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MISOGYNY IN CONTEMPORARY POPULIST AUTHORITARIANISM

by

Maxine Elisabeth Mannheim

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts,
The City University of New York

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APPROVAL

The Misogyny of Contemporary Populist Authoritarians

by

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in
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for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

The Misogyny of Contemporary Populist Authoritarians
by
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The regression of rights for women and the LGBTQ community, as well as the freedoms of religious and ethnic minorities are coinciding with the global rise in populist authoritarianism. However, the link between misogyny, gendered narratives, and populist authoritarianism remains understudied and requires further elaboration. There can be no full investigation of modern populism, nor the political leaders who utilize it, without an understanding of the gender dynamics that permeate populist and authoritarian politics. I argue that misogyny is interwoven in populist authoritarianism, and that it is a defining characteristic observable in the ways in which leaders manipulate the emotions of their constituency, silence their political opposition with regressive gender policies, and violate democratic norms with illiberal, undemocratic practices. These strategies — emotional manipulation through misogynistic rhetoric, silencing through policy, and the misogynistically-coded justification of undemocratic practices, are explored in this thesis as politically salient features of contemporary populist authoritarianism. This thesis draws connections between the sexist expressions of populist leaders in four parts of the world: the United States, Brazil, Turkey, and India. Rather than focus on the individual pathologies of Trump, Bolsonaro, Erdogan, and Modi, I emphasize how their similarities in style, affect, and strategy subsequently influence their politics while perpetuating and reinforcing misogyny.

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Introduction

If by some form of mysticism you were plucked from our current year and placed back in time to the early 1990s, and you had the opportunity to describe to other academics the current global resurgence of populist authoritarianism, they might have laughed at you. If they were kinder, they might have instead politely brushed you off or dismissed your claims, though perhaps it is even possible that some might have believed you — undoubtedly students of history. After all, the turn of the twentieth century saw a dramatic ending (or, in some cases what simply appeared to be an ending) of numerous authoritarian regimes. Ideologically varied yet comparable in their visions of relational power, or at least in the strategic narratives they wielded to amass such power, the collapse of such regimes provided hope that the spread of neoliberal values would translate into the establishment of resilient democracies. But as Mark Twain once said in his infamous drawl, history might not repeat itself, but it certainly rhymes.

The regression of rights for women and the LGBTQ community, as well as the freedoms of religious and ethnic minorities are, of course, coinciding with the global rise in populist authoritarianism. However, while there is an abundance of research on authoritarian personalities and the role of nationalist narratives of populism and authoritarianism, the link between misogyny, gendered narratives, and populist authoritarianism requires further elaboration. There can be no full investigation of modern right-wing populism or the opportunistic political leaders who utilize it, without an understanding of the gender dynamics that permeate populist authoritarian politics. I argue that misogyny is interwoven in populist authoritarianism, and that it is a defining characteristic observable in the ways in which populist authoritarian leaders manipulate the emotions of their constituency, silence their political opposition, and violate democratic norms with illiberal, undemocratic practices.

Scholars identifying the varying aspects of such political movements must recognize the ever-present role of gender in populist narratives, which are definitively misogynistic in both their political strategies and foundational ideological bases. The contemporary populist authoritarian leader has a relationship to politics and governance that cannot be fully understood without the recognition of his reliance on gendered power relations. Misogyny is a consistent thread in contemporary populist authoritarianism and its pervasive reach requires global analysis. This thesis draws connections between closely related yet differently expressed constitutions, styles, and progressions of misogyny in four different parts of the world: the United States, Brazil, Turkey, and India. Rather than focus on the individual pathologies of Trump, Bolsonaro, Erdogan, and Modi, I draw attention to how their similarities in style, affect, and strategy subsequently influence their politics while perpetuating and reinforcing misogyny. In order to accurately understand the mechanisms of contemporary populist authoritarianism — how it reassures its followers through emotional manipulation, silences its critics, and justifies illiberal uses of power — scholars must acknowledge and analyze the vital role misogyny plays in such political strategies. To that end, this thesis contributes to a growing body of research that examines politically misogyny as a political strategy in twenty-first century populist authoritarianism.

This thesis will be structured into three parts. Chapter one will specify the concepts of misogyny, populism, and authoritarianism, as well as how they will be used in this thesis. It will also expand upon the centrality of gendered narratives in populism, as described by Mostov (2021). In the second, third, and fourth chapters I argue that misogyny and gendered narratives perform three essential functions for twenty-first century strongmen, and I do so by analyzing examples from the United States (former president Donald Trump), Brazil (former president Jair

Bolsonaro), Turkey (president Recep Tayyip Erdogan) and India (prime minister Narendra Modi). In chapter two, I demonstrate that misogyny capitalizes on the insecurity, shame, fear, and anger of the demos in a process that mirrors populism's well documented play on emotions, and is reflective of how populism has transitioned away from its twentieth-century cousin into an altogether more cynical political approach. This chapter analyzes the misogyny employed by Trump, Bolsonaro, Erdogan, and Modi in their speech acts and rhetoric. The third chapter examines the function of gendered narratives as they effectively silence oppositional forces by intrinsically policing behavior and subverting liberal and feminist terminology. This chapter is descriptive of the way that misogynistic rhetoric translates into policies that actively harm women LGBTQ people. The fourth chapter confirms that populist authoritarians reinforce and justify illiberal assaults on democratic institutions in a way that is strengthened by weaponized misogyny. Included in the the fourth chapter will be the conclusion of this thesis.

Chapter I: Misogyny In the Context of Populist Authoritarianism

By many measures, modern populist authoritarianism (sometimes referred to as neofascism, right-wing authoritarianism, neo-autocracy, and many other such terms) and the strongmen who champion it are contributing to the erosion of democratic norms and institutions. Populism is a contested term, described differently according to its relation to democratic and fascist regimes. It is a reactionary force that relies on the public's growing feelings of suspicion and resentment towards the government. Populist leaders, whose politics can reflect either the left or the right side of the political spectrum, rely heavily on a polarizing political narrative that divides the demos into those who represent the authentic, nationalistic community, and those who are a threat to the 'real' nation and the 'real' public. It should be clear that in this text,

populism does not refer to the politics of leftist popular leaders such as Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Such leaders, while sometimes described as populist, do not embody authoritarian characteristics, such as the disdain for democratic principals, nor do they rely on populist strategies such as the glorification of the leader as the savior of the nation, the transgression of democratic institutions, or the utilization of polarizing language based on religious, ethnic, sexual, racial, and other xenophobic divisions.

Populist narratives are essentially gendered, and focus on purifying and maintaining the ethnostate by emphasizing strict unwavering allegiance to the leader, surveillance of and hostility towards those who question the leader or the state, and exclusionary practices that violate civil rights and subjugate racial, ethnic, religious, and non-heteronormative communities. Racial, ethnic, and religious bigotry, along with the regulation of nationalistic homogeneity are defining characteristics of populism, and leaders who espouse rhetoric reflective of such sentiments may be considered populist. Populist leaders are known for embodying grand, charismatic, memorable public personas, and often project a 'larger-than-life' disposition. They typically embody a cultish-style personality, and readily inhibit democratic institutions or flounce democratic norms to achieve their political amends, often with the support of their followers. The leaders examined in this thesis are considered non-democratic populists.

Authoritarianism in this text is characterized by its modernity and adherence to far right-wing politics. Authoritarianism references regimes in which the erosion of democratic institutions and practices, contributes to the dismantling of the democratic balance of power. Institutions that maintain political accountability and checks on executive power, such as the free media or the independent judiciary, are restricted, threatened, and corrupted. Under authoritarian governments political dissent is not tolerated, and journalists and political activists are harassed,

threatened, and even found dead for criticizing authoritarian leaders or their political projects. The authoritarians discussed in this thesis are characterized by their populist leanings and tendencies. They employ gendered and divisive narratives that rely on an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality, show predictable contempt for democratic institutions, and consolidate political power by using authoritarian-style tactics and strategies.

Misogyny, perhaps more than populism or authoritarianism, is a contested term and its definition has been the subject of increasing debate since the beginning of the MeToo movement in 2017. As a function of prejudice, it can be found across all contemporary societies and is a common feature of many ideologies. Historically it has been a part of countless philosophies, religions, and myths; it seems to have always been a key feature of the stories that we tell one another and the narratives that mold and shape relations of power. As described by Manne, misogyny should be carefully differentiated from sexism, patriarchy, and generalized oppression (2017). As a powerful force in modern society, it is distinct from its traditional definition as hatred towards women (women in this thesis are not defined by the sex that they were born with, but by the gender they identify as). Instead, it is defined as a property of patriarchal society that enforces gender relations and power dynamics.

Rather than a matter of individual psychology, it is more accurate to identify misogyny as a property of social systems that uphold and police features of patriarchal relations (Manne, 2017). It functions to bring people in line when girls and women are not behaving in accordance with patriarchal norms, and it do so as a structural and political phenomenon rather than an individual one. None of this is to suggest that misogyny has no psychological effects on the individual or the collective. However, these effects are symptomatic of misogyny and are not necessarily reflective of where the phenomenon originates. According to this view, we can

reasonably verify something as misogynistic when it disproportionately affects women or girls in a way that serves, polices, and enforces patriarchal or heteronormative norms, expectations, and oppressions.

While misogyny is often hostile or violent, it need not have to be. In fact it is often indiscreet or apparently benevolent, and it is this seemingly transparent nature that maintains misogyny as such a pervasive force. Prejudice can come in subtle forms, in slights or comments that might seem outwardly polite or kind. For instance, commenting on a woman's physical appearance might serve to discredit or undermine them in a professional environment in which the woman aims to be taken more seriously, despite the intention with which it is made. This form of objectification might appear innocent, but it remains an assertion of the primary function a woman's desirability plays in her perceived worth or value. A study done on American women in 2007 maintained that both aggressive and benevolent expressions of misogyny interact with authoritarianism to reinforce gender inequalities (Sibley, Overall, and Duckitt, 2007). This suggests that authoritarian attitudes may play a significant role in perpetuating sexist ideology (Haddock and Zane, 1994).

As social and self-conscious beings we are simultaneously responsive to, and continually participate in, the production and reproduction of our environment. We consistently conform to what is socially expected of us through practices and norms. The commonly held belief that misogyny is an individual pathology fails to acknowledge the subconscious psychological, affective, and sociological ways in which we acquire our knowledge and behaviors from the world around us. It rejects the fundamental role of structures and institutions, both of which proliferate and receive support from the enforcement of sexist and patriarchal ideologies.

Sexism, separate but not unrelated to misogyny, can be described as a set of beliefs, cultural narratives, and social codes that rationalize, justify and naturalize a patriarchal social hierarchy. It creates a gender binary which depicts women as embodying certain traits, behaviors, and skills that are ‘naturally’ well-suited to feminine coded roles, such as caregiving. Similarly, it codes masculine roles as those that require logic, rationality, political and intellectual authority, physical strength, and leadership, most of which are associated with privileged men.

