politics, practices, and histories of fascism, gender, and militant resistance. Part 1 explores the gender politics of fascism today, Part 2 examines the history of women's participation in anti-fascist resistance, and Part 3 concludes with a consideration of the challenges and prospects for developing an explicitly feminist anti-fascism.

## Part 1 – The Gender Politics of Fascism: Across the Spectrum of Fascist Sexisms

"Fascism, then, is an exacerbation, a more militant extension, of the patriarchal relationships between men and women that have persisted for centuries. It is a worsening of the fantasies, the violence, the misshapen desires that the whole system of gender relationships that have long pertained in European societies and those in the new world that are descended from them. Rather than a *thing*, which is categorically distinct from other social and political systems, fascism is a *process*, which can easily recur, and wherein we can see men, and groups of men, who have commenced the journey".<sup>4</sup>

Following the death of Heather Heyer in Charlottesville, an organizer of the Unite the Right event commented that Heather was a "fat, disgusting, communist" and her death was "payback".<sup>5</sup> In a similar vein, comments were posted online celebrating her murder and calling her a "useless slut" on the grounds that "a 32-year old woman without children is a burden on society and has no value".<sup>6</sup> Beyond being attacked for her anti-fascist politics, Heather was attacked for being a woman. At the 2018 Women's March in Seattle, posters exclaiming "Make women property again" made an appearance.<sup>7</sup> During this same time at a similar march in

Providence, members of the white nationalist group Vanguard America showed up with a banner reading “Feminists Deserve The Rope”.<sup>8</sup> On International Women’s Day, an article on a popular neo-nazi website proposed that an “International Burn a Witch Day” and an “International Shame a THOT Day” be celebrated as “it’s only fair that we reward AND punish”.<sup>9</sup> Only a few years earlier at an International Women’s Day celebration in Sweden, neo-Nazis attacked the crowd and seriously injured five women.<sup>10</sup> More recently, in Santiago this past July a feminist march in support of free and legal abortion in Chile was attacked by the fascist group the Social Patriotic Movement. Several hundred members of the group – infamous for describing feminists as animals and arguing for their sterilization – attempted to block the march and in the process covered the streets in animal blood, physically attacked the demonstrators, and stabbed three women.<sup>11</sup> Such examples are seemingly endless.

Incidents such as these are taking place with growing frequency, as those on the far-right increasingly decry the role of feminism in propagating “Cultural Marxism” and destroying “Western Civilization”.<sup>12</sup> Echoing the idea promoted in Nazi Germany that women’s emancipation “would destroy the German race and lead to the introduction of Bolshevism”, feminism (and women) are still the enemy.<sup>13</sup> Then, as in now, patriarchy is fundamental to fascism. Taking this assertion as a starting point, this section focuses on where and how the question of gender fits into fascism. To do so, I explore the rise of the Alt-Right, examine the differing perspectives on gender and sexuality found on the contemporary far-right and finally, consider the role of the “white women victim” trope in propping up white supremacy.

### *MRA’s, “the Manosphere”, and the Rise of the Alt-Right*

The current resurgence and proliferation of far-right movements in North America has frequently been linked to the rise of the Alt-Right. Short for the alternative right, the Alt-Right can be understood as a loosely organized collection of ideological tendencies, groups, podcasts, websites, think-tanks, and figureheads that have created a new breed of white supremacy. It takes inspiration from the identarian ideas of the European New Right and is tied together by “a contempt for both liberal multiculturalism and mainstream conservatism”<sup>14</sup> and a “trenchant opposition to all socio-economic, cultural, and political propositions based on egalitarianism and collectivity”.<sup>15</sup> While it is best known for its politics of white nationalism and antisemitism, politics of misogyny are also formative. Patriarchal ideology fundamentally shapes the Alt-Right and misogyny is undoubtedly one of its central pillars.<sup>16</sup> The Alt-Right advocates not only for white supremacy, but more specifically for white male supremacy.<sup>17</sup> Sexism rather racism, is the gateway drug that has led many to join the Alt-Right.<sup>18</sup> Romano explains: “The basic idea that ‘women are getting too out of hand’ is the patriarchal common denominator. And it aligns perfectly with male rage against ‘social justice’ activism, which in turn paves the way for white nationalism and white supremacy to gain a foothold”.<sup>19</sup> To understand this dynamic, it is useful to look at some of the precursors to the Alt-Right movement.

Countless observers have linked the Alt-Right to the so-called “the Manosphere”, arguing that the Alt-Right arose in part from and continues to be closely intertwined.<sup>20</sup> Emerging in and around the 2010s, the manosphere is most simply defined as “an online antifeminist male subculture that has grown rapidly in recent years, largely outside of traditional right-wing” circles.<sup>21</sup> It entails a disparate network of websites, internet forums, blogs, and videos that focus on men’s issues, share a chauvinistic orientation, and are united by an emphasis on male

victimhood. Those involved speak out against the tyranny of SJWs (social justice warriors) and PC (politically correct) culture, and condemn feminism, along with other equity seeking movements as instigators of societal decline. The manosphere first entered the public limelight in 2014 with the “Gamergate” controversy, in which a large online campaign was undertaken against a number of women who worked in the video game industry and had spoken out against sexism. Supporters of Gamergate claimed that the campaign was about defending free speech and fighting for journalistic ethics, however, in practice the campaign marked a blatant attack against women in the industry. In the words of one researcher: “This campaign took the diffuse online harassment of women and sharpened it into coordinated attacks against specific women, who faced stream of misogynistic invective, rape, and death threats, and doxing”.<sup>22</sup> This event was a harbinger of things to come, foreshadowing the rise of the Alt-Right and offering a glimpse into the future.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the tactics forged by Gamergaters such as online harassment, targeted abuse, and doxing, were picked up by the Alt-Right and have become a common tool of the far-right.<sup>24</sup>

The manosphere universe is comprised of a variety of different and overlapping circles, including MRAs, PUAs, MGTOWs, and INCELS. The first of which, Men’s Rights Activists (MRAs) assert that the legal system, media, and society at large unfairly discriminate against men. They talk of misandry, argue that men (and not women) are oppressed and otherwise disadvantaged, and advocate on a number of different issues such as suicide, domestic abuse, and child custody. The metaphor of “the red pill” is central; evoked to describe one’s awakening to the dark truths of our world such as “feminism is toxic, sexism is fake, men have it harder than women, and everything the media teaches about relationships is a lie”.<sup>25</sup> Paul Elam, founder of the influential MRA website A Voice for Men has promoted beating women<sup>26</sup> and infamously commented “there are a lot of women who get pummeled and pumped because they are stupid (and often arrogant) enough to walk through life with the equivalent of a I’M A STUPID, CONNIVING BITCH – PLEASE RAPE ME neon sign glowing above their empty little narcissistic heads”.<sup>27</sup> Their vitriolic hatred of women is undeniable.

Moving to the next category, Pickup Artists (PUAs) focus on helping men learn how to pick-up women and manipulate them into having sex. They talk about “the game”, are obsessed with the notion of an alpha/beta male hierarchy, and advocate a predatory sexuality based on asserting dominance.<sup>28</sup> One of their best known figures, Daryush Valizadeh who writes under the name Roosh V on the PUA website Return of Kings has argued for the legalization of rape on private property.<sup>29</sup> In May 2014, Elliot Rodger injured 14 and killed 6 at the University of California where he hoped to “slaughter every single spoiled, stuck-up blond slut”.<sup>30</sup> His manifesto stated amongst other things that PUA forums had confirmed his theories “about how wicked and degenerate women really are”.<sup>31</sup> The garbage continues and next we have Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOWs). MGTOWs are basically male separatists – they choose to avoid relationships with women altogether as a “protest against a culture destroyed by feminism”.<sup>32</sup> Websites like MGTOW.com, advocate men’s independence from women, argue for the importance of male preservation, and discuss the fight of modern man to protect his sovereignty. Their writings are “peppered with references to a ‘bitch’ who will cheat, leave, use you for your money” and discussions of how “women will either trick them into raising children that aren’t theirs, get pregnant intentionally in order to trap them, or falsely accuse them of

rape”.<sup>33</sup> Essentially, women are viewed as degenerate and untrustworthy sluts programmed to ruin men’s lives.

