IDENTITY CRISIS

The Alt-Right and the Ancient World

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ABSTRACT

This study discusses Alternative Right (Alt-Right) construction of collective identity through appeals to ancient history. It conducts a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of Alt-Right blogs to analyse the way that Alt-Right discourse in these spaces contributes to their identity construction. The focus of the study is narrowed to the' high-brow' culture of the Alt-Right, discussing intellectual-style theorisations as opposed to 'low-brow' Alt-Right meme culture. The study argues that the ancient past plays a key legitimising role in Alt-Right identity construction, serving to not only provide intellectual weight to theorisations of identity, but also acting as a starting point for the identity that is constructed, which is fundamentally grounded in the past. The study finds that Alt-Right identity is ultimately constructed through the lenses of resistance and supremacy: the Alt-Right view themselves as simultaneously marginalized and superior.

INTRODUCTION

The far right is on the rise across Europe and the US (SPLC, 2023; Honeyball, 2024; Adler, 2023; ISD, 2024). As I conduct this research, far-right race riots erupt on the streets of Britain (Kissane, 2024; Newburn, 2024; ISD, 2024). As I study at my university's library, the surrounding streets are filled by Tommy Robinson's demonstration- the former leader of the English Defence League (Symonds, 2024). In Britain's recent general election, the right-wing Reform Party secured 14% of the total votes and its leader, Nigel Farage, was able to secure a seat in parliament (Honeyball, 2024; Chu, 2024). In the US, the possibility of a second Trump election emerges, and support for the former president is significant (The Economist, 2024; Knowles and Wells, 2024). Unrest is apparent, following an assassination attempt on Trump's life (Levenson, 2024). The number of hate groups is rising significantly in the US, with the Southern Poverty Law Centre (SPLC) (2023) reporting 1,430 hate and anti-government groups across the US in 2023- nearly double of the 733 groups it reported in 2021 (SPLC, 2021). The SPLC (2023) explain their 2023 report as evidencing a rise in hard- right activity and popularity.

In the wake of this context, it is important to look closer at the people who belong to and identify with these groups. This study focuses its research on the American Alternative Right (Alt-Right), a group associated with white supremacy and far-right extremism (SPLC, n.d.; ADL, 2020; Hermansson et.al, 2020). There is a common narrative, in both the UK and the US, that the men who support these far-right movements are uneducated thugs, storming the Capitol or causing public damage in the streets, lacking the proper education to understand their views, able to express themselves only through violence (Burton-Cartledge, 2019; Malečková, 2005). In this study, I intend to encourage the recognition that viewing the men of the Alt-Right (and the far right in general) through this lens is inaccurate and dangerous. Yes, these men represent part of the Alt-Right. However, the men of the Alt-Right are also intellectuals and academics (Zuckerberg, 2018; Main, 2018), they produce novels and opinion pieces, some of them have even held significant political positions (Zuckerberg, 2018). To view the far right solely through the lens of thuggery is to entirely underestimate it, underplaying the threat that it poses, and misunderstanding its far-reaching influence beyond the streets that it causes chaos in.

This research, then, is focused on looking closer at those intellectuals of the Alt-Right. That is where the focus on the Classics comes in. The Classics have long served as a signifier of intellect (Zuckerberg,

2018), and have a long history of invocation by far right groups (Pharos 2021b; Beard, 2014). This project comes in part as a follow-up to previous work that I conducted in the field of the Classics, analysing ancient sources to determine the relevance of skin colour in ancient Greece. In the closing section of this work, I touched on far right invocation of the ancient world, urging that this is a pressing issue which warrants further investigation (Aziz, 2021). With this study, I aim to carry out that research, conducting a study of Alt-Right identity construction through claims to the ancient world, through an investigation of online blogs produced by Alt-Right 'intellectuals'.

