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Weaponizing Masculinity: Populism and Gendered Stories of Victimhood

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Introduction¹

The rise of right-wing populist political agents in Western liberal democracies over the last decade has amplified participatory and economic grievances, nurtured the polarization of voters, and fostered violence against women and minority communities. It has also renewed concerns over far-right movements that challenge established democratic practices, including the peaceful transfer of power after elections. Footage of overwhelmingly white male bodies pushing forward and against each other to gain entry to the United States Capitol and take revenge on those they wrongly accused of stealing the 2020 US presidential election stands vividly alongside imagery of white supremacists marching the streets of European cities in the name of “freedom” from Covid-19 measures.

This article makes the case for seeing hypermasculine posturing and appealing to male anxieties as integral to the wider purchase of nationalist populist narratives that fuel anti-democratic sentiments and demand a radical transformation of politics and society. It focuses on how populist rhetoric from—and to—the right of the political spectrum relies on highly gendered scripts to build and mobilize political support by making abstract notions of insecurity feelable as a crisis and betrayal of manhood. Speaking to a growing body of literature discussing gender and populism,² the article demonstrates that populist masculine rhetoric is more than simply a brawny display of “bad manners.”³ Alongside ethnicity and nationality, it forms the core of the radicalizing playbook that helps turn individual grievances over frustrated desires and unmet expectations into a call to arms for political agents who promise alleviation and transformative change.

Using former US president Trump as primary empirical anchor, we approach populism from a narrative perspective that integrates how populist political agents speak and perform (in)security to shape political behavior in their favor, which we have set out in detail elsewhere.⁴ While existing scholarship has illustrated the antagonistic dimension of populist discourse rhetoric with a focus on the dynamics between anti-elitist and people-centric framing⁵ and increasingly explored populism as a gendered discourse,⁶ this article seeks to provide a conceptual entry point for the analysis and critique of populist rhetoric that integrates the affective dimension of gendered stories of victimhood. Narratives, as Annick Wibben underscores, “simultaneously invest and invent an order,”⁷ and this holds for how populist political agents (re)imagine the past and present through a hypermasculine discourse.

That a link exists between masculinity, radicalization, and populist movements is increasingly well-established,⁸ and we show that integrating a gender lens is vital to understanding the affective grip of right-wing populist rhetoric. We first highlight how hypermasculinity, understood as an imagined ideal of masculinity with rhetorical salience,⁹ forms a cornerstone in nationalist-populist narratives that seek to mobilize voter support via an affective appeal to male audiences. The article then examines how stories of troubled manhood serve to simultaneously create sense of loss and belonging, stoking a desire to reclaim stereotypical manliness and re-establishing its political, cultural and socio-economic dominance. Contributing to broader endeavors of making masculinity in politics visible,¹⁰ we conclude that while multi-dimensional and complex, gendered populist discourse is not simply banter. Instead, weaponizing masculinity is integral to constructing the radical political identities that underwrite the populist right.

A Hypermasculine Discursive Toolbox

It is widely known that populist leaders display an eagerness to defend and protect the common “real” people from social injustice, cultural marginalization, and political victimization brought upon them by a “corrupt elite.”¹¹ Yet, if viewed through the perspective of gender, it becomes clear that their antagonistic conceptualization of politics goes significantly beyond the core people-elite dichotomy associated with populist rhetoric and targets a much wider segment of society that is classified politically, socially, and culturally as “enemy of the people.” Even if their stories are at the surface directed towards raging against the establishment, condescending elites, and foreign Others, the identification of the sameness of populist leaders with their audiences “always carries the seeds of a kind of exclusive belonging and the perilous path of proscribed gendered roles.”¹² Displays of hyper-masculinity are integral to the success of nationalist populist leaders.