Finally, Involuntary Celibates (INCELS) are a subculture of primarily young men who identify as involuntarily celibate. Influenced by a sense of unfulfilled sexual entitlement, they speak of swallowing the “black pill”<sup>1</sup> and conceptualize their condition – defined by the absence of romantic or sexual relationships – as immutable. Sparrow explains: “Incels understand biology as destiny. They regard themselves as losers in life’s genetic lottery. They’re self-described betas, condemned by their faces and physiques to perpetual isolation while women (whom they deride as ‘Stacys’) seek out the muscular, handsome males (known in the incel lexicon as ‘Chads’)”.<sup>34</sup> While some amount of blame is placed on other men, incels primarily hold women responsible for their misery. As a result, they denigrate women online, discuss the best ways to punish them, and in some cases advocate mass rape, maiming, and murder.<sup>35</sup> In Spring 2018, Alek Minassian drove a van into a crowd of pedestrians in Toronto killing 10 people, 8 of whom were women.<sup>36</sup> Hours before the attack, he made a post on Facebook celebrating the “Incel Rebellion”. In the aftermath of the incident, Jordan Peterson (psychology professor and darling of the Right) insisted that such acts of violence are what happens when men do not have partners. To address this issue, Peterson and his followers suggest enforced monogamy as the rational solution to redistribute sex and prevent single men from committing mass violence.<sup>37</sup>

These various online communities and the different patriarchal orientations they represent, have led many insecure, marginalized, and otherwise struggling men to broader fascist politics. They function to create a culture united in the belief that white male masculinity is under attack and the status of men must be protected at all costs. In the context of changes in capitalism and the organization of labour, coupled with various cultural-political changes said to favour women and “minorities”, more and more men are embracing the far-right. Reflecting on this reality, Bromma attests:

Millions of men are losing ‘their’ women, and ‘their’ jobs, and it’s driving them crazy... The anger of male dispossession fuels reactionary populist, fundamentalist and fascist trends in every part of the world. These right-wing movements are typically led by men of the middle classes, furious at losing the privileges they held under the previous male capitalist order. But millions of poor and de-classed men are joining in, forming a kind of united front of misogyny.<sup>38</sup>

In what has been referred to as the “MRA-to-white-nationalist-pipeline” men concerned with the demise of patriarchal culture and their declining material conditions in general, are seduced by white supremacist thought and xenophobic ideas. As a result, they come to embrace white nationalism and advocate the vision of “an ethnically cleansed future” that is “hostile to female power”.<sup>39</sup> Misogyny plants the seeds of fascism and operates as a stepping stone to the larger movement.

### *Across the Spectrum of Fascist Sexisms*

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<sup>1</sup> Basically a more nihilistic version of the “red pill”. They have learned the dark truths of the world, but unlike other groups belonging to the manosphere who set out to challenge and change that reality, incels see their situation as fundamentally unchangeable. Their situation and more broadly their life, is hopeless.

White supremacist movements have always been entangled with misogyny. As Spencer notes, their understanding of “racial hierarchy is intimately tied up with other social hierarchies”.<sup>40</sup> That said, although virtually all fascists are anti-feminist, their views on gender and sexuality are not monolithic. In the words of one researcher: “All far rightists promote male dominance, but the kinds of male dominance they promote differ enormously”.<sup>41</sup> There is much disagreement and frequent debate on the topic within the far-right. Speaking to the place of women, some argue for the complete banishment of women from the public sphere, while others argue that (white) women have a role to play in the white nationalist movement. On the topic of homosexuality, some argue for the extermination of all queers, while others argue for (and even celebrate) the inclusion of openly gay men. There is no consensus and substantial tensions exist. Before mapping out some of these tensions, it is useful to note the points of agreement that unite the far-right in regards to the question of gender.

Despite extensive disagreement, there are a number of general ideas on which almost all agree. Some of the most common include: 1) gender essentialism; 2) gender difference; and 3) gender hierarchy. First and foremost is the idea of essentialism, understood as “the view that anything, creature, or person has an essential nature that categorically defines it, materially and/or spiritually”.<sup>42</sup> Gender, like race, is essential – it is a biologically determined fact that defines the essence of a person and shapes everything from ability to intelligence to motivations to vices to human worth. It is an universal category that is not socially constructed, but the unchangeable product of nature.<sup>43</sup> Based on this understanding, the second shared idea is that of binary gender and specific gender roles. Gender is conceptualized as binary and rigid. One is born either a man or a woman, and this inescapably dictates one’s place in the world. Each gender comes with a unique set of innate traits and predetermined characteristics, and as such, men are suited to specific roles and women to others. It is worth highlighting that this position translates to agreement on opposing the notion of gender as non-binary, and thus, agreement on opposing (and frequently enacting violence against) genderqueer and trans people. In general, the far-right shares revulsion for trans people, and a particular hostility for transwomen who “are seen as men who reject their natural roles and privileges and ‘voluntarily’ become the hated other”.<sup>44</sup> Lastly, the third shared idea concerns gender hierarchy and inequality. Gender is necessarily viewed as a hierarchy. It is not only that men and women are fundamentally different, but that men are fundamentally superior to women. Inequality between men and women is the product of biology and a fact of nature – some genders, some races, some abilities, and some sexualities are simply inferior. In sum, gender is determined by nature, gender differences are immutable, and a clear gender hierarchy where men dominate and rule exists (and is desirable). These ideas are the basis upon which the gender ideology of the far-right is built.

Drawing on these guiding threads, a number of different orientations emerge. In his study of misogyny and right-wing movements, Lyon suggests that all far-right positions on gender draw on four ideological themes – patriarchal traditionalism, demographic nationalism, male bonding through warfare, and quasi feminism.<sup>45</sup> As part of this framework, patriarchal traditionalism is most frequently formulated in religious terms, promotes rigid traditional gender roles, and emphasizes the nuclear family as the mechanism for male control over women.<sup>46</sup> Demographic nationalism is primarily concerned with reproduction. It is often connected to the fear that a nation or race isn’t reproducing fast enough and/or that the stock is declining in

quality (e.g. through racial mixing), and declares that women's main duty to the nation or race "is to have lots of babies".<sup>47</sup> Male bonding through warfare is also referred to as the cult of male comradeship, and it "emphasizes warfare (hardship, risk of death, shared acts of violence and killing) as the basis for deep emotional and spiritual ties between men".<sup>48</sup> Historically associated with war in the trenches, it is today more commonly associated with street-fighting and militias. It sees physical confrontation as the most important aspect of life – the foundation upon which everything is built. Activities related to physicality are thus prioritized and celebrated above all others. Since women are and will always be non-combatants, they have little to no value. Lastly, quasi-feminism advocates specific rights for women, although not equality, and promotes "an expanded political role for women while accepting men's overall dominance".<sup>49</sup> Movements may draw heavily on a single theme or a mixture of several, and this may or may not change over time.

As part of this "warring visions of patriarchy"<sup>50</sup>, the approaches taken by far-right groups can be conceptualized as falling into one of two distinct categories – what I am going to refer to as *patriarchal fascism* and *misogynistic fascism*. In the category of patriarchal fascism women are considered inferior, but useful, and they have a role or particular roles to play in the white supremacist movement. This approach is exemplified by the infamous "Fourteen Words". Described as the most popular white supremacist slogan in world, "Fourteen Words" is typically written in one of two variations: "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children" or "Because the beauty of the White Aryan woman must not perish from the earth".<sup>51</sup> In both versions women are valued, as mothers, as symbols of beauty, and as protectors of the future. This orientation has a long legacy. Throughout the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan actively recruited women and combined white supremacy with a "specific, gendered notion of the preservation of family life and women's rights".<sup>52</sup> They criticized inequality amongst whites, and promoted the "special mission of Klanswomen" to protect "pure womanhood" and the home.<sup>53</sup> In Germany, the Nazi Party had a women's wing – The National Socialist Women's League. According to Nazis ideology, women belonged to three areas of activity "Kinder, Küche, Kirche" (children, kitchen, and church).<sup>54</sup> Women's roles were highly restricted, however, they were also highly regarded. Mothers were seen as fighting a battle for the nation and "accorded with the same honourable status as the soldier".<sup>55</sup>

Turning to our contemporary moment, this legacy continues. Coming to prominence in the 1980s, the neo-nazi group White Aryan Resistance (WAR) created the affiliate group Aryan Women's League (AWL). It denounced the feminist movement as a Jewish conspiracy, while arguing that women had subordinate, but complimentary roles to play in the race war.<sup>56</sup> The largest neo-nazi organization in the United States, The National Socialist Movement has a specific Women's Division.<sup>57</sup> Another example, Women for Aryan Unity was founded in the 1990s and has chapters in several continents. They call for the reinvention of feminism "with the parameters of Race and Revolution", and urge women to develop both domestic and survivalist skills in order to take care of home life and be ready to take up arms if their men require it.<sup>58</sup> Self-proclaimed western chauvinists, The Proud Boys have as one of their central tenets "venerate the housewife". They argue that "women are equal but different", interpreted to mean men go to work and women stay at home.<sup>59</sup> Women cannot join The Proud Boys, however, they can join The Proud Boys Girls – a supporting group comprised of "the wives, girlfriends, and cheerleaders" of The Proud Boys.<sup>60</sup>