This study begins by reviewing the relevant literature on this topic, bringing together four key themes: the nature of the Alt-Right community and its communicative practices; the conception of 'identity', why it matters, and how it is constructed; Alt- Right identity construction; and Alt-Right engagement with the Classics. Although the Alt-Right's identity construction has been discussed, it has not been discussed in significant depth with reference to the ancient world. This is the aim of this research, which conducts a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of Alt-Right blogs to investigate the role that the Classics play in their identity construction. The research results proceed by explaining that the Alt-Right reinforce themselves as the descendants of ancient Europeans, insisting on the importance of an identity grounded in the past, and advocating for pride in cultural difference. This cultural difference is placed under threat by three key enemies: immigrants, women (particularly feminists), and the left-wing. The Alt-Right conclude that the West is in decline. In saving the West, the Alt-Right look towards the ancient past, viewing themselves as the ancient heroes who can revive ancient 'Western' values.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question that this work seeks to investigate is as follows: "What role does the invocation of ancient Greece and Rome play in the construction of online Alt-Right identity?"

LITERATURE REVIEW

Who are the Alt-Right?

'I coined the term "Alternative Right" in 2008 in order to differentiate myself from the failure of mainstream American conservatism. I saw the latter as a purely reactive form, seeking to preserve the status quo as opposed to focusing on passing down key aspects of our ancestral traditions to future

generations ... Today, Alt-Right is, indeed, an umbrella term used to describe those seeking the way out of Liberal Postmodernity dominating the United States and Europe through various means: culturally, socially, politically' -Alt-Right Thought Leader. [R8]

It is important to understand who I am referring to when I speak of the 'Alt-Right', because the term itself does not represent one homogenous entity, but rather a number of differing groups with varying ideas. Beckman (2021, p.241) notes that the Alt-Right consists of 'numerous and sometimes clashing factions'. The ADL (2020) describes the Alt-Right as an 'extremely loose movement made up of different strands of people connected to white supremacy'. This begs the question: if the Alt-Right represents a 'loose' and unorganised group, how is it possible to bring its many different factions under one label? Main (2018, p.116) argues that this is possible due to a 'considerable similarity of thinking' amongst Alt-Right thought leaders. Similarly, Hermansson et.al (2020, p.2) argue that, while the 'eclectic and disparate' nature of these groups leads to disagreement, 'together, they are united around a core set of beliefs'.

What, then, are these core beliefs? What unites these different groups? First is the Alt- Right's formulation as a 'radical' alternative to establishment conservatism (Hermansson et.al, 2020, p.2). The ADL (2020) explain that the Alt-Right view mainstream conservatives as 'weak and impotent'. It is important to stress that this framing is put forward by the Alt-Right. The SPLC (n.d) warn that the classification of this extremist group as merely 'alternative' deliberately serves to obscure the dangerous ideologies that underly it, instead evoking themes of 'rebellion or anti-establishment thinking'. Whilst the Alt-Right are, on the surface, formulated as an alternative to establishment conservatism, it is an 'alternative' that is built upon extremist, racist, and misogynistic ideologies (ADL, 2020; SPLC; Hermansson et.al, 2020). The second key commonality across the Alt-Right is the centrality of white identity (SPLC, n.d). Gray (2014, p.527- 528; 2018, p.142) describes the Alt-Right as 'identitarian', an ideology which holds that 'a specific group holds a particularly important place in social/ historical development, with its unique position providing privileged access to the 'truth''. The SPLC (n.d) describe American identitarianism as aiming to 'preserve American (i.e. white) culture in the US'. This 'American' culture extends beyond the confines of the country's borders, and through to Europe (Hermansson et.al, 2020). There are, of course, many different beliefs which span the Alt-Right, however the rejection of mainstream conservatism and centrality of white identity represent fundamental commonalities across all factions.