If sexism is understood as the ideological umbrella that justifies why women and non-men deserve a lower place (relative to men) on the social hierarchy, misogyny is the power that polices, controls, and maintains such subordination. It is the enforcement of the patriarchal social order that rewards those who fulfill the roles prescribed to them by dominant men and punishes those who do not. It is relatively indifferent to individual feelings and psychologies, and often goes unnoticed by both its perpetrators and its subjects. Sexism serves as the justification and rationale behind the patriarchy, while misogyny is its complex, operational, systemic governance.

The patriarchal enforcement of subordination can be antagonistic, coercive, or violent. Its many configurations require strict adherence, despite its insidious and unconscious nature. It punishes women who challenge patriarchal dominance or fail to provide moral goods expected of them, while simultaneously rewarding those that adhere to the status quo and embody preconceived gender roles, norms, and attributes. One of the many reasons that we see misogynistic women content to capitalize on their own compliance with patriarchal standards, is that by doing so might be rewarded with a so-called ‘seat at the table’, in which they are offered positions of relative privilege within the lower level of the social or racial hierarchy that they occupy.

An individual need not despise or aim to control women solely based on their gender identity in order to adhere to misogynistic principles, and often women of a particular group face distinct prejudice on levels that include their gender in addition to their race, religion, sexuality, or ethnic background. It can and often does harm particular women in distinct groups (such as those of a religious, racial, or sexual minority) who are perceived as having certain behaviors predicated on identifying factors other than gender. It is intersectional and does not operate on its own, but instead works in conjuncture with racism, homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of oppression (Crenshaw, 2017). Its cousins, misogynoir and transmisogyny, function in similar yet distinct ways, and it is regrettable that this thesis does not have the opportunity to explore other axes of oppression. Further research on the interacting dynamics between misogynoir and transmisogyny and their relation to populist authoritarianism, as demonstrated by the rising discourse surrounding ‘wokeism’ and ‘gender ideology’, are required if we are to have a complete analysis of the role of oppressive gendered narratives in populist authoritarianism.

In this text I demonstrate the ways in which authoritarian populists recruit misogynistic gendered narratives as a political strategy. However, the utilization of such narratives would be rendered weak if sexism was not such a prominent condition of contemporary society. As it is, these leaders readily exploit gendered relations to power. Misogyny, culturally coded in our language and behavior, mandates that we view women who fulfill traditionally masculine seats of power or dissent against patriarchal structures or norms as abnormal or morally divergent. This is how leaders like Dilma Rousseff face accusations of dishonesty, while Bolsonaro and Trump, both of whom have been caught in many lies and are consistently fact-checked by journalists and politicians alike, remain trustworthy to their supporters. They are after all, fulfilling their rightful gendered scripts.

Populist authoritarianism and its message of inclusion for ‘the people’ is by its nature othering, and that separation of those who belongs to the ethno-state and those who do not require it to be intensely misogynistic in both message and policy. Populist views and mobilizations are commanded by feelings of resentment concerning the shifts of power, usually ethnic, religious, or racial in nature. Coherent research has also found that those who score high on measures of authoritarian personalities hold rigidly conservative views on gender sexuality. Similarly, authoritarian views are positively correlated with attitudes described as sexist, and negatively correlated with views on feminism (Smith and Winter, 2002).

A study by Peterson and Zurbriggen (2010) found that those who embody the characteristics of an authoritarian personality live in an invariably structured world distinguished by traditional gender roles. Altemeyer’s (1996) scale of authoritarianism describes authoritarian personalities as having a strong adherence to conventional moral values, an inclination to submit to established authority figures, and a hostility and willingness to assault others if they behave in a manner deemed unorthodox or threatening. Authoritarian personalities have been found to think in rigidly categorical ways reminiscent of absolutist or “black and white” thinking. Data has shown that authoritarian views in men are associated with defensive attitudes regarding adherence to rigid gender roles (Lippa and Arad, 1999), and those who scored high in authoritarianism expressed interest in regulating the sexuality of others through “extreme moralism and punitive reactions” (Adorno et al, 1969). The Peterson and Zurbriggen study (2010) also concluded that when attitudes on rape myth acceptance (that only morally compromised, promiscuous women are at risk for rape and thus are likely ‘deserving’ of it) were measured, acceptance was positively correlated with both men and women who expressed authoritarian personalities.

This is consistent with the rigidity and absolutist thinking that have been identified in authoritarian personalities, as it lines up with an intolerance of ambiguity and support for punishing those who act against established social norms (Pettersen and Zurbriggen, 2010). It suggests that ‘good’ and ‘bad’ women are easily identifiable and simplifies moral perspectives on violence in a way that imposes upon those who act out of line or do not adhere to the status quo. It comforts authoritarian women, as they assume that their goodness will protect them, and reassures them that these women are getting what they deserve. It also ensures that they themselves never act outside of the lines of propriety — as those belong to that categorization of womanhood are disciplined cruelly. Similarly, this study describes how authoritarian men “may not mind if bad women are assaulted” (Pettersen and Zurbriggen, 2010).

Populist rhetoric relies on the polarizing narrative of an ‘us’ (virtuous) versus a ‘them’ (immoral), a (real) people and a ‘non-people’, the nationalists (patriots) and the anti-nationalists (threats). Within an ethno-nationalistic context of exclusion, populist authoritarian leaders cultivate their own reality and truths. The regulation of the reproduction of the ‘us’ in this instance is a crucial aspect of the process of deciding who deserves to belong, and so, it becomes a priority of populism to reinforce traditional gender norms that ensure the continued dominance of the majority race (or ethnicity, religious group, etc). In order to recover the nationalistic values that have been deemed lost or corrupted, narratives that oppress and regulate the behavior women support the anti-immigration characteristics that are definitive of populism because they emphasize sentiments of ethnocentric belonging. Populists weaponize intense feelings of insecurity, fear, and anger by establishing a shared sense of sameness among group members and an inherent suspicion of disloyal, unfamiliar out-of-group members. This fear effectively produces conformity and ensures loyalty to the in-group.

In the United States Trump has maintained that the ‘them’ population is composed of Hispanic immigrants and Muslim refugees; for Bolsonaro it is leftists and Black and Indigenous Brazilians; for Erdogan it is the Kurdish population; In India Modi and his BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) has ensured that group is the Muslim minority. In all of the countries analyzed in this thesis, the one group invariably demonized is the LGBTQ community. Populist authoritarians maintain that any critique of the nation, particularly those that seek to enhance and enshrine the rights of LGBTQ people, be condemned as leftist woke ideology — degrading, degenerative, and amoral. Only the leader, in his commitment to the true people and the real nation, can save the polity from the disgraceful national adaptation of progressive ideology.

Populism only accepts unwavering fidelity to the in-group to protect ‘our’ women from those who would replace, corrupt, or destroy the dominant group’s idealized way of life. It is significant, then, that demographic policing take place — and one way to ensure that is to regulate women’s bodies and relegate them to conservative gender roles. It is telling that following the announcement of the *Roe v Wade* decision that lifted federal protections on reproductive rights, a pro-life Republican congresswoman gave a speech describing it as “a historic victory for white life” (Sullivan). The nationalistic messaging that fuels populism is dependent on the resentment felt by an ostracized group that feels it deserves more (power, social standing, recognition, dignity, government resources, economic opportunities) but is being replaced or otherwise shunned in favor of some other group, via condescending politicians and corrupt elites.

Nationalists will rally in support of a charismatic demagogue who claims unique authority and capacity to disrupt the ruling elite and bring power back to the people by way of recovering the pure values of some romanticized national past. Anti-immigration policies,

convictions of religious superiority, ethnic bigotry, and imagery of violation and occupation of the pure, by the despicable, play a crucial role in the messaging of populists. Relatively privileged classes and communities, susceptible to such rhetoric, find themselves in fear of those who demand basic rights to which they themselves have been historically privileged to.

Within this narrative, women play a special role and have a specific duty: to expel the forthcoming invading demographic and impending ideological tragedy by reproducing in the name of, and for the glory of, the nation. Controlling women's sexuality is a condition of restraining the naturalization of national boundaries. From racialized reproductive incentives, abortion rights, the accessibility of contraception, adequate sexual education, access to sexual healthcare, the stigmatization of the foreigner's sexual practices or portrayals of gender, and decisions regarding family separations — once you recognize the implications of patriarchy in authoritarian practices and policies it becomes impossible to not to acknowledge them as consistent throughout global and historical populist policies.

The men who belong to the 'other' group threaten the hegemonic power of nationalists by entering the labor market, imposing foreign values, diluting the dominant culture, and threatening public safety by way of their inherent existence as criminals, terrorists and rapists. Populists provide a solution to such emasculating threats to democracy, with policies meant to halt demographic decline and preserve the so-called national culture and character through the control of women's bodies and reproductive freedoms. Excluding those who are "unfit" to vote or immigrate to the country and earn citizenship are efforts to protect homogeneity and define entho-national belonging. The role that women play by upholding national values, symbolically representing the purity of national culture, and reproducing the nation, make their submission

vital to the populist narrative. It also makes them inherently worthy of suspicion, as they could be seduced by foreigners, or refuse their proper roles in society.

While Modi has not criminalized abortion, he has openly promoted xenophobia Hindutva messaging to increase Hindu demography. Warning against the potential for the amoral, “overpopulating Muslims” to overwhelm India, he has encouraged Hindu mothers to have multiple children (2022). Similar messages have come from Erdogan, whose administration has tried to outlaw both adultery and birth control. He has advocated for good Turkish women to have stay home as mothers and have “at least three children” so that demographics do not shift to favor the Kurdish minority and suggesting that women without children are “incomplete” and “deficient” (2016). Trump became the first president in U.S. history to attend a pro-life rally, stating unequivocally that he is the ‘defender of the unborn’ (Thiessen), while concurrently proposing immigration reform to cut legal immigration from an annual 1.1 million to 3-500,000 (Milbank). Bolsonaro made headlines when he argued that Black Brazilians “don’t even serve for procreating” (Travae). Such speech acts (and coinciding policies) strip women of their bodily autonomy and support the populist message of reinforcing political power through maintenance of the demographic majority.

Women pose a threat just by their very nature, because they have the power to redistribute demographic balances. Authoritarian populism wields the connection between ideas of ethnographic and racial superiority and the suppression of women’s rights to normalize the suppression of other categorical human rights. Efforts to control the free press or intimidate or assimilate oppositional demonstrations, advance policies of voter suppression, utilize police brutality and surveillance, and challenge the judiciary and other independent democratic

institutions, empower populist leaders whose success is dependent on the vilification of minorities and the women who perpetuate national reproduction.