While the above examples are far from progressive, they are also far from being the worst. Over the course of the last decade, the far-right's engagement with "the woman question" has taken an even darker turn. Well-known commentator on the manosphere David Futrelle, elaborates:

...like many traditionalists, Hitler and his fellow Nazis tempered their misogyny – or at least tried to make it seem more palatable – with praise for the supposed purity and womanly honor of Aryan women who fit themselves neatly into their restricted roles. Today's neo-Nazis, or at least those who've come to Nazism through 4chan and the meme wars of the alt-right, have a much darker view of women, one influenced more by bitter misogyny of 'Red Pill' pickup artists and Men Going Their Own Way than by sentimental fantasies of 'Kinder, Küche, Kirche'.<sup>61</sup>

Going beyond traditional claims about the sanctity of the family and natural gender roles, many contemporary groups influenced by the Alt-Right promote an intensely misogynistic ideology that straight-up hates women. They have largely abandoned the idea that "women have important, dignified roles to play as mothers and homemakers" to promote the message "that women as a group are contemptible, pathetic creatures not worthy of respect".<sup>62</sup> For instance, men's rights activist and white nationalist F. Roger Devlin refers to women as the new "white man's burden", arguing that traditional visions of marriage and the family "did not oppress women enough" and should be replaced with "a vision of absolute servility".<sup>63</sup> This is the realm of misogynistic fascism – women are not only inferior, but useless, and they have little to no role to play in the white nationalist movement. Examples of this orientation are terrifyingly ample.

Renown white supremacist website The Daily Stormer<sup>2</sup> has banned women from contributing to site, virulently argues against their inclusion in anything, and has come into conflict with women associated with the older white supremacist website Stormfront.<sup>64</sup> At several rallies in the last year, crowds of white nationalists could be found chanting "white sharia now".<sup>65</sup> Promoted by some on the far-right, the idea of "white sharia" proposes that in a future white ethnostate "the sexuality, reproduction, daily life, and right to consent of White women should be controlled by White men".<sup>66</sup> In a video promoting the idea, one proponent asserts: "Under 'white sharia' our women will no longer be permitted to live their lives as sluts...And you won't have any career women invading your workplace either. Nope. Under 'white sharia' our women won't even be able to leave the home without being escorted by a male family member".<sup>67</sup> Many defenders of the concept also advocate making abortions forbidden for white women, and mandatory for women of colour.<sup>68</sup> Equally vile, members of the militant Atomwaffen Division encourage the rape of white women as a tool to force the birth of more white babies<sup>69</sup>, and promote the rape of non-white women as a tool to terrorise by forcing "them to carry around the spawn of their master and enemy".<sup>70</sup> Beyond such obvious suspects, this particular orientation to women in far-right politics takes some less expected turns.

Under the umbrella of misogynist fascism, there exists a strain specifically defined by a queer misogyny. This subsection, referred to by Kirchick as "homofascism" is comprised of

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<sup>2</sup> Posts on the website argue things such as: women who have sex with black men deserve "swift and rapid extermination" via death squads; brown men are "deranged savages" who are indefensible except in cases where they "beat the shit out of" their "bitch" girlfriends; men need the right to beat their daughters so they don't become "dumb sluts"; and "women have become complete sociopaths that collectively deserve to be punished and punished severely".

aggressively sexist and generally hypermasculine gay men who literally have no use for women.<sup>71</sup> As mentioned earlier, the far-right's position on sexuality is somewhat complicated. On the one hand, LGBTQ rights are seen as a sign of social degeneration, Jewish influence, and an attack on white society.<sup>72</sup> In response, it is not uncommon to see "open calls for the expulsion or violent eradication of LGBT+ people".<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, when speaking specifically of the "homosexual question" things are much less clear cut. Nazi Germany rounded up and slaughtered homosexuals by the tens of thousands, yet, it is also common knowledge that there were gay Nazis. The most famous being Ernst Röhm, a high-ranking official and head of the Nazi Party's paramilitary force (the SA). Along with Hitler, Röhm was a "founding father of Nazism"<sup>74</sup> and his particular brand fascism "was identical to the Nazi's Party's ideology in almost all respects, save on questions of male-male eroticism".<sup>75</sup> Under Röhm, homosexuality was highly regarded in the SA where "they promoted an aggressive, hypermasculine form of homosexuality, condemning 'hysterical women of both sexes' in reference to feminine gay men".<sup>76</sup> They celebrated ancient warrior cults and frequently referenced the Greek tradition of sending gay soldiers, who were believed to be the most fierce fighters into battle.<sup>77</sup> In the 1980s, an explicitly gay neo-nazi skinhead movement emerged in the UK.<sup>78</sup> In the late 1990s, the American Resistance Corps (ARC) was founded in North America with the goal of uniting gay and straight skinheads to create "a new era of tolerance and compassion between racist heterosexuals and homosexuals in their war against non-whites".<sup>79</sup>

Looking to our current period, some on the far-right simply do not care about male sexuality one way or another. For instance, editor-in-chief of the influential Counter Currents Publishing Greg Johnson argues: "White Nationalism is for the interests of whites and against the interests of our racial enemies. Period. Anything else is beside the point".<sup>80</sup> Similarly, the infamous alt-right figurehead Richard Spencer insists that homosexuality is a non-issue – something that has been part of European societies for millennia and isn't "something to get worked up about".<sup>81</sup> Against this backdrop, several openly gay figures and the ideas they promote have gained some traction on the far-right. A featured writer on several alt-right websites and author of a number of books, James J. O'Meara is best known for his book *The Homo and The Negro*.<sup>82</sup> In the book, O'Meara makes the argument "that gay white men represent the best of what Western culture has to offer because of their 'intelligence' and 'beauty', and that 'Negroes' represent the worst, being incapable of achievement".<sup>83</sup> He insists that homosexuality is quintessential to Western Civilization and promotes gay participation in fascist movements.<sup>84</sup> O'Meara and others like him, advocate a future in line with the classic Aryan fantasy of the *Männerbund*. Associated with male warrior tribes and homoeroticism, the concept celebrates the unique bonds between men and speaks to a social order where elite bands of men rule.<sup>85</sup> Male dominance is central and the fundamental building block of society isn't the church or family, but close-knit groups of organized men.

Arguably the most infamous of this camp, self-described "anarcho-fascist" Jack Donovan promotes a blend of white nationalism, gang masculinity, and androphilia (love or sex between masculine men).<sup>86</sup> He calls for the establishment of a tribal order called "The Brotherhood" – an order that is comprised of men who swear an oath to each other and is based on "the way of the gang" understood as a life centered "on fighting, hierarchy, and drawing the perimeter against outsiders".<sup>87</sup> Utilizing violence, gangs of white men are to create decentralized "homelands/autonomous zones" marked by racially defined borders and the exclusion of (white)

women from public life.<sup>88</sup> Donovan is a prominent member of the neo-fascist cadre organization The Wolves of Vinland. Inspired by the theories of the late Italian philosopher Julius Evola, the group promotes a particularly anti-populist and anti-woman take on fascism.<sup>89</sup> They prioritize physical fitness and fight training, and argue that the solution to western decline is “a return of heroic masculine warrior-kings”.<sup>90</sup> All of these groups and figures advocate a politics defined by extreme hyper-masculinity based in an almost pathological veneration of “manliness” and a disdain for femininity. They reject gay culture for its association with decadence and hate effeminate men as much as they hate women.