Reclaiming the popular through a hypermasculine discursive toolbox that conjures idealized notions of manhood and forefronts the demeaning present of the true men forms a major part of right-wing populist discourse, and the retrograde quality of former US president Donald Trump’s nostalgic nationalism, encapsulated in the catchphrase “Make America Great Again,” is a case in point. Trump, an outsider candidate who was elected to the highest office in the US government in 2016 for a single term, is well-known for displaying open admiration for authoritarian leaders such as Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who he praised as “tough,” “strong,” and deserving of “respect.”¹³ At his frequent campaign rallies, t-shirts were available to purchase with the printed slogan: “Donald Trump: Finally Someone With Balls.”¹⁴ Trump also consistently elevated traditionally male-dominated professions as the engine of the American economy that must be revived. This included shout-outs to the coal miners, tobacco growers, auto and steel workers, farmers, and ranchers among his rally audiences while praising stereotypical male qualities, such as rugged individualism, self-reliance, martial virtue, and physical prowess as well as mocking physical disabilities and perceived weaknesses in others. In major speeches during his term as the 45th US president, he focused on traditional male-dominated industries like construction, manufacturing, and fossil fuel extraction, ignoring female-associated professions such as education and healthcare.¹⁵

Trump’s gendered repertoire extends beyond expressing admiration for muscular leaders and masculine jobs that has long been associated with populist discourse, especially where it has a decidedly nationalist orientation. The former television celebrity relied heavily on the use of a toxic gendered lexicon and designations that speak directly to the three characteristics of hypermasculinity that Donald Mosher and Mark Serkin set out in 1984 to capture a male desire for dominance in their social interactions.¹⁶ The first is “calloused sex attitudes toward women.” Consider the much-publicized footage of Trump, then businessman and media personality, in conversation with TV host Billy Bush in 2005 in the context of an appearance on the soap opera “Days of Our Lives” revealed by the *Washington Post* in 2016.¹⁷ “You know,” Trump states, “I’m automatically attracted to beautiful women . . . I just start kissing them. It’s like a magnet. Just kiss. I don’t even wait. And when you’re a star they let you do it. You can do anything. . . . Grab them by the pussy. You can do anything.” Here, Trump expresses the hypermasculine attitude that “sexual intercourse with women establishes masculine power and female submission, and it is to be achieved without empathic concern for the female’s subjective experience.”¹⁸ The women subjected to Trump’s transgression are stripped of agency; the need for consent is ruled out a priori. Trump, powerful and famous, can take what he wants.

The second defining feature of hypermasculinity is the fetishization of “violence as manly.”¹⁹ Take for example how Trump, whose claims of testosterone count became a vital component in constructing his fitness for office,²⁰ represented the Democratic candidate Joe Biden in the run-up to the 2020 US presidential election:

Crazy Joe Biden is trying to act like a tough guy. Actually, he is weak, both mentally and physically, and yet he threatens me, for the second time, with physical assault. He doesn’t know me, but he would go down fast and hard, crying all the way.²¹

This signals the hypermasculine attitude that “violent aggression, either verbal or physical, is an acceptable, even preferable, masculine expression of power and dominance toward other men.”²² He emasculates Biden, unmasking any apparent muscular behavior of the seasoned Democratic politician

as mere theatre, as a role played by someone who would never stand a chance against a merciless Trump and who can only respond with unmanly, dishonorable expressions of injury and loss.

Mosher and Serkin's third characteristic of hypermasculinity is the understanding and promotion of "danger as exciting," in which the attitude that "survival in dangerous situations, including 'tempting fate,' is a manly display of masculine power over the dangerous environment" plays a central role.²³ The ex-President's approach to becoming infected by the coronavirus SARS-COV2 illustrates this element. Although Trump, overweight and in his seventies, fell clearly into what was characterized early on in the Covid-19 pandemic as a high-risk demographic, he consistently downplayed the danger of becoming seriously ill after catching the virus. Despite being hospitalized in October 2020, Trump survived an infection with the virus and represented this as a further sign of his heroism. When the 45th president ceremoniously returned from a three-day hospital stay to the White House on 5 October, Senator Kelly Loeffler (R-GA) tweeted a depiction of Trump physically wrestling the coronavirus to the ground and beating it up. In a video message recorded that evening, he declared: "I know there's a risk, there's a danger, but that's okay" and underscored that he "had to do it. . . . I stood out front. I led."²⁴ Trump took one for the team because of his strength, not despite of it. He demonstrated that the virus is (easily) beatable and told Americans: "Don't be afraid of Covid. Don't let it dominate your life."²⁵