Chapter Two: Misogyny is Emotional and its Function is Political

In this section, I outline the process in which gendered narratives and misogynistic rhetoric and messaging directly contributes to the political saliency and strategy of four right-wing populist authoritarian leaders: Donald Trump, the former president of the United States, Jair Bolsonaro, former president of Brazil, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, president of Turkey, and Narendra Modi, prime minister of India. As we shall see, misogynistic discourse is a binding factor and common denominator in the rule of these four leaders. There are three central processes by which misogyny fortifies the political projects of these leaders. First, gendered narratives capitalize on and reinforce the mercurial emotions of fear, insecurity, shame, and anxiety that populists exploit and rely on to amass political support and remain popular. Second, misogyny is used as a tool to silence oppositional forces by policing behavior, delegitimizing critics, regulating who can participate in civil society, and appropriating feminist and liberal ideological terminology. Third and finally, misogynistic logic legitimizes undemocratic behavior and abuses of power, reinforcing justifications for the illiberal consolidation of political power.

Sexism is salient to populist authoritarians because they utilize its enforcement to reproduce and reinforce patriarchal norms for political capital. Just as misogyny should not be adequately described as an aspect of individual pathology, neither should its weaponization by contemporary demagogues be dismissed as anything less than a defining property of the populist authoritarian playbook. As we witness global shifts in the erosion of democratic norms around

the world, it is imperative that we pay attention to the ways in which right-wing populist leaders combine nationalistic messaging with attacks on women, both in rhetoric and policy.

The masculine and often aggressively violent imagery embodied in the political communication style espoused by such leaders has seen a visible increase in both physical and symbolic violence. The gendered narratives used by right-wing populist authoritarians are constantly reinforced through social media, speeches, rallies, and other kinds of charismatic performances that have seen unfortunate success in exciting and enraging significant populations. The assault on women is now unabashed in its open acknowledgement by populist authoritarian leaders as an expression of their masculine political dominance.

Scholars hold a variety of explanations for why the early twenty-first century is seeing a rise in authoritarian populism and a decline in democratic values around the world. Some, such as Ruth Ben-Ghiat, whose research examines the patterns and reoccurring conditions that allow authoritarian strongmen to come to power, indicate that periods of significant social progress usually precede the rise of wide embodiment of authoritarian dispositions (Ben-Ghiat, 2020). These progressive reforms and policies can have a destabilizing effect on parts of a given population as they threaten dominant balances of power. Increased polarization is also a significant factor, typically exacerbated by populist strongmen so that their strategy of ‘othering’ is effective.

One of the main themes that distinguish populist authoritarian rulers is that of the cult of personality and the glorification of the leader. By embodying traits consistent with hegemonic masculinity and defining themselves in misogynistic terms, these strongmen have defining themselves in opposition to femininity (or what sexism perceives as femininity). Trump and Bolsonaro use overtly brazen and vulgar misogyny to achieve an image of ‘alpha’ masculinity,

while Erdogan and Modi portray themselves as patriarchal fathers to their nations. Forging emotional ties with supporters is crucial for the authoritarian strongman, as he demands unwavering loyalty. While this is true of all authoritarian strongmen and many authoritarian parties, there seem to be some relevant differences in the way in which 21st century authoritarians inspire their followers, as the promises of contemporary authoritarian leaders adapt to modern contexts.

In particular, Trump built his political career off the popular and positive response to his misogynistic behavior which both perpetuated, and was exemplary of, hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity, described by Messerschmidt as a framework “originally formulated to conceptualize how patriarchal relations are legitimated throughout society,” appears consistently in the rhetoric of modern populist strongmen (Messerschmidt, 2016). Operating as a pattern in relation to the increased acceptance of non-heteronormative masculinities and collaboration with women, hegemonic masculinity operates within sexist ideologies to justify the patriarchal subjugation of women. Mutually constitutive of hegemonic masculinity is what Ozbay and Soybakis (2018) identify as “political masculinities”, which illustrate the relational dynamics between political leaders and the men who follow them, internalize and incorporate their values, and subsequently confirm and reform their gender identity. This is conceptualized by Ozbay and Soybakis as “the ways in which men are affected by and recalibrate their masculine selves according to the aspirations and fears rooted in certain political leaders, movements, positions, and discourses” (Ozbay and Soybakis, 2018).

During a time when the progression of rights for women and members of the LGBTQ community has been consistently increasing, contemporary populist authoritarians have tapped into fears of societal change and weaponized misogyny to reassure their supporters that old

prejudices still have their place. These leaders project themselves in distinctly masculine terms which resonate with contemporary audiences. When the Covid-19 pandemic broke out and the former president of the United States was hospitalized with the virus, he told his followers not to panic, “Don’t let it dominate you. Don’t be afraid of it,” (Kurtzleben, 2020). During the course of his campaign Trump made references to the size of his genitalia and the levels of his testosterone, and his disparaging remarks for his opponents were traditionally feminized. His message was clear: only I, the strong, can protect you from our enemies domestically and abroad; only I can protect you from the ideology of the weak.

The political performances that portray Trump as aggressively misogynist uphold conservative gender narratives that resonate with voters whose insecurity and fear is tied to rapidly changing public acceptance of non-heteronormative masculine ideals. It is a gender performance that builds his grand, larger-than-life, cultish style personality while allowing him the opportunity to act as the judge of authentic masculinity and call out his opponents in feminized, derogatory terms. During the 2016 campaign trail he famously insulted opponent Hillary Clinton as “nasty” and “shrill”, while on a separate occasion insulting the appearance of Republican Presidential candidate Carly Fiorina (“look at that face!”), degrading lawyer Elizabeth Beck “she wanted to breast pump in front of me” and calling the former chairwoman of the Democratic National Committee Donna Brazile a “cheater” and a woman who “chokes on the truth” (Quealy, 2021). His insults for his male critics also took on a misogynistic style: “a total lightweight” (Justin Amash, former U.S. representative), “he would go down and hard, crying all the way” (president Joe Biden), “cried like a baby and begged for forgiveness” (U.S. representative Richard Blumenthal), as he labeled countless critics as “weak”, “little”, and “small” (Quealy, 2021).

By accusing his enemies of being soft, and small, Trump portrays them as what he considers the weakness of the nation that is diminishing the state from its former greatness; he legitimizes the fears of his supporters by posing as the solution to those fears. He undermines his opposition as feminine and in contrast presents himself as the national protector. He valorizes himself as authentic and strong, rooting his success in a militarized style of masculinity that offers protection to those who are fearful of rapid change. By defending his political agenda as strong and delegitimizing challenges to it as signs of weakness, his refusal to back down in any given situation to achieve his political projects acts as a public assertion of dominance. Thus by emasculating his enemies and emanating a kind of protective hero-like figure, Trump's misogyny serves as a key role in his political strategy.

The dynamics of populist authoritarianism, such as 'othering', scapegoating, and disenfranchising minorities, can be multiplied in post-colonial states which are simultaneously experiencing large shifts in cultural values and epistemic violence. Prime Minister Modi has crafted for himself the image of the savior and for his party BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) the disposition of masculine, moral (Hinduvta), superiority (Kaul, 2017) that reflect hegemonically masculine norms in India. His administration engages in powerful emotional storytelling and the creation of political myths that are not only performative and descriptive, but shape political realities. This myth describes Modi as an austere, paternal nationally representative icon. His masculinity is expressed with portrayals of self-discipline, the denial of extravagance, and control over his bodily desires (Kaul, 2017). Modi fasted for the duration of his first international trip to the United States, and projects his virility and stamina through such public acts of spiritual devotion (Nair, 2014).

During the 2014 elections in India Modi, engaged in exemplary benevolently misogynistic behavior, describing the sister of his opposition and prominent public figure Priyanka Gandhi as “like his daughter” (Rai, 2014). He launched a public social media campaign for fathers and their daughters to take and post selfies together in order to promote acceptability for girl children and has been described by Bollywood actors as “a father figure for all girls in India” (Kaul, 2017). This, of course, despite the prime minister’s silence on rapidly increasing rates of violence against women in India, his own misogynistic remarks (complimenting the prime minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina on being tough on terrorism “despite being a woman”(Bhalla, 2015), and his noticeable silence during the highly publicized cases of the rape of young girls (New York Times, 2018).

Within this patriarchal and nationalist narrative lies Modi’s description of the ‘other’ — his scapegoat. He weaves carefully manufactured media portrayals of himself as a leader embodying self-control and faithful spirituality in order to depict India’s Muslim minority as sacrilegious, indulgent, hyper-sexual, and threatening. He abstains from having a family (though he is divorced, and kept his ex-wife a secret for decades) in order to put no loyalty above his loyalty to his country, so the political myth goes (Taylor, 2014). His lack of familial ties and humble origins are propagandized as reasons that embody his devotion to his country: he is simply too passionate for proper government rule and cannot suffer any distractions from his duty to his country. This creates the perfect contrast for his portrayal of the ‘traitorous’ Muslim minority who eat meat, are portrayed as sexually aggressive and overpopulating, and worship in an alien way that is not indicative of the ‘real’ India (Ghassem-Fachandi, 2009).

Masculinity in Erdogan’s Turkey also serves the populist leader in ways dependent on the weaponization of fear, alienation, and precarity. The machismo of Erdogan’s political

performances, not unlike those of Trump and Modi, integrate a hostile form of bullying with a portrayal of paternalism. Narratives that exemplify their status of ‘outsider’ (Trump will challenge the elites; Modi comes from humble beginnings) still allow them to be dominant and display power through their transgressive political behaviors. Erdogan weaponizes his macho-style rhetoric in defense of Turkish nationalism. After a clash at the Davis economic conference in 2009 in which the president yelled at former Israeli president Simon Peres, Erdogan returned to Turkey as a hero, with thousands of supporters hailing his performance (Tait, 2009).

Erdogan has been described by journalists, oppositional Turkish politicians, and researchers as exercising an innovative Islamist form of masculinity (Oxford Feminist Press, 2018). As was the case with Trump and Modi, his performance of hegemonic masculinity is culturally relevant and contextual to the challenges facing Turkey. Similar to Modi, Erdogan took power during a time when the nation was experiencing a wave of social change and, in 2002, hoping to gain entrance into the EU. Describing his patriarchal style of communication, actor Hülya Avşar described a meeting she had with the president where she felt “as a mother raising a teenager” and gave him some advice for dealing with domestic conflict and the Gezi Park protestors: “The child breaks, the mother mends, and the father looks the other way” (Korkman and Aciksoz, 2013).

Analyzing his domineering personality, journalists Zeynep Kurtulus Korkman and Salih Can Aciksoz (2013) describe Erdogan as trying to embody the role of father, brother, and husband of the nation. He has encouraged all Turkish women to have three children and publicly chastised a group of girls sitting on men’s laps in a park. In response, Gezi Park protestors, aware of the power of the political power of his masculine image, responded in kind: graffitiing images of the president wearing blush and labeled “so sweet”; graffitiing phrases that suggest that they

want a divorce; and using emasculating language that questions the size of his genitalia and sexuality (Korkman and Aciksoz, 2013). While Erdogan’s cult of personality comes in a relatively less overtly aggressive form, it is no less self-centered. In a vanity project meant to project glory and dominance, Erdogan had an enormous presidential palace constructed (Case, 2023).