### *White Supremacy, Complicity, and the Legacy of Saviour Politics*

Beyond understanding the contemporary far-right’s varying positions on women, it is furthermore valuable to consider the ways in which women as a generic symbol and white women in particular are used as a tool to promote and further white supremacy. Hand-in-hand with the far-right’s condemnation of feminism, comes the condemnation of immigration and a particular disdain for black and indigenous women. Combined they represent the core dangers threatening Western Civilization and white nationhood. In a somewhat contradictory dynamic, as groups advocate “putting women in their place” they simultaneously express concern for women’s safety from supposedly dangerous black and brown men. For example, it is common for anti-immigrant arguments to be framed in terms of the threat migrant men – who are discussed as violent and/or as rapists – pose to “their women”. Founded in Finland and now with chapters across Europe and North America, the far-right vigilante group Soldiers of Odin exists for the avowed purpose of conducting street patrols to keep women safe from refugees with a propensity to rape.<sup>91</sup> Since taking over the White House, Donald Trump has frequently invoked the threat of “Mexico sending rapists” to justify increased border security and stricter immigration policy.<sup>92</sup> Such claims are not unique to discussion of migrant men alone, but pop up frequently in discussion of homegrown non-white men as well. In 2017, when white supremacist Dylann Roof opened fire and massacred nine black churchgoers at a prayer service in Charleston, he reportedly exclaimed: “You rape our women, and you’re taking over our country, and you have to go”.<sup>93</sup> Calls to defend (white) women from the threat of the barbaric “other” play a critical role in upholding the white supremacist project.

The image of the “white woman victim” who must be protected is frequently employed by reactionary forces to whip up hysteria and justify vehemently racist actions. This classic image “implicitly calls out to white men to defend ‘their women’ and their nation, indeed, whiteness itself”.<sup>94</sup> White woman’s bodies – understood as central to the reproduction of race and nation – become symbols to be fought for and these symbols become powerful tools of propaganda. Discourses of safety and appeals to patriarchal ideals of womanhood are invoked to construct the figure of the vulnerable (white) woman under attack from the dangerous (racialized) other. This dynamic functions to produce and reproduce particular race and gender formations, as well as to establish and enforce a particular vision of white nationhood. As Keskiäinen notes: “Gender and sexuality have not only been by-products of colonial and racial encounters, but essential for their (re)structuring”.<sup>95</sup> The trope of the “barbaric dark-skinned rapist” – of black and brown men as sexual predators who target white women – has been a key tool in upholding racial hierarchies and carrying out white supremacist politics. From the colonization of North America

to lynchings in the United States to xenophobic attacks in Europe and much else, calls to defend women have been used to incite racialized violence and establish incredibly racist policy. A brief look into this history is telling.

The stereotype of “the black brute” and the threat of “the black rapist” are fundamental to the history of white supremacy in America. The idea of the black brute was drawn on to contribute to justifications for slavery, while the myth of the black rapist was “a political invention” cultivated to promote a “strategy of racist terror” to keep “the Negro” in check following emancipation.<sup>96</sup> The myth of the black rapist, complimented by the continued rape of black women, helped to assure the ongoing domination and exploitation of black people.<sup>97</sup> In the aftermath of the Civil War, the claim that black men were sexual predators was used as pretext for murder and mob violence. Lynching came to be rationalized “as a method to avenge Black men’s assault’s on white Southern womanhood”.<sup>98</sup> According to Angela Davis, the myth functioned to both demonize black men and thus legitimize contempt for them, as well as to exalt white men and excuse their brutality. She explains: “In a society where male supremacy was all-pervasive, men who were motivated by their duty to defend their women could be excused of any excesses they might commit. That their motive was sublime was able justification for the resulting barbarities”.<sup>99</sup> It is worth noting that as the myth gained traction “former proponents of Black equality became increasingly afraid to associate themselves with Black people’s struggle for liberation” and by the end of the nineteenth century many white women, including leading suffragists, “publicly vilified Black men for their alleged attacks on white women”.<sup>100</sup> There is a long legacy of white women’s complicity in propping up racist narratives that have very real consequences, and this not just a matter of the distance past.

At first glance, calls for safety – things like calls for safe spaces or safe neighbourhoods – sound harmless enough. Almost everyone desires to feel safe. However, within the context of a society defined by racial domination (institutional and interpersonal racism), calls for safety often draw on and act to perpetuate racist tropes (e.g. “the black thug”, “the dangerous black man” etc.) and frequently go hand in hand with actions and/or policies that enact racialized violence. Wang elaborates:

“When considering safety, we fail to ask the critical questions about the co-constitutive relationship between safety and violence. We need to consider the extent to which racial violence is the unspoken and necessary underside of security, particularly white security. Safety requires the removal and containment of people deemed to be threats. White civil society has a psychic investment in the erasure and abjection of bodies that they project hostile feels onto, which allows them peace of mind amidst the state of perpetual violence”.<sup>101</sup>

Looking at the history of the feminist movement against sexual violence, Wang observes that calls for the safety of women were answered with the expansion of a racialized penal state. Drawing on the age-old trope of the black male rapist, appeals to ensure women’s safety acted to sanction the expansion of the police and the prison system as the state came to be presented and positioned as the protector of women (almost always conceptualized as white women). Through the process of raising awareness about violence and fighting for aggressive sex crime prosecution, feminists inadvertently aided in the creation of a tough on crime model of policing and punishment that reflects the racism of the society from which it came; a society in which the black male is almost always conceived of as a threat.

Similarly to the function of the anti-black myths in North American history, anti-indigenous tropes have played an equally influential role. The convergence of racialized rape narratives and white-nation building is also integral to history of colonialization and indigenous genocide in North America. Ideas of “the savage indian” and “native sexual perversion” were essential to the colonial imagination.<sup>102</sup> These myths, combined with notions of European superiority and the righteousness of “civilizing missions” were used to justify war against indigenous nations, the theft of native land and resources, and the decimation of native communities. Popular captivity narratives spread stories about the abduction and barbaric treatment of white women by violent, lust driven native men. These stories, along with other writings, helped to solidify the image of Native men as wanton savages and promote the idea that “both Native and white women have to be protected from Indian men”.<sup>103</sup> In addition to providing a rationale for appropriation and assimilation, Nagel notes that stories of “Indian depredations and savagery also became a means of justifying white misbehaviour and atrocities and provided opportunities for white self-aggrandizement”.<sup>104</sup>

More recently, the trope of “the immigrant rapist”, “the barbaric refugee”, and “the Muslim extremist” have been central to cries to close the borders and save the (white) nation. Examining the refugee crisis in Europe, Carroll observes that those on the right have drawn on the myth of the immigrant rapist “to call for the closing of the borders as a way to protect white, European women against the dangerous, brown men who are coming to Europe seeking asylum”.<sup>105</sup> In addition to impacting state policy, such myths produce grassroots backlash. Last year, Italian and Polish neo-nazi groups announced that they were joining forces to launch patrols of European beaches in order to “protect women and children from migrants” in the face of a “muslim invasion”.<sup>106</sup> The Quebec based ultra-nationalist group La Meute, claims it “was founded for the protection of our women from religious fundamentalism” and routinely patrols sections of the Canada-US looking for “illegal refugees”.<sup>107</sup> Calls to protect white women are used to justify everything from border policy to vigilante violence to the formation of white-nationalist paramilitary organizations.

Following a related logic, in their fight against migrants (particularly Muslims) some on the right have begun to publicly advocate for the safety of LGBTQ people. Calls to protect queers from the threat of Islamic extremists/gay-hating Muslims have been employed in an attempt to spread anti-immigrant sentiment and appeal to a different demographic. Shortly after the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, white-nationalist and explicit homophobe Butch Leghorn called on right movements to take advantage of the event. Writing on the alt-right website The Right Stuff, Leghorn argued: “This shooting is a very valuable wedge issue...We simply need to hammer this issue...Drive this wedge. Smash their coalition. Make it cool to be anti-Muslim because Liberalism”.<sup>108</sup> Over the past year, “gay pride” marches that go almost exclusively through Muslim neighbourhoods have been organized by fascists in France, Sweden, and the UK.<sup>109</sup> Their calls to protect women, just like their calls to protect LGBTQ people, is of course disingenuous. They hate women and queers, but calls for their protection are a politically useful mechanism. Under these circumstances, Faye aptly notes that the task of feminist and queer liberation “cannot be merely sexual or gendered, but it must also be sharply critical of its alignment with whiteness as a system of persecution”.<sup>110</sup> This is not just a matter of being aware of opportunistic white-nationalists duplicity using calls for LGBTQ safety to further their vile agenda,

but also of critically evaluating the ways in which queer movements themselves buttress and reinforce white supremacy.