Trump's hypermasculine performance displays belligerence and uses an uncompromising tone towards his opponents. He frames himself as tough, winning, and muscular, as unforgiving, aggressive, and transgressive. He performs disdain, even disgust, towards men he sees as weak—taking the knee, refusing violence, and displaying "feminine" characteristics. Male opponents are typically belittled and rhetorically emasculated as "crying," "little," or "low-energy," as documented in Trump's use of insulting monikers for 2016 Republican primary opponent Jeb Bush and Marco Rubio, or then-Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer. Where men are emasculated, women are reduced to their physical features and framed in terms of the degree of attractiveness (or repulsion) they evoke, which to decide is in Trump's hands: supermodel Heidi Klum is no longer a "10," news host Megyn Kelly has "blood coming out of her wherever," and TV presenter and comedian Rosie O'Donnell is a "degenerate," "slob," and "fat pig," whereas Huffington Post editor Arianna Huffington is reduced to a "dog," "ugly both inside and out."²⁶ Women are not only insulted for their looks, however. They also have their intelligence questioned, with Trump referring to the Democratic Congresswomen Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, for example, as a "poor student," and they are cast as untrustworthy ("crooked" and "nasty woman" Hillary Clinton) and hysterical, even "stone cold crazy" as in the case of Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi.²⁷

Vitriolic antipathy against women, hypermasculinity, and a vulgar sexist machismo are all markers of Trump's combative communicative style. How the former US president rhetorically elevates himself above men and over women serves as a prime example of a performance of manhood that has long been seen as toxic. Gendered populist discourse is not simply mockery or locker-room talk. Instead, it rests on hypermasculine posturing that emphasizes aggressive masculine traits and engages in masculinity competitions, and this includes "Trump speak."²⁸

<A> Stories of Troubled Manhood

It is increasingly well-known that the rise of populist political agents cannot be reduced to either a cultural or economic "backlash" of American voters against the status quo.²⁹ Not only is a sense of cultural estrangement entwined with perceptions of being economically marginalized,³⁰ but "deep stories" that are felt rather than merely believed are fundamental to nurturing a sense of victimhood that unifies those associated with support for the populist right.³¹ Perceptions of being left behind, of being shifted to the margins of society, do not form in a discursive vacuum. As our previous research has shown, populist security narratives manufacture a sense of crisis to provoke an emotive response that drives support for those seen as political outsiders,³² and they transform inward-oriented feelings of humiliation and disempowerment into outward-oriented feelings of anger and resentment.³³ The stories populist political agents tell play into a deep-seated sense of loss of home and belonging, only to reconstruct the identity of the "true" people around radical resistance against further progression away from past national greatness.

Gendered stories of victimhood undergird the imaginary of carnage in the present. The populist performance of hegemonic masculinity—a culturally idealized form of masculinity that sees “real” men as above both women and subordinate men such as homosexuals and men of color³⁴—that reinvigorates past masculinist ideals is entwined with stories about the loss of manhood in contemporary America. A highly-stylized idea of what once was normal and righteous, from a gendered hierarchy and sexism to homophobic discrimination and racial segregation, is portrayed not only as politically and socially sanctioned but as a key source of the loss of past greatness. Trump evoked this imaginary when he talked about a long-dead American Hollywood icon and Western movie star who was famous for portraying strong white men in the fight against Native Americans. “John Wayne,” he argued, “represented strength, he represented power, he represented what the people are looking for today because we have exactly the opposite from John Wayne right now in this country.”³⁵

The loss of the strong, silent male protagonist of the Western is a cultural trope that has long been associated with a crisis in contemporary Americanness and manliness, which bemoans an era of “male dysfunction,” where non-college-educated and working-class men feel increasingly useless, left behind by a deindustrialized economy that prioritizes social skills and educational achievement.³⁶ And it becomes ammunition in the hyper-partisan confrontation between “real America” and the un-American Other. As Senator Josh Hawley (R-MO) argued at the *National Conservatism Conference* on 1 November 2021: “The left want to define traditional masculinity as toxic. They want to define the traditional masculine virtues—things like courage and independence and assertiveness—as a danger to society.”³⁷