Similar to the way that Trump capitalizes on the insecurity of American white men who feel dispossessed by progressive social change, Erdogan emphasizes a “patriarchal and authoritarian gender configuration that seeks entitlement, superiority, privilege, and revenge while it rejects dealing with cultural institutions and denigrates the existing social norms and values” (Ozbar and Soybakis, 2018). His rhetoric over the decades he has been in power have been consistent in that they seek to establish the proper role of Turkish women as subscribing to their nature to be nurturing, insisting that they belong in the home taking care of the children. Claiming gender equality as unnatural, he legitimizes his narratives using an approach to nature that justifies his views on gender hierarchy. This misogynistic narrative translates well to Turkish men who enjoy the feelings of superiority and entitlement of their gender. It also acts as a rejection of Western values; something that can comfort those who feel the sting of rejection by the EU’s continual refusal to admit Turkey into the organization.

Jair Bolsonaro, the recently ousted president of Brazil, is often compared to Trump. Allies of a similar rhetoric style that share many of their right-wing views, Bolsonaro, like Trump, was internationally infamous for his misogyny and homophobia before he was elected to the executive office. Presenting his political opposition as sinful, gender-bending communists that represent the moral degradation of the nation, Bolsonaro rose to power by claiming to speak for the people — the real, authentic Brazilian people — and brought his narrative to life with a

brazen, hostile presidential campaign. Perhaps one of his most notorious insults came during a debate in the 2018 election. Facing MP Maria de Rosario, the former president disparaged that he would not bother to rape her because she “did not deserve it...Slut!” (Assis and Ogando, 2018).

A comment as violent as this serves two purposes: it belittles a political opponent for her gender with violent imagery that expresses the authoritarian dominance of his own gender, and it asserts that as a man unafraid to speak so vulgarly in public, he can withstand any criticism and come out on top of it. Trump used a similar tactic, and indeed, as Modi and Erdogan’s version of masculinity shaped them as patriarchal father figures to the nation, that of Trump and Bolsonaro is more overtly “alpha” and machismo. Brazilians have not seen the progress on gender equality that many of their South American neighbors have achieved, and in 2017 despite a gender quota, only 10% of Brazil’s politicians were women. Indeed, Brazil ranks as one of the worst countries in the world for the political representation of women — behind even Saudi Arabia and North Korea (Encarnacion, 2017). Yet even in this environment women have made progress; after all, Bolsonaro was succeeding former president Dilma Rousseff (though the president did face an extraordinarily sexist impeachment).

It is likely that, as Trump’s election was seen as racial backlash for electing president Barack Obama, Bolsonaro’s election was backlash protesting the gender of Brazil’s previous president. Misogyny puts women who threaten the dominance of men in their place, and Bolsonaro was the perfect misogynist to deem feminism an anti-national ideology. Signaling a return to the conservative right-wing politics (interrupted by Rousseff and her mentor and ally Lula da Silva), Bolsonaro claimed his adherence to the Bible as his “Toolbox to fix men and women” (Assis and Ogando, 2023). As with other twenty-first century authoritarian strongmen, alongside Bolsonaro we can detect a noticeable pattern of tapping into the fear of progress and

social change in order to capitalize and profit politically from the desire to return to the relatively simpler times of rigid, traditional gender roles.

The appeal to populist authoritarianism and the traditional gender roles that it demands do not only appeal to men. Women all over the world are seeing expectations for how they should live transition at a rapid pace. We live in a time characterized by the rise of non-heteronormative relationship structures (such as LGBTQ and polyamorous relationships), decreased adherence to religion and conservative religious practices, and the common subversion of traditional gender roles, norms, and identities. Anxiety regarding the speed at which social norms are shifting is observable on many cultural and societal levels but are especially apparent in the sphere of social media apps such as TikTok and YouTube.

One recent trend in the U.S. and U.K. that reflects the anxiety of these changes can be seen in the trend of the ‘Tradwife’, which consists of married women who might find relief or peace through the rejection of modernism and instead find fulfillment through embracing 1950s gender roles (Freemen, 2020). Her counterpart can be seen in the highly lucrative ‘manosphere’, where we see cultural influencers such as Joe Rogan and Andrew Tate exalting the purportedly lost ideals of traditional masculinity and promoting their followers to restore the disappearing values of ‘real’ masculinity. As people who long for a kind of idealized past while being a part of a modern culture, these traditionalists might see themselves as righteously rebellious in their nostalgic longing for a simpler time.

The return to traditional morals and social norms might appear symptomatic and unique to the era in which we live. but is more of a historic trend than a phenomenon unique to our time. Retreating into tradition amongst widespread instability is observable on a historical level and is something that we saw during the Victorian era. Coinciding with the rapid industrialization of the

British empire, women during this time began to join both the labor force and the public sphere. These new roles for women bred a kind of cultural and societal anxiety, but Victorian society relied on a notion of gender centered around the ideology of “Separate Spheres”, which posited a strictly binary version of gender (Naddy Tamara, 2020). Hughes notes that “In earlier centuries it had been usual for women to work alongside husbands and brothers in the family business”, during the Victorian era “men and women’s roles became more sharply defined than at any time in history” (2020). Of course this didn’t apply to working class women and men of color, who had no option outside of working long hours in brutal conditions characteristic of that time period, if they had the freedom to earn wages at all.

Similarly, we can see that another retreat into tradition took place in 1950s America. It was, again, a time of massive change: gay and lesbian spaces opened up, researchers as well as the general public began experimenting with psychoactive drugs, and new research on sex and sexuality, such as that done by Masters and Johnson, as well as that done by Kinsey (1948), suggested that most people belonged on a scale of sexuality rather than in one exclusive sexual category. Views on gender roles began to shift, as WWII made it necessary for women to enter the workforce; and when they did, they proved just as efficient as men. Again, alongside these cultural shifts came a reactionary fetishizing of domesticity and exorbitant pressure for women to conform to the rigid gender scripts. With the end of Second World War came the end of encouragement for for women’ employment, and federal policies replaced them with returning soldiers (NPR).

This desire to adapt to moral and gender traditionalism comes from, at least in part, the temptation to return to a mythologized time before modern economic pressures. The ‘Tradwife’ phenomenon is sometimes portrayed by journalists in terms of a liberal and conservative culture

war. However, Rottenberg and Orgad see resurgent interest in traditional culture through the lens of neoliberal capitalism and the inordinate expectations place on modern women. The authors write that “the current toxic always-on culture must be understood as a key factor facilitating the rise of this retro-movement... Combined with entrenched gendered social norms, the burden of care disproportionate falls on women. Even relatively privileged women find it difficult to live up to the popular feminist ideal of ‘work-life-balance’. So although at first blush the Tradwife movement may seem profoundly at odds with our times... it is very much a product of the contemporary moment” (Rottenberg and Orgad, 2020). Radical social change always generates an insecurity about how to live in the correct manner, which lead some people who deeply feel that pressure to look to the past for comfort rather than hope or work for a better future. Rottenberg and Orgad write: “We live in a time when normative gender roles and dominant notions of sexuality have not only been challenged but are in flux. As such, reasserting a narrowly defined version of femininity may be a way for some women to gain a sense of control over their lives” (Rottenberg and Orgad, 2020).

A return to antiquated gender beliefs is also tempting when society faces new dangers. Terror Management Theory has been used to explain such shifts towards conservative beliefs. The theory suggests that in the face of death or other fear-inducing terrors, adhering to established beliefs systems and identities can enable individuals to feel an existential kind of security (Greenberg and Arndt, 2012). Lack of control over external forces can prompt a desire for internal control and order. Traditional ideologies and moralities have the opportunity to thrive during times of instability. Faced with modern problems, withdrawing into the past might paradoxically seem like the most rational option. Beneath the desire for a return to simplicity is

the longing for a time that might appear less volatile and unpredictable. When society is under pressure, it becomes easier to look backwards than it does to look forward and forge new norms.

As historian Mark Lilla puts it “Every major social transformation leaves behind a fresh Eden that can serve as the object of somebody’s nostalgia”, and nostalgic reactionism can be far more appealing than optimism for the future (2016). Withstanding the regressive reactionary impulse might be more difficult than we assume, because reactionary ideology is somewhat different than conservative ideology; reactionaries are revolutionaries that seek to restore a mythologized past, and they see progress as akin to betrayal. Optimism can betray if expectations are let down; it can leave you feeling tricked. Nostalgia provides a comfort crystallized in an immovable past.

Modern authoritarians do not seek to transform the character of their subjects or encourage them with promises of utopian futures. Rather, they identify the resentment and longing for a relatively privileged class to return to a nostalgic, fictional past of prosperity. Yet this nostalgia is for a time when many people did not have rights — in the United States it refers to a time characterized by racial segregation; when women had few legal protections and non-heteronormative sexualities and gender identities were considered pathological. In India, for the BJP and the Hindutva, Modi inspires a nostalgia for a pre-colonial time, in Turkey, for Erdogan, the nostalgia represents the glory of the Ottoman Empire. In Brazil, shockingly, Bolsonaro has inspired amongst his supporters a nostalgia for dictatorship, and has been repeating this authoritarian message for 20 years (Barbara, 2016). Nostalgia for former glory in nationalism is nothing new; it is a classical red-flag for those who have studied populist leaders. Its modern resonance is noteworthy because it reflects warmth for time periods that were particularly oppressive for numerous populations. In each of these nostalgic periods women were

systemically oppressed, and the return to traditional gender roles and widely accepted gendered subjugation is a part of the political fantasy that nostalgia provides.

As argued by Ben-Ghiat (2020), one of the pre-conditions for a populist strongman to rise is the liberal progression of a given society. Accepting of diverse cultural influences, expanding civil rights for the LGBTQ community, women, religious and ethnic minorities, and the profiting off of the pluralism inherent in neoliberal capitalism (particularly when some are profiting, but others are excluded from the benefits) can all feel threatening to a segment of the population that previously held relatively more social capital. The centrality of the notion of a kind of existential threat cannot be undermined in this context; the fear and precarity that accompany it are crucial, and in the literature on authoritarianism they are considered prime determinants. Authoritarian personalities feel comfortable around uniformity, convention, and order, and are reactionary and fearful of the ‘other’ — whether that be a religious, ethnic, or sexual minority. Fearmongering for the authoritarian strongman is the metaphorical fuel for their fire, and in return for devotion they provide a sense of assurance that a lost glory can be reestablished.