In regards to this responsibility, it is worthwhile to keep in mind that the LGBTQ movement like the feminist movement, has a history of pushing for safety in a manner than has had violent consequences for others. Examining the history of the LGBTQ movement in the United States, Hanhardt observes that appeals to safety have had racialized consequences. Since the 1970s, activist responses to anti-LGBTQ violence have taken one of two forms: the establishment of protected gay territories and the identification of anti-LGBTQ violence as a criminal category. Rooted in the implicit assumption that white gays need to be protected from violent (often read as black) criminals, these two approaches have led to gentrification and mass incarceration – both of which disproportionately impact and devastate black communities. Hanhardt explains:

“Messy distinctions between crime and violence, safety and justice, underscore the flexibility of concepts such as risk and their centrality to the politics of development. Here risk is simultaneously the value of speculative capital (real estate) and the justification for crime control (bad neighbourhoods), the ever-present threat to gay autonomy (violence), and symptom of irresponsibility (the designation ‘at risk’).”<sup>111</sup>

Calls for the creation of safe spaces came to be interpreted as calls for state violence in the form of criminalization and privatization, and through this process, became inextricably linked to spatial development and crime control strategies that play out along race and class lines.

There’s a lot that needs to be challenged and much organizing to be done, and knowing the nuanced ins and outs of the forces we face is advantageous. Given that misogyny is a foundational element of contemporary far-right politics, it is valuable to know its specific role and function. This, however, is only one piece of the puzzle and it is useful to consider other things. As we strive to challenge the rise of the fascism, it is worth looking back to the anti-fascist resistance that came before us.

## **Part 2 – Against Heroes: An Incomplete History of Women’s Anti-Fascist Resistance**

“The past does not pass; the dead are not dead, for they continue to move us today...These ghosts have not risen simply to be put to rest, but to speak in the manner for which they were killed; some of them must be battled anew in our hearts”.<sup>112</sup>

For as long as there has been fascism, there has been anti-fascist resistance, and from its origins onwards to our present moment, women and queers have been active participants. However, these histories are routinely glossed over and while there has been much talk of our “grandfather’s anti-fascism” there is much less said about the anti-fascism of our grandmothers. Speaking to the politics of anti-fascist history, Richet notes: “Most of the sources of the history of antifascism deal with the political space occupied by men. This is the case of the fascist sources built on the assumption that women could not be autonomous political subjects. It is also the case of the sources collected by the antifascist groups whose male leadership shared similar assumptions”.<sup>113</sup> This has an impact on anti-fascism in our present moment. When people think about or hear the term anti-fascist, the image most likely to pop into their head is not CeCe

McDonald<sup>3</sup> or an armed partisan women, but a generic anti-racist skinhead dude or perhaps the anti-fascist man as depicted in classic propaganda posters with rifle, sickle, and hammer in hand. Against such trends, this section considers the gendering of history and explores women's participation in antifascist resistance during the first half of the twentieth century. The intention is not to provide an exhaustive account, but to provide a snapshot of a history too frequently forgotten and in the process, challenge the dominant image of the anti-fascist hero. To the extent to which such an image holds a certain pervasiveness, it acts only to hinder actions and limit possibilities.

### *Gender, Memory, and the Stories We Tell*

The stories and more importantly, the histories we tell matter – they frame events, contextualize theory, and situate agential subjects. Anti-fascism and anti-fascist history is not gender neutral, or race or class neutral for that matter. Gender plays a huge role in how we think about anti-fascism and how its history is commonly told. The history of anti-fascist struggle is depicted as the history of great moments and even greater men. It is a history of the heroic and necessarily male subjects who dared to back fight against the behemoth of fascism. If women or queers do appear in these histories, they are predominantly presented as secondary characters – as minor participants, romantic partners, or bystanders. In the realm of revolutionary history, there is a long legacy of women's activities being dismissed as: a) personal/private/ home matters (e.g. breads riots, various feminist campaigns, and even the march that sparked the Russian Revolution etc. framed as home issues, but not disciplined politics); or b) an irrational/ emotional matter (e.g. they act from eruptions of emotions, and thus are inclined to spontaneity, but not organized politics). Women's involvement in explicitly political movements in the public sphere, as well as the day-to-day support, reproductive, and behind the scenes work they perform in the private sphere, is simply disregarded.<sup>4</sup> Specific figures and activities are glorified and romanticized, while others are neglected and downplayed.

This common approach to history leads to the erasure of particular experiences, the loss of whole histories, and beyond that, a skewed and inaccurate picture. The creation and dissemination of accounts of radical history shape our collective political imagination, and

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<sup>3</sup> A Black transwoman attacked by a Nazi in June 2011. McDonald and a group of friends were confronted by another group of people spewing racist and transphobic remarks at them. One of the women in the other group smashed a glass in McDonald's face and punched her. After a fight between the two groups broke out, the woman's ex-boyfriend assaulted McDonald, whose face was already bleeding from the glass, and threw her into the street. The man, with fists clenched, began pursuing McDonald. She quickly pulled a pair of scissors from her purse and stabbed the man in the chest as he lunged towards her. The man died. He was later found to have a swastika tattooed on his chest. She went to prison for 19 months of her 41-month sentence, despite having obviously defended herself against a racist, transphobic Nazi who was threatening her life.

<sup>4</sup> This dynamic is made worse by the fact that there is generally less documentation of women's involvement. Women were more likely to be illiterate and thus unable to write down their ideas and experiences. And even if they were literate, they were less likely to have the opportunity or time to record their thoughts. Furthermore, so much of antifascist history (at least in the period around the Second World War) was recorded by traditional political organizations and their leaderships, from which women were most often excluded.

influences the events and actions thought to be desirable (and even possible). They convey specific ideas about who counts as history, what counts as history, and by default, what counts as political work and who can be a political actor. In sum, histories frequently present a hierarchy of who and what matters, and when the accounts are particularly gendered (and thus exclusionary) they stand in the way of challenging a fascist threat steeped in misogyny. As a result, it is important to look to the margins of history and seek out alternative accounts.

### *Women Against Fascism*

As already mentioned, women, femmes, and queers have been active participants in anti-fascist struggles for as long as there has been fascism. Their involvement is as diverse as it is extensive, and any attempt at a comprehensive telling is beyond the scope of this piece of writing. With this in mind, I take a narrow and inevitably limited approach to presenting anti-fascist history. While the histories of anti-fascist women and queers frequently dovetail, they are also different things and it would be impossible to cover both. The vibrant legacy of queers against fascism is a history in its own right.<sup>5</sup> Thus, this section focuses exclusively on women. It draws on a small sampling of case studies from Europe, Africa, and North America to examine women's resistance to the rise of fascism following the First World War. Contrary to popular notions, women were involved in all aspects of the historical fight against fascism. Feminist historian Ingrid Strobl elaborates: "They were activists in urban brigades, the ghetto underground, and partisan units. They printed and distributed the illegal press; they forged papers; they transported weapons and themselves participated in arm actions. They organized underground movements and ghetto uprisings; they were political cadres and military commanders of groups".<sup>114</sup> To explore this further, it is instructive to look at resistance in Ethiopia, Spain, and Yugoslavia.

As of 1934, Ethiopia was one of just two African countries that had not been colonized by Europe.<sup>115</sup> Unfortunately, this was not to last and in October of 1935 Mussolini's forces invaded Ethiopia. After capturing the capital the following year, Mussolini declared Ethiopia part of the Italian Empire and ushered in a period of fascist occupation. Resistance to the occupation, to fascism and to colonialism, commenced immediately and lasted until Italy was expelled in 1941. From the beginning, women participated in the struggle in large numbers and fulfilled many critical roles. Reflecting on this period, historian Aregawi Berhe contends that women's participation was crucial, arguing that while it is difficult to assess their military contribution

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<sup>5</sup> There are so many amazing stories. While outside of the scope of this article, I wanted to include at least one demonstrative example. *Raad van Verzt* (Resistance Council) was a group in the Dutch anti-fascist resistance. The group was founded by the gay artist Willem Arondeus and was comprised of many openly queer members, including the well-known lesbian cellist Frieda Belinfante. The group engaged in a variety of activities, but focused primarily on forging documents for the Jewish community in Amsterdam to help them escape Nazi persecution. While they had initial success with forging records, they eventually encountered a problem – the forged documents could be discovered as fakes by cross-referencing their information with the records kept in the Amsterdam Public Records Office. In response, late one evening the group burned the Public Records Office to the ground and in the process, destroyed a key resource used by the Nazis to hunt Jews and other "degenerates". Following this sensationalist act, the group was hotly pursued by Nazis forces and tragically, were quickly arrested and executed. Right before his execution, Willem Arondeus passed these final words to his lawyer: "Let it be known that homosexuals are not cowards".