Those who do not conform to the norm of (white) muscular men reflected in the “uncomplicated image of a traditional (and increasingly outdated) masculinity”³⁸ are systematically talked down, including through gaffes, jokes, and slips. In turn, those who see themselves reflected in and spoken to by hypermasculine posturing are being roped into populist imaginaries of insecurity through narrative tropes on troubled manhood that lend legitimacy to their grievances. Conjuring the notion of a tragic loss of the ability to be a “true” man in the present, however, is often implicit rather than presented in clear, easy quotable lines and catchphrases. It is done through references to political correctness, that long-accepted ways of speaking plainly are off-limits—“you can’t say this anymore.” It contains gendered observations of what is wrong in the present—a loss of respect, women’s rights gone too far, the decline of traditional values. And it ridicules men who have caved—weaklings, nice guys, cowards—while America itself is presented in gendered dystopian imagery as a country “raped” by other nations.

The sentimental longing for the past activated here consequently goes beyond the wishing back of a time of prosperity and an abundance of traditional masculine jobs. It weaponizes nostalgia for a simpler time when (white) male privilege was uncontested by egalitarian demands. Like bait taunting fish until they do not see or want anything else, representations of a male-dominant past as idyllic stoke a blinding desire to reverse the status quo in which the “hard bodies”³⁹ have lost their rightful place. The crux of this story of troubled manhood is that the tides have turned against traditional men, economically, socially, and politically. “True” men have the right to feel humiliated by the loss of their ability to provide and protect, marginalized for being unapologetic and transgressive, and ashamed over the state of the country.

Consider, for example, how Trump framed the stakes of the US presidential election during his final rallies on 2 November 2020, the day before the American people cast their votes. In North Carolina, he assured his captive audience that Joe Biden, as the figurehead of the extremist “Far Left Democrats”—the “fake people” who “*demeaned* your sacred faith and values”—is supported by “every corrupt force in American life, that is responsible for cruel *betrayals* that *hurt* our family, and, you know, all of the people that we love.”⁴⁰ That same day, at his last rally in Michigan, Trump affirmed the right for the true men to concede the damage done to their jobs, values, and status, especially by his opponent and what the Democratic candidate is deemed to signify:

The failed establishment that started the disastrous foreign Wars, they support Biden. The career politicians that offshored your industries and decimated your auto plants, and you suffered for many, many years... they support Biden. They still do. The anti-American

radicals, defaming our noble history, heritage, and heroes. They support Biden... A vote for Biden is a vote to give control of government over to the globalists and the communists, socialists and wealthy liberal hypocrites who want to silence, cancel and punish you.⁴¹

Discursively stripping potential followers of masculine glory may seem counterintuitive, especially if masculinity is understood as a precarious social identity that requires displays of manhood in actions and speech. After all, misogynistic humiliation and shaming are generally associated with an attempt to render those targeted “unable to act, to disable their agency.”⁴² But there is comfort in being consigned to a community of hypermasculine outcasts. Being able to claim to have been “stigmatized, traumatized, and subordinated”⁴³ is an essential element in the populist discursive toolkit that turns an imaginary of troubled manhood into a source for “we-ness.” Sharing “wounded identities,”⁴⁴ expressed in the collective commiseration of a loss of masculine control and selfhood, encourages a sense of group identity and in-group solidarity. The collective sense of humiliation works as an emotive bond that fastens together those who perceive themselves as unjustly injured, emasculated, and betrayed.⁴⁵ The motto of the true men becomes one of shared victimhood: “If you humiliate me, I enter a new community, a fellowship—across history—of sufferers and outcasts.”⁴⁶ Creating a shared sense of the dishonoring loss of manhood becomes “a form of abreaction that reclaims dignity”⁴⁷ by adopting a narrative of undeserved failure. Acknowledging demeaning injury in the present is the first step in reversing the fate of manhood in the future.