While in the past this assurance may have been predicated on feelings of transformation, such as the ‘new-man’ in Stalin’s Soviet Union, assurance in contemporary populism is symbolized by a return to an idyllic prosperous past. Instead of promising grand transformation, the new populist authoritarians offer a radical kind of political inclusion to their followers: state-sanctioned dissent. As social norms quickly progress, culture changes. Derogatory language used to beat down racial minorities, LGBTQ folk, and women are no longer considered acceptable in public (and often private) discussions. Due to the rise of social media and the internet, scandals involving sexual assault, racial disparagement, and other public faux pas are common, occasionally involving and taking down some very powerful public figures. In the United States,

India, Turkey, and Brazil, public acceptance of LGBTQ people is increasing. All of this can, to the authoritarian personality, appear deeply troubling.

Misogynistic gendered narratives and displays of masculine strength come in the form of rhetoric that has less to do with aspiration towards a greater future than it does scapegoating and blaming the loss of a venerate past on an already marginalized community. The great and deep cynicism that feels so ingrained in contemporary politics can be manipulated to mobilize people who otherwise might not have expected themselves to participate politically at all. Many of these people have been disappointed by economic inequalities exasperated by neoliberal politics and globalization and feel jaded at the prospect of ‘politics as usual’. So when a strongman appears on the political scene offering a chance for them to radical, empowered, and safe, it is not surprising that they feel politically invigorated.

Holly Case describes this in her piece “The New Authoritarians” when she writes that “The new authoritarian does not pretend to make you feel better, only to make you feel better about not wanting to change. In this respect he has tapped a gusher in the *Zeitgeist* that reaches well beyond the domain of state socialism, an attitude... [of] ‘nonfailure’... that the writer Walter Mosley elevates to a virtue: ‘We need to raise our imperfections to a political platform that says: ‘My flaws need attention too.’ This is what I call the ‘untopia.’” Welcome to the not-so-brave new world” (Case, 2023).

In the face of deep cynicism, disillusionment, indignation, and anxiety for the future, strongmen provide an opportunity for relatively privileged, but economically downtrodden and threatened groups to articulate illiberal views that may feel like a rejection of powerful elitism. The underlying drive has the appeal of providing an opportunity to participate in a movement that has both the security of belonging to a cohesive group and the thrill of cultural transgression.

For supporters of Modi in India and Erdogan in Turkey that may look like insulation from Western values, for followers of Trump and Bolsonaro that rebellious spirit may come in the form of brazen and derogatory rejections of political correctness and relational feelings of shame. For supporters of contemporary populist authoritarians that find themselves in economically precarious positions, an opportunity to allow themselves a bit of shamelessness could be a tempting retreat away from how their facial mediocrity makes them feel. As Rabbi Micheal notes, “working people’s stress is often intensified by shame at their failure to ‘make it’ in what they are taught is a meritocratic American economy.... Instead of challenging this ideology of shame, the left has buttressed it by blaming white people as a whole for slavery, genocide of the Native Americans and a host of other sins... The rage many white working-class people feel in response is rooted in the sense that once again, as has happened to them throughout their lives, they are being misunderstood” (Lerner, 2016). The shamelessness upheld and projected by Trump and Bolsonaro supporters can be seen as a rejection of the shame that modern understandings of social progression imbue them with. If they accept progressive ideas and norms surrounding gender and non-heteronormative expression, they may have to accept shame with it.

Populist strongmen manipulating feelings of fear, shame, and resentment are accompanied by the support of major religious institutions. That Modi and Erdogan have the support of religious institutions in their country we might expect. As previously mentioned, Modi keeps to a strict vegetarian diet and fasts during the Hindu holidays that require it, even while traveling (or perhaps specifically while traveling in order to get positive press coverage). Influenced greatly by India’s recent colonial history, commanding strict control over one’s body has become symbolic with nationalistic ideas of rejecting the alienating presence of colonialism,

secularism, and modernism (Derne, 2012). In some ways this is a response to the colonial portrayal of Indian men as emasculated. As a political and deeply personal response it offers Indian men feelings of power associated with controlling the sexuality of women — including enforcing Hindu practices on women and girls.

Derne details how many of the men he interviewed felt threatened by the importation of Western capitalism, values, and secular ideals. These men expressed longing for an imaginary past, a happier time, in which “brothers lived harmoniously together, parents found suitable spouses for their children and women happily accepted the restrictions placed upon them. In short, many Hindu men continue to feel that the Hindu family is under assault by modern practices and principles” (Derne, 2012). Again, we see the pattern of misogyny emerging as a way to empower disenfranchised men by imposing control over women. This is politically salient for authoritarian leaders who do not manage to achieve much else during their administrations — if they fail to provide economic mobility or safety to their populace, they can offer the reassurance that a sense of control over others in their lives provides.

For Erdogan, we can also observe an antagonistic relationship between political applications of religion and a resistance to the imposition of secular Western ideology that manifests in misogynistic ways. While Turkey went through a modernizing period in the 1970s and 1980s, men were legally recognized as the head of the family until reforms took place in 2001 (Ozbay and Soybakis, 2018). Political Islamists in the Islamic AKP (Justice and Development Party) insist on a form of “separate but equal” gender equality, but in reality the social hierarchy places men above women and reinforces traditional gender roles that keep women in the home and out civil life (Ozbay and Soybakis, 2018). The justification for policies that subjugate women are based on religious interpretations that maintain gender inequality by

keeping women in the home and away from the public sphere. Resistance to modernized Western culture, as well as the commodification and sexualization of women's bodies is important to Turkish women. Despite Erdogan's insistence that the only way to maintain Islamic culture and tradition is to keep women in the home and out of the public square, Turkish women have been at the forefront of protests against Erdogan, and Turkish feminists insist that feminism and Islam need not be at odds (Yesim, 2016).

The ways in which Trump and Bolsonaro found religious support took on a different tone. While making constant references to the Bible and Christianity, both Trump and Bolsonaro have made public statements unbecoming of traditional Christians. Both have openly discussed sexualizing women: Trump in a secretly recorded video that infamously went viral just months before he was elected (in which he brags about sexual assault), and Bolsonaro on multiple occasions, one of which includes him bragging about spending state funds to pay for sex (The Wire, 2020). Trump has disparaged parts of the Christian population in the United States, including Seventh-day Adventists (Williams, 2021), and Bolsonaro has been criticized by several Bishops for his anti-environmental policies (Lima, 2023). Neither appear exemplary of Christian virtue, and yet both have the backing of religious institutions and Evangelical Christians in their nations. While many will not find anything too out of the ordinary with this, as many politicians have seemingly embraced religion despite being apparent nonbelievers, there is something more going on.

Schneider (2023) understands the sense of religion that mark both Trump and Bolsonaro as a modern conception of religious identification stemming from ethnic and nationalistic belonging instead of adherence to religious practice or even, possibly, belief. Instead, belonging in the modern politically religious context involves not belief, but identification, tied to ethnicity

and nationalism. Research has found that American Christian nationalists do not feel comfortable admitting non-Christian and Latin American immigrants into the country (Schneider, 2023). This supports the notion that modern religious nationalism is based on inherited, fixed, religious identities as opposed to the more globalist conception of universality that transcends race and ethnicity and is based on religious faith.

The argument that Christian identity is an inherited trait uniformly tied to ethnicity and nationality, rather than a deeply personal individual choice, has implications for political gender narratives and the role that misogyny plays in supporting authoritarian populist political strategies. On one level those implications seem obvious: the increased acceptance of feminism and LGBTQ rights threatens the communal identities that the natal concept of religious association depend on. It is more than this. By overlooking a political leader's religious beliefs and requiring only their commitment to maintain a right-wing, Christian nationalist political agenda, religious bodies gain a closer association to power in a world that feels increasingly less devout. It is a way to gain control in a rapidly changing world that seems to have more and more potential to transgress traditional gender roles and scripts than have been upheld by the Church.

On some level this might give us an explanation for why right-wing populists seem to be so concerned with the rights of trans and non-binary people. As Schneider explains: "What could be more opposed to the Right's vision of identity as innate and fixed than the trans subject, whose very existence reflects a sort of individual self-fashioning *par excellence*? What could be more contrary to the claims of liberalism — and yet more resonant with the actual experiences of so many born into the hollow shell of bootstrapping ideology — than the insistence that you are, and will remain, what you were born, that all those paeons to personal choice are insubstantial nonsense? We are not mere products of our own creation, as the myth of individualism — so

central to liberalism — has long insisted. The new Right understands this social fact as well as any Leftist. But the post-liberals do not imagine using the powers of the state to advance a fairer and more equitable social order, in which the ideals of liberalism might be actualized. Rather, they aim to resolve thorny questions of rights and recognition by denying the individual any substantive ethical position. You are what you were born into, and no amount of education, migration, hormone therapy or affect can change this reality. The racialisation of religious identity is part and parcel of this overarching attack on individual freedom in favor of the supposedly essential” (Schneider, 2023).

We can connect this concept of religion by contemporary Christian nationalist movements to the misogynistic principles that empower populist authoritarian demagogues. In the first part of this thesis was a short description on the intrinsic nature of misogyny in populist narratives of othering. Coming back to that discussion we can see that for a religious movement tied to racial and ethnic definitions of citizenship and belonging, regulating the reproduction of the nation becomes vital. Christian nationalism and populist authoritarianism are mutually reinforcing and have in common their disposition to mold the social and political realms through coercion and with disregard for democratic values and individual choice. It is no coincidence that the same organizations in the United States that have pushed forward restrictions on voting rights have also introduced restrictive abortion legislation; for the right-wing authoritarian political interests they represent these goals go hand in hand.

Every populist authoritarian included in this study has the support of religious institutions, and all of them promote the growth of the ‘real’ population and all (with Modi as an inconsistent exception) have vocally denounced abortion. Just as populism relies on the process of ‘othering’ so that the polity is divided into an ‘us’ versus a ‘them’, so too does Christian

nationalism rely on such divisions. Both justify illiberal processes of consolidating political power, and neither leave room for the social progress that has imbued women and LGBTQ people with increasing civil rights. Similarly, both make use of gendered narratives, which are constituted by moral rules that require obedience. Straying from the moral mandates of gendered narratives have different repercussions, but by the logic of both Christian nationalism and populist authoritarianism doing so remains morally repugnant.

United by fidelity to the populist authoritarian strongman, supporters find community and connectedness, reassurance of entitlement and safety, moral and religious legitimization, protection, and someone to blame for perceived losses. The gendered narratives employed by Trump, Modi, Erdogan, and Bolsonaro reinforces feelings of pride, nationalism, and gender superiority to their male followers, while providing a sense of stability against the forces of modernization to their women supporters. By refusing to show any kind of public shame or admit mistakes, the leaders make themselves appear untouchable. Even Trump and Bolsonaro, two former presidents who lost their reelection campaigns, never conceded the loss and instead made attempts to overthrow democratic elections. Further, by feminizing their male opponents, portraying images of relentless masculine dominance and belittling the critical voices of women, they delegitimize their political opposition. In the next chapter I demonstrate how such behavior acts as a politically salient strategy.