“their supplementary support activities, spying and sabotage actions in some instances were decisive” .<sup>116</sup> During the occupation, the Ethiopian Women’s Volunteer Service Association (EWVSA) was turned into “a clandestine movement of resistance”.<sup>117</sup> Women who were part of the association engaged in a diversity of activities, ranging from supplying those fighting in the field with clothes, food, bandages, and ammunition, to providing shelter, forging important documents, producing propaganda, and gathering intelligence.<sup>118</sup> Some women became camp-followers, women who travelled to the front and took care of maintaining weapons, as well as feeding and providing medical care to those engaged in fighting.<sup>119</sup>

Other women fraternized with Italian soldiers, and artfully engaged in deception to further the struggle. Women took Italian soldiers, including high-ranking officers, as lovers to build a false sense of trust and gain access to information and materials. With a relationship established, women took the opportunity to steal arms and it was not uncommon for these women to kill their lovers in order to do so.<sup>120</sup> Such relationships were used as a tool of sabotage as well, after pretending to be a defector and declaring their allegiance to fascism, women would supply their lover with false information and point the Italians in the wrong direction.<sup>121</sup> Women took Italian lovers, found employment as domestic servants, or ran drinking houses to gather intelligence and collective sensitive information, such as the location of arms and munition depots or plans for upcoming offensives.<sup>122</sup> In addition to these roles, women were also actively involved in the military aspect of the struggle. Some women became guerilla fighters and fought on the battlefield, and some even led fighters and planned military operations. Although wars in Ethiopia were predominantly fought by men, women were not entirely excluded from warfare.<sup>123</sup> For instance, in circumstances where a wife or daughter – in the absence of a male successor – inherited a family’s land and weapons “they were expected to perform the duties attached to the land and weapons, whether or not the duty was military or administrative”.<sup>124</sup> Thus, it was not unheard of for women to play leading military roles. In this context, a handful of women from prominent families led their own armies, and many more from all rungs of society, took up arms and joined the guerilla war.<sup>125</sup>

The anti-fascist/anti-colonial struggle in Ethiopia caused ripples far beyond its borders. In the United States, Mussolini’s invasion sparked protests, riots, and solidarity campaigns throughout the country. Massive demonstrations took place in New York and Chicago, street fights broke out between black anti-fascists and Italian pro-fascists, pickets were held outside of the Italian consulate, leaflets were distributed, dock workers refused to load Italian ships, and fundraising drives were organized.<sup>126</sup> Black Communists set up the Joint Committee for the Defence of Ethiopia and along with other Pan-African groups spearheaded the activities.<sup>127</sup> Crabapple notes, “black Americans recognized the dangers of Fascism abroad early...They saw Mussolini’s Blackshirts reflected in the white hoods of the Klan, and Hitler’s Jew-baiting mirrored by the systemic violence of Jim Crow”.<sup>128</sup> Women in the American Communist Party spoke out against the threat fascism posed to women’s rights and with the invasion of Ethiopia sought to develop a cross-racial alliance to build class-solidarity against fascism, and with varying degrees of success, worked with black organizations to build support for Ethiopia.<sup>129</sup> In Britain, black rights and anti-colonial activists formed the International African Friends of Abyssinia (IAFA) to promote resistance to fascism in Ethiopia.<sup>130</sup> Black radicals in America, Britain, and elsewhere, drew connections between the fight for Ethiopia and their experiences, as well as put forth analysis of anti-fascism rooted in black internationalism, anti-colonialism, and anti-

imperialism.<sup>131</sup> Several members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade<sup>6</sup> came to Spain as a result of their activism in support of Ethiopia. For example, Salaria Kea – the only black woman in the Brigade – fundraised for Ethiopian hospitals and when her application to join the Ethiopian army was rejected, she sailed for Spain.<sup>132</sup>

In July of 1936, General Francisco Franco initiated a military rebellion against Spain's republican government. The instigators anticipated a swift victory. However, the *coup d'état* was met with a spontaneous uprising and Spain was thrown into civil war. In many of the besieged cities, everyday civilians raided local armories, requisitioned weapons, and took up arms to fight against the fascists. During these early days of popular resistance, women took part in the storming of barracks to obtain weapons, built barricades, and participated in armed street fighting.<sup>133</sup> Beyond a fight against fascism, the Spanish Civil War was also a highly contested fight for revolution. Anarchists and dissident Marxists sought to combine the anti-fascist fight with the fight for broader revolutionary change, while communists and socialists rejected such positions, arguing for the necessity of engaging in the war exclusively in terms of anti-fascism. This conflict led to what Nash refers to as "civil war within the civil war".<sup>134</sup> In this context, women essentially found themselves in a struggle on three fronts – fighting against fascism, fighting to push antifascist forces towards a revolutionary orientation, and then finally, fighting to make revolutionary forces take seriously gender liberation. In response, women's organizations were founded to aid the anti-fascist cause, while promoting ideas of revolutionary change that included women's emancipation.

Founded a few short months before the official outbreak of the civil war, *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women) was an anarchist organization that sought to contest women's subordination and mobilize women to take part in the struggle against fascism. Beginning with just a few hundred members, its numbers soared during the war reaching a membership ranging from 20,000 to 60,000 women.<sup>135</sup> Members of the organization were active in all aspects of the Civil War, from fighting on the front lines, as well as aiding the wounded, to maintaining collective kitchens and organizing schools for refugees and engaging in political debate. Central to *Mujeres Libres* and what made them unique, was an emphasis on organizational autonomy. The foundering members of *Mujeres Libres* were all militants in the broader anarcho-syndicalist movement who "found the existing organizations of that movement inadequate to address the specific problems confronting them as women, whether in the movement itself or in the larger society".<sup>136</sup> The organization was built on the belief that women needed separate organizations to address their specific needs and ultimately, to build their capacities to intervene and shape the political landscape. To this end, the organization took on a variety of initiatives, including: the publication of a regular journal aimed at political consciousness-raising; the running of classes to overcome illiteracy; the facilitation of discussion groups to challenge ignorance; the opening of women's health clinics; and the offering of industrial and commercial apprenticeships.<sup>137</sup> Political instruction and basic education sought to help in addressing women's cultural and sexual subordination, and professional training aimed to aid women in their economic subordination by increasing employment opportunities.

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<sup>6</sup> The battalion of African American volunteers who traveled to Spain to resist fascism, and fought in the Spanish Civil War.

In addition to challenging women's subordination, the organization's initiatives were aimed at recruiting women into the anti-fascist movement and creating a conscious force of women who were prepared for the "social revolution". To build this force, the organization emphasized two-interrelated goals and corresponding programs: *capacitación* and *captación*. The first, *capacitación* was concerned with "preparing women for revolutionary engagement".<sup>138</sup> Related to the educational and consciousness-raising activities outlined above, *capacitación* focused on the empowerment of women such that they would feel confident in their abilities, recognize their potential, and ultimately conceptualize "themselves as competent historical actors".<sup>139</sup> This emphasis on personal development, individual growth, and building capacity was the result of conceptualizing struggle not only in quantitative terms, but also in qualitative ones. Moving to the second, *captación* was concerned with "actively incorporating them [women] into the libertarian movement".<sup>140</sup> In practice this entailed working to increase women's participation in other, larger revolutionary organizations. As *Mujeres Libres* worked with women to address their everyday material needs, they created the conditions necessary to bring more of them into the fold of revolutionary politics.

By the spring of 1941, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was occupied and partitioned off by Axis forces. A portion of the country was occupied by German troops, while other areas were occupied by Bulgarian, Hungarian, and Italian troops, and Croatia was established as a Nazi puppet-state ruled by a local fascist militia.<sup>141</sup> In response, a Communist led resistance movement emerged and the National Liberation Army (NLA) was formed.<sup>142</sup> From the onset and continuing for the duration of the conflict, women played a huge part in the partisan resistance movement. In the words of one scholar: "The mass participation of women in the communist-led Yugoslav Partisan resistance is one of the most remarkable phenomena of the Second World War".<sup>143</sup> Similarly, Bonfiglioli describes women's contribution as "unprecedented in Europe", explaining that "out of a population of sixteen million...[official records] report one hundred thousand women fighting as partisans, and two million participating in various ways to support the National Liberation Movement. It was been calculated that approximately twenty-five thousand women died in battle, and some two thousand women attained officer's rank".<sup>144</sup> While noteworthy, women's contribution as fighters is only one part of a much bigger picture. Women participated in the anti-fascist struggle in a variety of different ways. Acting autonomously, women led food riots in face of widespread hunger caused by the country's food stock being exported to the Third Reich.<sup>145</sup> Otherwise disconnected, peasant women passed information to partisans on enemy troop movements and spies, as well as harvested crops for neighbours who were at the front or in prison.<sup>146</sup> In addition to taking care of important agricultural work, many of these women also tended to wounded partisan soldiers, took care of orphans, and housed those on the run.<sup>147</sup> As part of organizations and collectives officially connected to the resistance movement, women took on many more roles still.