<A> Angry but Caring Warriors

A heightened sense of insecurity and vulnerability about the loss of manhood is a breeding ground for emotive responses to a rhetoric that reaffirms a stereotypical view of masculinity and promises to avert a future in which muscular men and masculine jobs have no place in politics, society, and the economy. Research in social psychology into the gender dynamics has shown here that especially men socialized from early childhood to shun any association with femininity may perceive a profound pressure to conform to masculine stereotypes, fearing to otherwise lose their status as “real men.” Defending and continuously proving manliness, while battling a constant sense of inadequacy, is integral to such “fragile masculinity.”⁴⁸ The populist performance of troubled manhood serves to bolster the endangered identity of traditional masculinity.⁴⁹ It gives voice to frustrated men with frustrated dreams and desires who refuse to apologize for being true men, enabling them to rally around an imaginary of victimhood. This amplifies grievance politics and at the same time as offering an answer in safe (masculine) identities, and in so doing, establishing a virtuous cycle.⁵⁰

Placing manhood in a state of existential crisis is also a discursive mechanism of externalizing the fear of being unmanned, which allows turning a sense of injury and humiliation outward into anger, leaving audiences agitated and inspired to fight back. Violence becomes an effective and legitimate way to address injustice. While populism is often seen as a political style that seeks “broad appeal through the deliberate expression of anger,”⁵¹ as a collective emotion, anger is also a source of empowerment that translates a perception of shared injustice into a motivation to restore the disgraced and ruptured self.⁵² As Martha Nussbaum has pointed out, it has three action-inducing qualities that are politically useful:

First, [anger] is seen as a valuable signal that the oppressed recognize the wrong done to them. It also seems to be a necessary motivation for them to protest and struggle against injustice and to communicate to the wider world the nature of their grievances. Finally, anger seems, quite simply, to be justified: outrage at terrible wrongs is right, and anger thus expresses something true.⁵³

In the populist narrative of troubled manhood, anger over marginalization, disrespect, and replacement is directed at the status quo and at those who have brought this onto the true men, including a political elite and societal climate that threaten the mythical greatness of self and country. Self-pity and anger are two sides of the same coin of “manhood acts,”⁵⁴ and they drive the reassertion of male dominance.

But the evoking of traditional masculine identities does not only fuel a backlash against feminism and the expansion of civil liberties and reproductive rights. It also gives room to revive the image of the caring warriors, in which men protect the women and children of their tribe. Opposition

to feminism is deliberately not framed as being unsupportive of women in general, on the contrary. The reclamation of patriarchal gender roles in the populist imaginary centers on the heroic ideal of the husband/father/brother as protector of the innocence of women and defender of their sexual “virtue.” Rape and instances of sexual assault against women by un-American Others become a cause *célèbre* for nationalist populists. Defense of the nation against an invading presence and the fear of an unauthorized penetration of its borders by illegal aliens is projected onto the female body. (White) femininity is constructed as vulnerable, precious, and in need of protection by “true” men against hostile Others, especially hyperviolent and predatory men of color.

In Trump’s vision of (in)security, the raping of women and children by terrorist groups like Islamic State and other villainous foreigners frequently took centerstage. During his 16 June 2015 announcement speech to run for President, he underscored that:

When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re not sending you. They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with them. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.⁵⁵

Yet accusations of violence against women and the sexual molestation of children are also hurled against the “enemy of the people” within. In the “Pizzagate” conspiracy theory—shared widely online among right-wing conspiracy theorists and members of the alt-right—Trump’s Democratic opponent in 2016 Hillary Clinton was accused of being involved in a pedophile sex ring clandestinely operating out of a Washington DC pizza restaurant, proving to its believers the utter moral degradation of the Washington “swamp.” Although the theory was a complete fabrication, Trump repeatedly amplified content alluding to Pizzagate on social media.⁵⁶ Just as objectifying and insulting women serve as integral elements in Trump’s hypermasculine discursive toolbox, the emphasis on sexual acts performed by undeserving Others in the framing of threats against the true people reinforces the notion that the bodies of women are a property belonging to the men of the in-group, thus stripping them of their individual agency.