Chapter Three: Misogyny as a Tool of Silence

The argument that misogyny and gendered narratives function as tools of silence for populist authoritarianism is reliant upon Manne's definition of misogyny as the property which polices patriarchal social orders to maintain subordination to sexist ideologies. It regulates the

roles that men and women are authorized to play, both in their private and public lives. It enforces gendered scripts that maintain how men and women are expected to behave, and rewards and punishes them accordingly. Part of the imposed gender roles require that women are placed as the supporters and suppliers of certain moral goods, including those embodied by acts of caregiving, nurturing, childrearing, and the upholding of patriarchally defined virtues. When women fail to provide moral goods or behave in ways they are outside their line of purview they are threatened, reprimanded, punished, and otherwise conditioned to fall back in line with what patriarchal societies demand of them. By breaking with established social norms, taking goods, or fulfilling roles that are associated with men or coded as masculine, women break the protocol assigned to them and become deserving of discipline.

Punishment comes in a variety of forms from chastisement, blame, hostility, and ridicule to threats, intimidation, violent assault, and of course, death. All of these punishments reflect the inherent aspect of misogyny to silence women by way of intimidation and fear tactics. Dotson (2011) identifies two types of silencing (testimonial quieting and testimonial smothering) and illustrates them by using an example from Collin's *Black Feminist Thought* (2000). She suggests that differential power relations create context-specific mechanisms to effectively silence in ways that are often, but not necessarily always, deeply dependent on ignorance, willful or otherwise. She demonstrates how stereotypes ("controlling images") are usually the product of willful ignorance which tells us that rather than occurring without intention, silencing is often purposeful (Dotson, 2011).

Shame might accompany fear as a silencing tactic, and it is one of the first ways in which most girls learn to make themselves smaller. Street harassment, also known as sexual harassment, is a common issue for women around the world. It is a form of silencing that takes

place in public spaces and teaches women to censor and otherwise shrink themselves when they are out in the world. A study conducted by the United Nations in Delhi found that 95% of girls and women ages 16-19 felt unsafe in public places (Sundholm, 2013). In the United States a study from 2019 found that 81% of women had experienced street harassment, a number which rose to 91% for lesbian and bisexual women (Stop Street Harassment 2023). Another study found that in Brazil the average girl experiences sexual harassment before the age 9 (Global Voices Adox, 2019); and a survey conducted in Istanbul found that 93% of women had been sexually harassed, and that 61% of Turkish women reported being harassed on a monthly basis (Stop Street Harassment 2023).

Street Harassment is a misogynistic tool that is particularly political. This method of harassment controls the movement of women's bodies and serves to remind them that they are under the consistently watchful eye of the patriarchy, under which they can never fully escape, but is particularly threatening in public. Harassment dictates the decisions women and girls make, alters their perception of safety, and imposes psychological, emotional, and material costs (Borker, 2018). Women actively take precautions to avoid street harassment: they change their routes to and from school and work to avoid certain areas they have marked as potentially dangerous, they wear additional clothing (despite the weather), avoid eye contact when walking down the street, ensure that when they travel they do so in groups or with partners, make phone calls to friends and family members to calm themselves and to share their location. They change their social habits, such as the time of day or night that they might go to the gym or meet with friends. They rearrange their schedules and walk without headphones — keys in hand and between fingers — so that they may stay alert and prepared for potentially violent confrontation. Street harassment creates environments of anxiety that necessitate that women must always

remain vigilant. When participating in public life requires such mental and psychological costs women and girls are less likely to engage.

Online harassment functions in a related way. When Trump openly attacks journalists or belittles the women who criticize him, when Bolsonaro jokes about raping his political critics and Erdogan tells women that they belong in the home and are not whole unless they are mothers — these statements are not just meant to reaffirm their beliefs on the proper roles of women. They restrict the boundaries of women’s behavior and signal to their followers that they too, can enforce such boundaries with corresponding attitudes. Patriarchal authoritarians prescribe what the acceptable conditions of women’s political engagement, agency, and identities can be, and misogyny finds some of its most active enforcers in the digital world. Virtual harassment in the form of insistent and repetitive troll behavior, such as graphic rape and death threats, is endemic of online political culture. Shaping political dialogues online can have a strong impact on real-world political behavior, and attacking political dissenters in a distinctly gendered manner has the effect of empowering the digital troll and keeping women out of political discourse.

Misogynistic cyber bullying can be an extremely effective political strategy, and in some instances has been shown to be part of coordinated efforts by right-wing activists and groups (Condé, 2019). Comments that target journalists, organizers, activists, and politicians with vitriol and abuse are often personal and sexually violent in nature and aim at intimidating and silencing right-wing critique. Online harassment against women has an impact on their personal lives and the ways in which women perceive themselves, and as a result politicians have increased their security due to online threats (Lamensch, 202). These real-world consequences intimidate women from active participation online, limiting the perimeters of political discussions and organizing. Online bullying and harassment are just one way to punish women who violate the

roles established for them by the patriarchy. Subjecting women to surveillance and suspicion to exclude them from political conversations is an additional way to coerce them into knowing their place.

Street and online harassment is an effective misogynistic tool because it polices the bodies, voices, and behaviors of women. It is a form of violence that can be helpful to authoritarian populists as it is, on a very basic, intrinsic, and essential level, the threat of violence. A threat which does not have to be fulfilled to accomplish its mission — keeping women away from political engagement, organization and mobilization. While there are no statistics to indicate that levels of street harassment have gone up during the years when Trump and Bolsonaro were in office, or since the Modi and Erdogan were elected, there are many that suggest that there have been increased levels of violence.

Steve Bannon, strategic advisor to Trump during the 2016 presidential campaign and former White House chief strategist who claims to have advised Trump throughout the entirety of his presidency, is reported to have strangled his ex-wife (Bresnahan, 2016). Trump has himself been accused of sexual misconduct over 18 times, including a rape allegation by his ex-wife (Jamieson et al, 2016). Before Trump's ascendency to one of the highest offices in the world such scandals might have been thought to be ruinous for a politician's reputation. For Trump, a politician who reveled in flouting democratic norms and wielded shamefulness and willful ignorance as a political shield, no such effect occurred.

Bolsonaro is also no stranger to sexual misconduct. Just weeks prior his re-election, accusations of pedophilia surfaced due to comments he made as a guest on a radio show. In the video which went viral, Bolsonaro describes making lewd comments descriptive of sexual tension and having a "climax" to a young girl before following a group of 14-year-old girls, who

he claimed were selling sex, into a home (Brazilwire, 2022). An investigation as to why, if the self-reported story is true, Bolsonaro failed to report an underground sex trafficking ring to federal authorities is one of the many investigative charges Bolsonaro currently faces. His campaign then spent \$140,000 on Google ads to deny his reputation as a pedophile (BrazilWire, 2022). This is not the first time Bolsonaro has made headlines for inappropriate behavior around minors: in 2022 he expressed rage that an 11-year-old girl sought an abortion after having been raped (AP News, 2022) and in 2022 he asked sexual questions to a 10-year-old girl on television (Tele Sur English, 2022).

As one might expect, during the presidential terms of accused sexual predators Trump and Bolsonaro, safety standards for girls and women in both countries fell. Under Trump Title IX (expanded under president Obama's administration to protect transgender students and victims of sexual assault), narrowly redefined sexual harassment as actions that could be proven as "severe, pervasive and objectively offensive" (Badera, 2020) while rescinding protections for transgender students (Green, Benner, Pear 2018). Other rollbacks of protections for vulnerable communities included: reducing department funding for LGBTQ youth homelessness, limiting asylum for survivors of domestic violence and gang violence, issuing a presidential memo barring transgender people from serving in the U.S. military (still being challenged in courts), reversing protections for transgender workers under title VII of the Civil Rights Act, and cutting the budgets of federal agencies that support survivors of domestic abuse. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it is demonstrative of the acute damage that such a misogynistic administration can inflict, as well as evidence that rhetoric often translates into policies that hurt women, LGBTQ communities, children and families, and non-heteronormative groups.

Such policies serve as a way to inflict harm upon the very communities that organize, mobilize, protest and demonstrate against populist authoritarian leaders. Trump's degradational policies and gendered messaging serves as way for him to discredit, diminish and undermine women, people of color, and LGBTQ people. He creates political narratives that humiliate these groups and follows through with policies that further increase their marginalization. This creates a hostile environment that reinforces harmful stereotypes and demoralizing prejudices, so that they and the people around them view and treat them as lesser. It is an effort to regulate the perception of these groups as weaker and ineffectual, to deter them from organizing and to delegitimize their civil participation when they do. By rolling back protections against vulnerable populations he ensures increased violence against them — an effectual way to silence a group that feels threatening. By creating political conditions of fear for LGBTQ people he discourages them from entering into public spaces; by rolling back regulations that protect college students from sexual assault, he oppresses a demographic known for their political participation. Strategic silencing is an effective misogynistic tool that all populist authoritarians use to police the behavior of potential and realized dissenters.

For his part, Bolsonaro's administration oversaw Brazil during a time where overall homicidal rates were falling as rates of femicide consistently grew. Despite violent crime dropping to its lowest level since 2007, femicide rates between 2017 and 2018 increased by 12%, and then another 7% from 2018 to 2019, leading to numbers that have grown by a staggering 19% (Garcia, 2020). Brazil's Minister of Justice and Public Security under the Bolsonaro administration commented on these statistics by saying that such incidents were a "negative side effect" of women's increased participation in public life, saying that men resorted to such

violence due to feeling intimidated, describing it as “due to this cultural defect, often an addiction, a criminal spirit”(Garcia, 2020).

During his presidency Bolsonaro loosened restrictions on gun laws, and the amount of guns in Brazil has doubled since 2018 (Nugent, 2022). Such regulation rollbacks feel distinctly threatening to Brazilian women and were opposed by 82% of women polled by the BBC, as well as 63% of men (Sanchez 2022). This data should be contextualized in a way that highlights the extreme situation in Brazil regarding violence against women; the loosening of gun restrictions serve as just one more way to intimidate them from leaving their homes and entering the public square. In 2021 the Bolsonaro government cut the budget for combating domestic violence in Brazil by an estimated 90% (over \$17 million) (Forster, Blofield, et al 2022). This has the effect of making the public sphere a more dangerous place during a time when, due to a lack of funding and repealed protections against violence including the removal of protections against gun violence, women have fewer ways to defend themselves (let alone their political autonomy). A 2021 study done by the research department of the Brazilian Senate reported that 86% of women thought domestic violence had increased in the last year, and 68% reported to know a victim of domestic violence (Forster, Blofield, et al 2022). The harmful policies in conjunction with misogynistic rhetoric and imagery create barriers to keep women from public participation. How can they engage in democracy if they are fearful for their own lives?