Shortly after the formation of the National Liberation Army, the Antifascist Front of Women (AFZ) was established. A specific women's organization, the AFZ was founded as an organ of Yugoslav Communist Party and was charged with the two-fold mission of mobilizing "larges masses of women in the struggle against the German occupation and in support of the combat and noncombat activities of the Liberation Movement".<sup>148</sup> Anti-fascist women's committees were formed in towns, villages, and cities across the country, and members canvassed both liberated and non-liberated territories to recruit new women into the

organization.<sup>149</sup> Once members, the work taken on by the women was all-encompassing and ranged from typical gendered tasks such as sewing and laundry, to espionage and sabotage. The women knitted socks and sweaters, sewed uniforms, and made shoes for the troops, as well as mended and laundered their clothes.<sup>150</sup> They collected food, clothing, medical supplies, money, arms and ammunition.<sup>151</sup> They prepared hideouts for partisans on the run, “looked after the families of the arrested and organized prison escapes”.<sup>152</sup> Women acted as couriers, transporting important messages, outlawed literature, attack orders, weapons and explosives through the country.<sup>153</sup> They printed underground newspapers, published and distributed clandestine anti-fascist journals, and ran illegal radio stations.<sup>154</sup> They dug up streets to inhibit the movement of fascist tanks and served as guards in liberated villages.<sup>155</sup> Women destroyed roads and rail lines, cut telephone lines, blew up power stations and other strategic targets, and burned enemy crops.<sup>156</sup> They also engaged directly at the front as nurses, cooks, and armed fighters.<sup>157</sup>

Local AFZ councils ran hospitals and orphanages, set-up public kitchens, and organized accommodations for refugees.<sup>158</sup> They engaged in constructive, socially useful projects to provide much needed services and care. In addition to building women’s involvement in the resistance movement, the organization operated to agitate for women’s right and facilitate political education.<sup>159</sup> The AFZ had the “revolutionary mission” to help transform women into equal and deserving citizens of the future socialist state”.<sup>160</sup> Specifically, this meant working to “eliminate illiteracy among women, ‘raise’ their political consciousness, and train them professionally” so that they could effectively participate in the process of building socialism.<sup>161</sup> To this end, the organization carried out a comprehensive literacy campaign offering courses that taught reading and writing in urban, as well as rural areas.<sup>162</sup> Along with literacy course, the AFZ held general education classes on topics such as hygiene and health, first-aid, and other practical skills.<sup>163</sup> Special political courses were offered for more “advanced” members, and covered discussions of politics, economics, history, and culture.<sup>164</sup> Working in tandem with the courses, the AFZ released publications “which, besides being tools for the dissemination of propaganda, featured educational pieces and political texts in a simple, accessible language”.<sup>165</sup> This is a limited account – a small handful of examples from a much larger history. Nonetheless, these examples are powerful and offer lessons, inspiration, and other takeaways for anti-fascist resistance in our present moment. To explore this further, the next section considers some of the key insights that can be garnered from these histories.

### **Part 3 – Learning from Our Predecessors: Towards a Feminist Antifa**

“ We conspire; we breathe together. We share what we have been gifted to us by those who came before us. We attempt to walk beside each other. But what will we carry over with us past the emancipatory horizons we’ll approach together? What histories will inform our collective actions? What energies of solidarity and creativity will animate these movements”.<sup>166</sup>

Invoking the history of women’s participation in anti-fascism, a number of lessons can be drawn and carried into our current moment. While the uncritical introduction of organizing models and ideas from other places and times is problematic, it can be useful to draw inspiration and take insights from elsewhere. History certainly does not hold all of the answers, but it can be a place (one amongst many) to start. Akemo and Busk discussing anarchism, insist that building

“an anarchist feminist historical tradition will give us a platform to advance our own politics, understand our work in the context of what has already been done, and then forge ahead...We have always existed, but we have not always been seen”.<sup>167</sup> The same can be said for an anti-fascist feminist historical tradition. With this in mind, I propose seven general insights that can be teased out from the history of women’s anti-fascist resistance and applied to contemporary anti-fascist struggles. These are not intended to be universal or prescriptive, but merely contextual and suggestive.

First, conceptualize anti-fascist resistance broadly and engage in multi-layered struggle. Embrace a variety of organizing strategies and tactics, and move away from the tendency to look at anti-fascist struggle in terms of a hierarchical ranking in which certain forms of activity (e.g. combat/fighting, involvement in formal political organizations etc.) are placed at the top, and all other forms of activity are seen as secondary and less important. Anti-fascist resistance isn’t just one thing. It involves a lot of different types of activities, and requires a diversity of things. Describing the range of activities that anti-fascists historically engaged in, Bravo notes that while armed resistance and the ideal of a “young, healthy, tough, and preferably male” body were disproportionality glorified, there was also space for unarmed resistance where “the human frame was far less strictly defined” and “one could be old, weak, physically inept, sickly, and still useful and not excluded”.<sup>168</sup> Resistance was lived everyday by many different bodies, from those who took up arms and fought Nazis to those who engaged in sabotage, to those who aided clandestine activities to those who fed and clothed those resisting. It involved both formal and informal involvement, as well as individual and collective actions. It took place in both the public and the private sphere, included physical confrontation, public education, labour and community organizing, surveillance and information gathering, the building of infrastructure, and so much more. Building on the first, the second insight is related to the task of building anti-fascist political culture. Calls to develop a “physical culture of class combat”<sup>169</sup> or to form “ultras” football supporter clubs<sup>170</sup> are fine, but limited.<sup>7</sup> If we want to develop a strong resistance movement, we cannot focus almost exclusively on physical activities and/or traditionally male-dominated spaces.<sup>8</sup> It’s important to have spaces, roles, and activities that account for the variety and diversity of social life – for example considering things like ability and age. Historically, there existed a wide range of anti-fascist cultural spaces. These included things like reading groups, social clubs, collective kitchens, daycare centres, workplace organizations, and sports associations.

Thirdly, the next insight concerns the propensity to associate particular types of activity with particular types of bodies. Against the tendency to associate women with passivity and non-

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<sup>7</sup> As part of this, I would also include the aggrandizement of particular aesthetics. It’s fine to be into a certain style or subculture, but they can present limits. A sleek Adidas sports jacket; a crisp Fred Perry polo shirt etc. at least in some spaces anti-fascism has a particular European influenced aesthetic. Inherited from the white dominated punk subcultures from which modern antifa emerged, this aesthetic can function to hinder struggle if anti-fascism is exclusively thought of or associated with a specific dress code. Aesthetics should not be a stand in for, nor should it be prioritized over politics.

<sup>8</sup> Anti-fascist gyms are great, and anti-fascist football clubs can be useful. But, what about an anti-fascist neighbourhood association? Or anti-fascist story-telling time for children, or an anti-fascist food program? Or maybe, anti-fascist day at the nail salon or an anti-fascist roller derby league? The list could go on.

violence, it is crucial to recognize that combative politics is not exclusively the domain of men. Throughout the history of anti-fascist resistance and continuing today, women, queers, and trans folks have been involved in armed uprisings, self-defence initiatives, physical confrontations, coordinated attacks, and various other forms of violent activity. Critiquing such actions as inherently male and exclusionary to all others, marginalizes the diverse voices of those engaged in confrontational tactics, and furthermore, perpetuates restrictive gender stereotypes. That said, it is also true that anti-fascism has issues with sexism and patriarchal behaviour, and “that whenever confrontation is part of the repertoire, it is an extra concern”.<sup>171</sup> Which leads to the fourth insight, couple anti-fascist politics with feminism and conceptualize gender liberation as a non-negotiable component of anti-fascism. This means centering gender considerations, taking trans politics and queer struggle seriously, and not treating these things as peripheral concerns. Relatedly, the fifth insight concerns the value of autonomy and autonomous organizing. Creating autonomous spaces and/or pushing for organizational autonomy was crucial to many historical anti-fascist groups. Many women found themselves in a situation where they were fighting against fascism and fighting for revolutionary change, all the while pushing their movements to take gender oppression seriously. To address this layered struggle, women founded separate organizations to undertake the work that was otherwise brushed off.