Expressions of tenderness towards (feminine white) women in nationalist populist discourse further the idealization of the rural heartland, suburbia, and the nuclear family as the heteronormative in-group of the “real” people deserving of protection and affection. In his 2020 re-election bid, representing himself as savior and guardian of suburbia after repealing Obama era regulations aimed at combatting racial segregation in suburban housing, Trump targeted white suburban female voters, a core constituency behind his 2016 election win, by stoking fears about falling property prices and rising crime through “housing projects” predominantly associated with ethnic minorities. One tweet, for example, directly addressed the “Suburban Housewives of America,” warning them that Joe Biden would “destroy your neighborhood and your American Dream.”⁵⁷

In populist gendered stories of victimhood, the status of women in American society is framed through a retrograde patriarchal discourse that venerates the roles of women in the domestic sphere of housekeeping and childrearing, while female political opponents and liberal progressive women (“social justice warriors”) are subjected to misogynistic slurs. Feminism becomes a hostile ideology that threatens the traditional American way of life.⁵⁸ In this narrative, a “woke” pluralist society leaves no room for true men, unveiling claims to cherishing free speech and variety of opinion as “fake.” Through the lens of gender, we can see that populist anti-establishment politics are firmly entwined with a discourse of injustice that portrays a present dominated by feminism and woke-ism as not pluralist and tolerant enough. Hypermasculine populist discourse not only superimposes men as the victims but seeks to restore the status of injured Self and re-establish the in-group as good men through compensatory dominance. As former Trump-endorsed Senate-hopeful Sean Parnell, who eventually withdrew from the 2021 primary race in Pennsylvania in the face of court hearings over domestic abuse allegations from his ex-wife, put it on *Fox Nation* on September 17, 2019: “Maybe it’s just [that], now, there’s an entire generation of men that don’t want to put up with the BS of a high-maintenance, narcissistic woman.”

<A> Conclusion

The attempted overthrow of the US government on 6 January 2021 is widely understood as the consequence of a process of mass radicalization that shifted Trump’s nationalist populist politics into a

call for action, where different radical right groups joined forces and where individual grievances turned into a “battle between good and evil,” with the other side undermining “us and our way of life.”⁵⁹ Stories emerging in the context of investigations into the insurrection have revealed that Trump and his movement pushed many Americans previously not active in politics into a world of extreme theories and conspiracies. The power of online recruitment tools and widely broadcast radicalizing messages enabled widely spreading highly gendered narratives about Others, about evil “haters,” who do everything to undercut and betray the true people. As Donald Trump’s 2020 presidential election campaign demonstrates, anti-feminism serves as a key ideational resource that connects nationalist populist political agents with violent far-right groups such as the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, and the Boogaloo movement.

While right-wing populism is often associated with (male) blustering, with a display of strength, in which the showing of (female) weakness has little place, this article has sought to provide an entry point to understanding the politicization of manhood fundamentally implicated in such processes of mobilization. As we argue, gendered anti-establishment populist rhetoric that constructs a lack of responsiveness of democratically elected leaders speaks to those who have not shed but embraced the imaginary of hard bodies. Donald Trump’s affective appeal is rooted in a gendered vision of insecurity centered on the construction of a culturally alien, effeminate, un-American Other “enemy of the people,” in which his followers are cast collectively as heroic masculine protectors, who will relieve America from weakness and decline and deliver the United States from its feminized status quo. It is an appeal against dominant power structures, ideas, and values within society in the present that disenfranchise traditional manhood and prevent the true men from (re)establishing their ontological legitimacy.⁶⁰

While the focus of much research on populism from the right has been on its divisionary politics, the above suggests that it is fruitful to engage with how a gendered populist repertoire can also create collective affective responses that foster a sense of community and belonging. This (re)produces complex and subtle gendered assumptions through a paradoxical mix of tropes about weakness and power.⁶¹ As we suggest, the populist promise of remasculinization is seductive as it allows (re)building a self-affirming narrative that the shamed, weakened, injured can—and will—emerge from this victoriously. Victimhood is self-imposed to generate collective affirmation, from others in the same boat, to overcome the “haters” of the true people. Paraphrasing Wendy Brown, it celebrates the triumph of the imagined weak as weak, achieving a triple effect:

[I]t produces an affect (rage, righteousness) that overwhelms the hurt; it produces a culprit responsible for the hurt; and it produces a site of revenge to displace the hurt (a place to inflict hurt as the sufferer has been hurt).⁶²

The weaponization of masculinity in populist discourse fuels fear about the future, nostalgia about the past, and anger about the present, all of which contributes to a sense of dread about being and belonging. It offers a look into a distorted mirror in which those in positions of relative societal privilege are represented as victims of progressive change who have the right to demand redistributive justice in their favor, lifting them out of their (felt) misery of being excluded from the spheres of economic, political, and societal influence. The need for externalizing feelings of emasculation to relieve pain and affirm the masculine self, including through vengeance, effectively turns emancipatory politics on its head: claiming powerlessness becomes power.

Notes

¹ This project has received funding from the Leverhulme Trust (RF-2021-527, PI A. Homolar).

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³ Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style and Representation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 44.

⁴ Alexandra Homolar and Georg Löffmann, “Populism and the Affective Politics of Humiliation Narratives,” *Global Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (2021), Alexandra Homolar and Ronny Scholz, “The Power of Trump-Speak: Populist Crisis Narratives and Ontological Security,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32, no. 3 (2019): 1-21, and Georg Löffmann,

“‘Enemies of the People’: Donald Trump and the Security Imaginary of America First,” *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* (online first 2021).

⁵ Margaret Canovan, *Populism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981). See recently Michael Hameleers et al., “The Effects of Populist Identity Framing on Populist Attitudes Across Europe: Evidence From a 15-Country Comparative Experiment,” *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 33, no.3 (2021) 491–511.

⁶ E.g. Angela Smith and Michael Higgins, “Tough Guys and Little Rocket Men: @Realdonaldtrump’s Twitter Feed and the Normalisation of Banal Masculinity,” *Social Semiotics* 30, no. 4 (2020): 547–562, Bice Maiguashca “Resisting the ‘Populist Hype’: A Feminist Critique of a Globalising Concept,” *Review of International Studies* 45, no. 5 (2019): 768–785, and Christine Agius, Annika Bergman Rosamond, and Catarina Kinnvall, “Populism, Ontological Insecurity and Gendered Nationalism: Masculinity, Climate Denial and Covid-19,” *Politics, Religion and Ideology* 21, no.4 (2021): 432–50.

⁷ Annick T.R. Wibben, *Feminist Security Studies: A Narrative Approach* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 85.

⁸ See e.g. Outi Hakola, Janne Salminen, Juho Turpeinen, and Oscar Winberg, eds. *The Culture and Politics of Populist Masculinities* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021). On misogyny as a political strategy see Nitasha Kaul, “The Misogyny of Authoritarians in Contemporary Democracies,” *International Studies Review* 23, no. 4 (2021): 1619–1645.

⁸ See Margaret Wetherell and Nigel Edley, “Negotiating Hegemonic Masculinity: Imaginary Positions and Psycho-Discursive Practices,” *Feminism & Psychology* 9, no. 3 (1999): 335–356.

⁹ See Margaret Wetherell and Nigel Edley, “Negotiating Hegemonic Masculinity.”

¹⁰ Kathloeen Starck and Birgit Sauer, “Political Masculinities: Introduction,” in *A Man’s World? Political Masculinities in Literature and Culture*, eds. K. Starck and B. Sauer (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2014), 3–10.

¹¹ See e.g. Cas Mudde, “Populism: An Ideational Approach,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, eds. R. Kaltwasser et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 27–47, Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London: Sage, 2015), and Thorsten Wojcieszki, “‘Enemies of the People’: Populism and the Politics of (In) Security,” *European Journal of International Security* 5, no. 1 (2020): 5–24.

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