Neither Modi nor Erdogan have, at the time of this writing, been accused of sexual assault or misconduct. Yet neither of their administrations have a markedly better track record than their North and South American counterparts of preserving the safety of women. In 2020 Erdogan’s administration proposed a bill (sometimes such policies are referred to as ‘marry-your-rapist laws) that would allow rapists of children under the age of 18 to avoid legal reproach

if they married their victims (McKernan 2022). In 2009 following the vicious and gruesome murder of 18-year-old Munevver Karabulut at the hands of her boyfriend, Erdogan gave a speech regarding the decline in traditional family values, saying “If you let your daughter have her own way, she will end up with [someone who is not fit for her]” (Atuk, 2020). His speech had two effects: weaponizing misogyny to scare fathers into increasing their control over their daughters; and absolving himself of his responsibility to protect a vulnerable demographic by blaming a victim of domestic abuse for her own murder. Connecting violence against women to their own perceived impropriety is simply another way of reinforcing the rules dictated by misogyny, and the message is clear: some women are good and some women are bad, and the bad ones get what they deserve.

Within the context of the rapidly rising rates of femicide in Turkey comments like these are hardly surprising. Between 2002 and 2009 the rate of femicide in Turkey increased by 1,400% (Kooperatifi). In 2012 the Turkish government under Erdogan ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention), but there were little legal or intuitional changes made to address domestic violence — making the gesture more symbolic than effective (Council of Europe). And this in a nutshell, is what Trump, Bolsonaro, Modi and Erdogan have done so well: they have created empty measures to address the violence and discrimination that they perpetuate in order to avoid and shut down feminist and leftist criticism.

Cooption diminishes the language of feminism and aligns leaders like Bolsonaro, Erdogan and Modi with supposedly pro-women agendas which lead to de facto policies that increase suppression, violence, and death. While openly using misogynistic hate speech (and truly, it is hard to continue to refer to such language as dogwhistles) they will in the next breath

argue that they are in fact the true champion of the nation's women. Populist authoritarians will demonize feminist-led movements and charge them with claims of sexism. They establish organizations for the benefit of women only to dictate that such organizations focus on the promotion of traditional values and the well-being of the family. The popularization of feminist terms and capitalization of feminist concepts and attitudes has worked to de-radicalize feminist sentiment and leave the movement (in its various forms) and its language open to cooption. Similar to how they will repeat, over and over and over again, that they are the defenders of 'the people' while simultaneously making the lives of their citizens demonstrably worse, populist authoritarians of the twenty-first century may render feminist rhetoric hollow and allow it to effectively support forcefully misogynistic aims.

Erdogan, claiming to support the improved status of Turkish women, uses government funded GONGOs (government sponsored non-government organizations) to impersonate feminist organizations. Taking up most federal funding allocated to promoting women's interests, organizations such as KADEM (Women and Democracy Association) with Erdogan's daughter at the helm claim to be feminist while openly insisting that by nature men and women are not equal and that to claim or act otherwise is anti-Islamic (Ehrhart, 2022). Work, Erdogan argued in a speech given at a feminist convention, goes against the "delicate nature" of women because their "characters, habits, and physiques are different", claiming that "religion has defined a position for women: motherhood" (O'Grady, 2014). By asserting this kind of language in feminist spaces, Erdogan repeatedly conveys what normative and acceptable behavior for women in Turkey looks like while concurrently failing to protect women from violence and restricting their right to assemble and demonstrate.

Similarly, Modi has described women as mothers, daughters and sisters, yet this description has not stopped him from pardoning offenders who participated in violent gang rapes in country-wide public cases (Pandey, 2022). Disguising the diversion of public funds towards a feminist achievement for gender equality, he established the organization Beti Bachao Beti Padho (Save the daughter, Educate the daughter) in 2014. In 2019 data came out suggesting that more than 56% of funds were spent on media promoting the program, undoubtedly to improve Modi's image among women, while 19% of funds were not distributed at all (Menon, 2019). He uses subversive language to claim that his intentions are to encourage women to lead, while arguing that a bill proposed by activists (which would require that women maintain a certain percentage of the seats in national and state assemblies) would decrease women's overall influence in politics. Claiming the desire to empower women, Modi calls for women-led development in India, while in the same speech suggesting that women politicians make themselves "effective" and refrain from getting held back professionally and political by "jealousy" (Bhalla, 2016). Instead of answering to the legitimate critiques raised by women that his campaign promises included supporting this bill, he reflected blame back onto them by employing misogynistic stereotypes.

In perhaps one of the most representative examples of a populist authoritarian's cooption of language, Bolsonaro convinced an elite and significant movement of women that it is actually feminism itself that is sexist and a threat to Brazilian women. When a feminist political movement, EleNao (NotHim) protested the popularity of Bolsonaro, the former president claimed that they were in fact the group creating unsafe environments for women, and that his gun reforms would make women safer. When interviewed about the EleNao campaign, a woman supporting Bolsonaro claimed that "Feminists treat men like dirt, as if they have to be

submissive. Take the political left for example - men on the left are always submissive, they treat women as better than them” (Watson, 2018). Successful appropriation of language markets the oppression and domination of women as subversively empowering, ‘right’, natural, and even admirable to some conservative women.

The appropriation of leftist, feminist language and the application of shallow, superficial policies meant to address issues of gender equality, reduce the impact of women’s solidarity movements. As a political strategy it is illustrative of the way that Trump, Bolsonaro, Modi, and Erdogan use misogyny as a weapon to discourage critical political discourse and reframe their harmful policies as beneficial to the population they are suppressing. By appropriating terminology used by women to dismantle patriarchal systems, they send the language through a fun-house mirror, distorting it until it has lost its meaning. They give words like ‘feminism’ incompatible definitions and promote the fulfillment of traditional gender roles as the ‘real feminism’. They defund departments that protect women against systemic violence while claiming to champion women’s rights. Right-wing populists have proven themselves adept at integrating language into their narratives of ethno-nationalism and applying them to their misogynistic political agendas. Appropriating feminist speech to their own political aims until it becomes empty, they have distanced this language from its original, radical intention.

Silencing women through patterns rooted in dominance shifts discourse so that extremism appears increasingly moderate and becomes more acceptable over time. Discouraging women from spheres of political participation through dehumanizing hate speech promotes violence, which aims to intimidate women and keep them “in line”. The fear of women’s increased participation and liberation outside of the home has found authoritarian populists assimilating gender theories to mask relations of power and turn feminist terminology on its

head. All of these efforts to subject women, transgender, nonbinary, and queer people to varying forms of violence point to the vulnerability at the heart of authoritarian populism — by failing to uphold the discriminatory categories of patriarchal authoritarianism they constitute a serious threat. As women are silenced and acceptance for increased misogyny grows, political shifts take place to marginalize other vulnerable groups, stagger civil rights advancements, and normalize non-democratic practices, all of which contributes to the populist authoritarian's consolidation of power.

Chapter Four: The Logic of Misogynistic Domination Mirrors that of Populist Illiberalism

The misogyny wielded by contemporary populist authoritarians sanctions violence against those who fail to uphold patriarchal expectations. This logic of domination asserts that traditionally masculine qualities (which, while they do vary culturally, share some essential commonalities) — brutish strength, protective defensiveness, decisive action, fearlessness, and above all the ability to conquer, coerce, and bully others into submission — are held in the highest esteem. Following a rational characterized by these values, rather than democratic consensus, collaboration, and ethical reform, what legitimizes a political victory is the victory itself. Failing that, the seizure of political power through force is sufficient. When political values shift and adhering to democratic institutions becomes less important than the accrual of power to push forward a particular agenda, we can see the parallels between the logic of misogyny and that of authoritarian justification. This chapter observes how the rational employed by misogyny and authoritarianism are mutually constitutive of one another.

Twenty-first century leaders Trump, Bolsonaro, Erdogan and Modi engage in the spread of gendered narratives to erode democratic practices. In a similar manner to the contemporary strategy of co-opting feminist language to benefit misogynistic aims, the goal is to superficially

reconstruct authoritarianism so that it takes on the appearance of democracy using liberal language. Fundamental to populism is the distinction between those who belong and everyone else — the enemy. The formulation of the ‘authentic’ homogenous community, which finds representation through the only leader who can defend it, becomes the actualization of the truest form of democracy. As the protector of the nation, the populist authoritarian is established as the only legitimate legal authority, and loyalty to this authority is vital to remaining part of the authentic polity. The legitimacy of the checks on his power — a free media, the judiciary, the legislative bodies of parliament and congress — become obstacles in the way of strongman whose authenticity assures his infallibility.

The other branches of government, let alone the political opposition, become definitive threats to the nation, apparent terrorists in their own right. While analysts of populist authoritarian leaders denounce them as desecrating or trouncing the rule of law, the judges that such leaders appoint interpret the law as another arm in service of the strongman’s authority. Understanding democracy in terms that morally justify authoritarian power is logically consistent with accepting gendered hierarchies as legitimate social and familial structures; both kinds of logic assume that the top of the hierarchy is in power because they deserve it, no matter why or how they got there. The threats facing the state warrant the consolidation of power, democratic or otherwise, just like potential threats to the nuclear family require the dominant father to protect it, by use of force if necessary.

Despising vulnerability, a misogynistic trait, and displaying violent chauvinism in support of the creation of an ethno-nationalistic cult, implies that the path to empowerment be at the expense and rightful exclusion of the the ‘other’. It need not be peaceful. When Trump responds to Black Lives Matter protests by calling the National Guard, employing the militarized police

force to use tear gas, rubber bullets, and “overwhelming force”, and praises the attack of protestors at his rallies (Cineas, 2021), he endorses violence as a proper response to democratic expressions of opposition to his rule. When Bolsonaro repeals gun regulations so that Brazilians may defend their ‘liberty’, arguing that “the people must have the right to defend themselves against those who dare take away their freedom”, he is transgressing democratic values, yet his followers feel they are participating in righteous democratic action when they support him (Morelock and Narita, 2021). Morelock and Narita summarize this understanding of populist authoritarianism by referencing a Nazi political theorist Carl Schmitt: “The total, voluntary submission of the people to the ruler, animated by the experiences of identity with the ruler, united by the all-encompassing ‘will of the people,’ constitutes true democracy... The leader, the spokesperson for the authentic people’s will, must be *free* of bureaucracy, to command as he sees fit, by his own decisions” (2021).

The moral imperatives enforced by misogyny, which demand that those who step out of their prescribed roles be punished and put back in line, justify exercises of power in service of authority as ethical obligation. It is comparable to the rationale employed by domestic abusers to justify their assaults: ‘it hurts me more than it hurts you’. Misogynists perceive and commit to domination of the ‘lesser gender’ as a just exercise of power; why should exercising democratic power be any different? The populist authoritarian weaponizes misogyny to dismantle political dissent the same way a chauvinist, with comparable zeal, might wield it to disempower his wife or daughter, or any woman who competes with or challenges him. Restoring the past glory of the nation is not so unlike restoring the pride of gendered domination a misogynist might have felt before the progression of civil rights and normalization of economic instability. The rigidity of misogyny in the home can be utilized for the populist authoritarian, which can “result[s] in the

reproduction of the patriarchal character of the household in the political realm” (Cindoglu and Unal, 2016).