Sixth, look to and draw on other anti-racist and anti-colonial resistance traditions and not just those most commonly associated with anti-fascism. Popular accounts of anti-fascist history privilege Europe and disproportionately focus on white actors. The proto-typical anti-fascist hero is presented not only as male, but as white, ignoring all other histories. There is an incredibly long legacy of black and indigenous struggle, however, it is often overlooked and goes unrecognized. Jegroo notes: “While many people think of white anarchists...punching Nazis when they talk about antifa, Black folks in the Western hemisphere have essentially been doing antifascist work for centuries. It just hasn’t been recognized as such”.<sup>172</sup> Particularly in North America – a continent defined by settler colonialism, indigenous genocide, and antiblackness – black liberation and decolonial movements have either explicitly or implicitly been engaged in fighting against fascism for hundreds of years.<sup>9</sup> Even though much of this work wasn’t done under the label of anti-fascist, that doesn’t make it any less relevant. These histories and their continuation today are crucial to conceptualizing and engaging in anti-fascist struggle.

Moving to the final point, the last insight is to connect anti-fascism with more ambitious revolutionary goals. Anti-fascism in and of itself is a necessarily limited struggle. It is a reactive and defensive movement that while incredibly important, is much more of a jumping off point than a desired end-destination. In the past, many groups rooted their anti-fascist work in a commitment to revolution and pushed for a broader vision of collective liberation and societal transformation. Anti-fascism wasn’t a single struggle, but an overlapping set of struggles taking place simultaneously. It was an anti-fascist war, but also a civil war and class war fighting for sweeping social, political, and economic change.

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<sup>9</sup> There are countless examples. Before the height of the civil rights movement, black activists like Mabel and Robert Williams worked to arm black people and taught them how to defend themselves against the Ku Klux Klan. The Black Panthers held a national conference in 1969 on anti-fascism (the National Revolutionary Conference for a United Front Against Fascism). Many black intellectuals have theorized the role of fascism in America, and also done much to highlight (and organize against) police as key perpetrators of fascist violence.

## Conclusion: Against Machismo, For Militancy

“Part of making anti-fascist politics stronger means contending with the hyper-masculinity and predominant whiteness of antifa spaces...Rather than be dismissed as secondary issues that fall behind the primary goal of confronting fascists, disability justice, anti-racism, and feminism should be at the forefront of any revolutionary analysis... This also means recognizing that anti-fascism is a necessary but insufficient political solution to the problems of our time ”.<sup>173</sup>

Misogyny is a fundamental pillar of contemporary far-right politics; it is not just an aside. With the proliferation of far-right movements over the last few years, and more recently with the recuperation of those movements and their abhorrent ideas into political parties and ruling institutions, it is crucial to understand all that we are up against. Part of what we face is the growth of political forces shaped by variations of intensively patriarchal ideology, and as such, forces that aspire to establish (or rather further establish, more accurately) not just white supremacy, but white male supremacy. This reality desperately calls for a response – it is a growing nightmare that is all too quickly becoming normalized and the only response is struggle. Unfortunately, the ready-made options presented to us leave much to be desired. On one hand, liberal feminism fundamentally lacks the teeth to address our current political climate, leading to a dead end of permitted marches, electoral campaigns, and “pussy hat” politics. On the other hand, anti-fascism is plagued by machismo, leading to a highly reductionist understanding of struggle and the glorification hyper-masculine activities above all else. Anti-fascism doesn’t have to be that way – we can do better.

Looking to histories of women’s participation in anti-fascist movements, we can see glimpses of a different anti-fascism. Contrary to the common conception, women were involved in all forms and formations of the historical fight against fascism. Feminist historian Ingrid Strobl paints a vibrant picture, referencing women’s involvement in anti-fascist activities, she explains:

“They were activists in urban brigades, the ghetto underground, and partisan units. They printed and distributed the illegal press; they forged papers; they transported weapons and themselves participated in arm actions. They organized underground movements and ghetto uprisings; they were political cadres and military commanders of groups. [They engaged in sabotage]. They found hiding places for Jewish children and youth, brought them to these hiding places, provided them with clothing, money, food, and with forged documents and encouragement over months and sometimes years”.<sup>174</sup>

There is a lot of inspiration and many lessons that can be taken from this history. This is not to say that all aspects of those histories are applicable to our current situation – we are struggling in a vastly different context. However, there are valuable takeaways, as were explored above, and these takeaways offer a solid ground on which to build an anti-fascism rooted in revolutionary feminism. Against an anti-fascism shaped by machismo, a revolutionary feminist anti-fascism is shaped by the concept of militancy. Before discussing the latter, it is useful to look at the former.

There is a thread that flows through anti-fascist movements, and while it does not exclusively define contemporary anti-fascism, it is influential and worth noting. The thread is an orientation/attitude that tends towards machismo. This inclination is one of bravado and

dogmatic combativity, and leads to a political position that prioritizes confrontation while it more or less ignores (or at least downplays) other aspects of struggle. It reproduces some of the worst characteristics of hegemonic masculinity with a self-righteous zeal, and considers discussion of things like sexism to be needlessly divisive and a distraction from the “important things”. This strain is almost exclusively concerned with physical conflict with fascists, where if you aren’t willing or able to “throw down”, you aren’t an anti-fascist. It is individualistic and leans towards an orientation of doing what one wants, regardless of the consequences. It is concerned more with the act of the fight itself than it is with the outcome. There is no room for nuance or any consideration of context, and strategy largely falls by the wayside.<sup>10</sup> These characteristics can be described as machismo, and an anti-fascism rooted in machismo is the political equivalent of a bar fight – as haphazard and chaotic as it is incoherent, and often sloppy.<sup>11</sup>

In contrast, an anti-fascism oriented towards militancy instead machismo is concerned with commitment, collectivity, and effectiveness. It isn’t about image or ego; rather, it is about doing what needs to be done, choosing the methods/tactics best suited for a situation, and looking at the bigger liberatory picture. This approach couples anti-fascist politics with feminism, and conceptualizes gender liberation as a non-negotiable component of anti-fascism. Such politics starts from the understanding that anti-fascist resistance isn’t just one thing – it involves a lot of different types of activities and a large diversity to roles. A vibrant movement would have a place for two year old child up to their eighty-two year old grandparent. This does not mean a move away from street politics, confrontational tactics, or the use of violence; it acknowledges that antagonism and conflict are inherent to anti-fascist politics and that confrontation/violence is both necessary and justifiable in certain circumstances. It also acknowledges that women, queers, and trans folks often “throw down” and are involved in physical altercations and other confrontational activities. Thus, there is an emphasis on dispelling the gendered myth that only men engage in such activities.

Beyond recognizing the role of combative politics, there is also an emphasis on expanding the number of people who participate in confrontational moments, and thus it puts effort into building the comfort and capacity for more women and queers to take part in those activities that are usually coded as hyper-masculine. While it values these activities, an anti-fascism that is rooted in militancy rather than machismo knows that violence is not appropriate in all situations, and the habit of narrowly focusing on physical confrontations is detrimental to our movements. Fighting isn’t winning; there’s a lot more to it than that. Even in the example of street violence, there’s more to it than just fighting. There’s a lot of background work involved, including intelligence gathering, neighbourhood organizing, logistical planning, and legal/prison support. This work, which is usually feminized, is as valuable as the confrontational activities it supports. It’s just that one type of work isn’t particularly sexy and is perpetually undervalued, while the

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<sup>10</sup> For example there’s no distinctions made between different tendencies on the right, everyone from a self-identified neo-nazi to christian conservatives is a fascist and must be confronted in the same manner.

<sup>11</sup> I mostly mean this figuratively, but I also know lots of examples of dudes going out drinking to the bar and purposively looking for fascists to fight. In this case, there literally is an “anti-fascist bar fight”. This usually this looks like men who identify as anti-fascist getting into a bar fight with those perceived to be fascists, though this sometimes get muddled (e.g. is the guy wearing that t-shirt of a fascist metal band actually a fascist, or does he just like the band and not know anything of the politics?).

other one is exciting and easily glorified. A feminist anti-fascism does it all and values it all; it knows that the unglamorous and boring work plays a quintessential part in struggle. Of related importance, an anti-fascism rooted in militancy considers both the qualitative and quantitative sides of struggle. This means it isn't just concerned with how many fascist rallies it shuts down, but also with the subjective experience and the personal development of those involved. Ideally, people are learning skills, developing confidence, and becoming a more capable revolutionary. Beyond the immediate benefits, these developments will be helpful for the other struggles moving forward. The infrastructure and abilities we build, and the resources we develop, should be part of and put to use by broader struggles. Our anti-fascist organizing should be grounded in revolutionary politics, in pushing for a vision of collective liberation, meaningful autonomy, and endless possibility. The problems we face are so much bigger than the question of fascism, and our aspirations should be so much more than this limited struggle.

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