Misogyny is a crucial tool to wield against social movements because the most successful mobilizations feature women in key positions (Chenowith and Marks 2022). When women participate in social movements they are more likely to be nonviolent and more likely to be seen as seen legitimate by the populace at large. Authoritarian strongmen are aware of this and have taken steps to suppress the right to assemble and squash feminist and LGBTQ movements across the globe (Chenowith and Marks 2022). Fully free and empowered women who participate in public spheres do so in ways that threaten populist authoritarians, and feminist and pride movements have been bravely fighting against Trump, Bolsonaro, Modi, and Erdogan for years.

In 2021 following the decision of Erdogan’s administration to pull out of the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe’s Convention on preventing and combating violence against women) hundreds of women protested for months. Just a few months prior Erdogan called the thousands of demonstrators (mostly college students and LGBTQ folk), protesting the appointment of a party loyalist as university rector, ‘terrorists’, and arrested over 300 of them (Aljazeera, 2021). In 2022 thousands more participated in banned Pride protests across several regions in Turkey and faced tear gas and rubber bullets, as well as additional arrests (Amnesty International). That same year saw the arrest of three women in high positions at the Rosa Women’s Association; they were also charged as ‘terrorists’. The group We Will Stop Femicide has been ordered by authorities to disband (Michealson and Narl, 2022) and 18 protesters shouting “‘Tayyip, run, run, run, women are coming,’ were arrested during an International Women’s Day protest in 2021 (Human Rights Watch, 2021). When the Gezi Park protests expanded across Turkey, Erdogan responded with threats that had sexual undertones. “Now they

say the Prime Minister is so tough. What did you expect? Am I supposed to *bend over* before a couple of wanderers and ask them kindly to quit protesting?” (Eksi, Batul, and Wood, 2019)

Rightfully seeing the protestors as the threat that they are, Erdogan has been brutally oppressive to uphold the limits he imposed for organizing and demonstrating. He has undermined democratic institutions or outright dissolved them, imposed numerous executive decrees, and managed excessive control over journalists and the media (Human Rights Watch, 2021). In 2021 he banned protestors from recording police and has engaged in multiple attacks against social media sites such as YouTube and Twitter (Rawlinson, 2014). He uses his strongman persona to justify the attacks on democratic institutions and, among his supporters, remains popular for taking aggressive stances on issues like security. He has used his masculine identity as a mask from the criticism of overreaching in the name of the nation and compared himself to a father doing what he must to protect his family.

Bolsonaro made many nondemocratic sentiments known during his time as president, including repetitively praising the violently abusive military dictatorship in Brazil’s recent past. After having claimed he “could not permit” (Human Rights Watch, 2021) the electoral system to remain in place, he sowed doubt among voters about the credibility of the electoral process. He is currently involved in multiple investigations, some of which surround his attempts to compromise other branches of government. He has openly threatened to respond to his political opponents with attacks “not within the bounds of the Constitution” (Fonseca, 2021), and encouraged police to use lethal force (Human Rights Watch, 2020). His constant violent bravado serves his reputation as a larger-than-life macho leader for whom the regular rules of democracy do not apply. However, none of that seemed to serve him once he lost his re-election bid.

After seemingly having received advice from Trump, Bolsonaro's prediction of his own loss at the polls allegedly led him to use Federal Highway Police to engage in voter suppression measures (Stargardter, 2022). He refused to concede and challenged the results of the election by attacking the validity of the voting system. While a mob of over thousands of his supporters stormed and ransacked the capital, he remained silent (Serhan, 2023). This incident was reminiscent of the insurgency that took place on January 6th in the United States, as both were such blatant undemocratic attempts to remain in power. So much so, in fact, that the reporting that followed was flooded with comparisons between the two riots. Trump's incitement of the crowd that day ("if you don't fight like hell you're not going to have a country anymore") (Naylor, 2021), as well as Bolsonaro's continuous disparagement of the electoral process in Brazil, reflect the illiberal tendencies one might expect of these populist authoritarians.

For years leading up to the re-elections, both Trump and Bolsonaro treated democratic institutions as if their only value was in supporting the interests of their own authority. They encouraged violence and called it a moral, patriotic obligation. They created enemies out of anyone who opposed them. This behavior is exemplary of the masculinity they embody: ruthless and rigid, non-apologetic and relentless. There can be no better example of this than the assassination of Black queer environmental activist Marielle Franco. Her death, which occurred immediately after she left an event for Black activists in Brazil, was connected with gang affiliates associated with right-wing politicians (Reist, 2023). Throughout his presidency Bolsonaro profited politically from the violent, gang-like language and imagery he projected. It is vital that we do not underestimate the power of such speech or its connection to misogyny. To do so devalues the activism of feminist and LGBTQ activists who are persistent in their fight to preserve and expand the values of democratic rule.

Modi, in a 2014 speech, insisted upon the protection of Indian women and girls from violence. So why has violence against women in India only increased in the last decade? Part of the answer lies in what happened in Kashmir following the gang-rape and murder of a little Muslim girl: members of Modi's party, the BJP, marched waving flags of support for the rapists (Navi, 2019) before Modi's administration approved their release (Aljazeera, 2022). Modi, the father of India, claims to wish the best for India's Muslim women and hopes to liberate them. He argues that this is why his administration has recently banned Muslim girls from wearing the hijab in any government-run institution (Bajoria, 2022).

His explanation for this overtly discriminatory law is that this clothing is representative of gender inequality (again, appropriating feminist ideas to serve misogynistic aims) and poses a disturbance to public law. Following this, claims of "love jihad" — a conspiracy that interfaith marriage between Hindu women and Muslim men can only be for the purpose of converting the women to Islam and turning India into a Muslim nation — and the violence against women that they have inspired, increased (Sharma, 2020). Modi's selective silence on the violence against Indian women (notably Muslim Indian women), his religiously oppressive policies, and the sexual assault and murder that coincide with such actions, perpetuate the ethnic conflict that has allowed Modi to stay in power for over twenty years.

The violent anti-Islamist sentiment within the BJP, perpetuated by Modi himself, provide a never-ending ethnic conflict to keep the populist authoritarian comfortably in power. Given his speech in 2014 about empowering women, one might be shocked to hear that his administration has, to this day, refused to outlaw marital rape. The 2014 speech, meant to address street harassment, achieved two things at once: it centered Modi as a leader who cares about girls and women while it simultaneously set the stage for an increased police budget and presence across

the country (Roychowdury, 2022). The Uttar Pradesh Police have connections to Hindu nationalist paramilitary organizations, and journalists have reported squads policing supposedly immoral behavior (read: queer) as well as conducting surveillance on Muslim neighborhoods. In classic patriarchal authoritarian fashion, Modi's political move increased reinforcement of religious, heteronormative, and classist hierarchies, all while maintaining the mythology that prescribes him the role of India's protective father (Roychowdury, 2022).

Conclusion

“Everywhere, threats, insults, defamations, sexual harassment, sexual violence, rape, and censorship are used as a means of intimidation, as well as calls to order... The young patriarchs of neoliberalism promise to invite a few women to the front of the line so that they may tower over the rest who survive; the old patriarchs want ‘their’ women to remain silent supporters of their order, want their sons to be patriarchs, and want other women, racialized women, to remain servants and sexual objects in their world.” (Verges, 2019)

On a very intrinsic level politics is personal and it is visceral. As described by Nietzsche and Foucault (Flyvberg, 1998), communication in politics is in many cases, if not all, defined by unequal relations of power. If we take this as a given, then one cannot have a meaningful consideration of political communication that does not recognize the central role of power distribution and relations (Flyvberg, 1998). Rarely relying on rationality, logic, or even standards of reasonableness, it is often the goal of rhetoric to distort, manipulate, control, and charm. Most people are contradictory in their beliefs, and can be simultaneously nativist and democratic, dictatorial and collaborative, driven by self-interest while empathetically communitarian. It should not be surprising to us then, that populist demagogues so frequently pop up in our history,

as populists appeal to the volatile emotions of nationalists. Neither should it surprise us that misogyny is embedded within the realm of emotional manipulation inherent to populist rhetoric.

Misogyny remains a key property of populist authoritarianism on the global level. It expresses gendered narratives to capitalize on feelings of anger, fear, insecurity, and shame in the same ways that populism does. Just as regulating ethnic and religious demographics are crucial to the agendas of populists, controlling the behavior of women serves them as well. Misogyny is an invaluable weapon for populist authoritarians to wield in their quest for the consolidation of political power, as it delegitimizes critics, effectively silences oppositional behavior and political dissenters, and co-opts feminist language. Policies and rhetoric that encourage or excuse misogynistic behaviors, such as street harassment, keep women in the home and away from the public square, where they pose a threat to those in power. The logic of domination employed by misogynists mirrors that employed by populist authoritarians to justify illiberal power grabs and violate democratic norms and institutions.

While misogyny has always been a central characteristic of modern populist authoritarianism, its overt presence is becoming increasingly brazen because of the sincere and adamant threat that women and non-heteronormative queer people pose — not just to authoritarians, but to the matrix of oppression that includes patriarchy, racism, anti-Islamic xenophobia, neoliberal capitalism, homophobia, and transphobia. Our democracies should make the demos feel safe; our people should be empowered and resilient, investigating solutions to present problems so that we might explore a future of possibility. As long as we fail to recognize misogyny as a central and defining characteristic of contemporary populist authoritarianism we will never fully understand how to combat it, and will continually fall short in our efforts to prevent its rise. Policies that keep women and LGBTQ folk distracted by constant threats of

violence, such as those that repeal protections against domestic violence and funding for survivors, keep these groups in a constant state of fear that prevents them from realizing their potential for mobilization and political organization.

There is a growing body of literature that explores the relationship between misogyny, contemporary authoritarianism, and populism. As chauvinistic rhetoric becomes increasingly normalized in political dialogues, it is vital that we not allow the regressive policies that follow such messaging to become the new norm. There is increased research being done on the foundations of homophobia, transphobia, and misogyny in populist authoritarianism, as well as the efforts of indigenous groups and LGBTQ movements that threaten such foundations. Invaluable insights on these topics can be found in the work of Nitasha Kaul, Javier Corrales, Jacob Kirk, Gabriele Dietz, Liz Mestres, and Julia Roth. Yet a significant research gap remains, particularly one that reflects our insignificant understanding of the roles of transmisogyny, misogynoir, and so-called ‘gender ideology’ and ‘wokeism’ in the contemporary context of populist authoritarianism. There is still so much we don’t understand about the relation between populism and increased societal awareness of the existence of transgender people. What we do know is this: women and LGBTQ people fortify social movements and contribute to their success. If we didn’t, authoritarians would not expend nearly as much effort and exhaustion as they do to get rid of us.

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