High Brow vs Low Brow

Because the Alt-Right spans many different groups, it is important to clarify the aspect of the Alt-Right that is the focus of this study. This study focuses not necessarily on one distinct ideological group of the Alt-Right, but rather narrows its focus through an exploration of the style of communication. A core aspect of the Alt-Right, which constitutes its foundations, is the lowbrow meme culture, focusing on the production of ironic and offensive memes, flourishing on online message boards (Hermansson et.al, 2020; Nagle 2017; Salazar 2018). There is, however a 'highbrow' side to the Alt-Right, filled with pseudo-intellectuals producing lengthy blog posts and publishing books at Alt-Right publishing houses(Hermansson et.al, 2020; Main, 2018). Finlayson (2021, p.169) explains that the 'high-brow' pseudo-intellectuals attempt to create a cultural meta-politics, resembling that of the European New Right. This 'high-brow', or 'intellectual' faction of the Alt-Right is the focus of this research.

Main (2018, p.7) explains that thought leaders within this space are 'intellectually sophisticated'. He discusses the 'experts' in these circles, explaining that although they may not have the credentials associated with 'true experts', they are 'articulate, well- educated, held academic appointments', and have produced significant amounts of work. The affordances of the internet have been emphasised as central in platforming Alt-Right 'intellectuals', allowing for the rapid and easy decimation of ideas, reducing the powers of typical intellectual gatekeepers, and allowing them to publish their work without the limits of traditional publishing processes. (Main, 2018; Finlayson, 2021). It is important to note that the high brow and low brow aspects of the Alt-Right are intimately linked (Hermansson et.al, 2020). Whether the message is spread via a crude meme or a ten-page manifesto, the underlying core ideas remain the same. The key difference is not the ideas themselves, but rather the manner in which the ideas are communicated.

What is Identity?

Before considering Alt-Right identity in detail, it is important to situate this study by asking the question: 'what is identity?' This question, for many scholars of identity, does not have a single or straightforward answer (Coulmas, 2019; Fukuyama, 2019; Woodward, 2004). Whilst there is a lack of consensus on the topic, we can consider some fundamental aspects of identity, and what is meant when we speak of identity in this study.

Identity is Constructed

This study follows Hall (1996) in arguing that identity is constructed, not given. That is to say, identity is not something that we naturally possess, rather it is something that we build. Hall (1996, p,2) discusses identity as a 'construction, a process never completed'. Bauman (2004, p.15) describes identity as 'something to be invented rather than discovered; as a target effort, 'an objective''. The constructivist approach to identity has indeed been criticised for its ambiguity (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). However, it is important to note that to say that identity is constructed is not to say that it is no more than a matter of choice. If this were so, the term would lack meaning entirely. Yes, identity involves choice, but there are restraints upon this choice (Woodward, 2004; Coulmas, 2019). Woodward exemplifies this in her claim that 'how I see myself and how others see me do not always fit'. Identity, argues Woodward (2004), depends not only upon how we perceive ourselves, but also how we are perceived by others. Yes, identity is constructed, however it is not an arbitrary matter of choice.

Individual vs Collective

Identity, when the term was first utilised, had an individualistic meaning, focusing on the autonomous individual with a personal identity (Coulmas, 2019). This personal identity, however, soon became conceptualised in a collective sense. So, identity seeks not only to answer the question of 'who am I?', but also that of 'who are we?'. Cohen (1994, p.11) explains that 'the compelling requirement for a strong sense of self extends beyond individuals to groups'. The concept of identity, then, tells us not only who we are in an isolationist sense, but also who we are in relation to others and the world around us. Central to the notion of group identity is the idea of belonging (Appiah, 2019; Bourdieu, 1977; Anderson, 1991; Woodward, 2004). Appiah (2019, p.13) explains that identities matter because 'they give you a sense of how you fit into the social world', explaining that it is important for individuals to 'feel some sort of solidarity with other members of the group'. Woodward (2004, p.7) explains that identity provides a link between individuals and the world in which they live, constituting a 'socially recognised position'. Following this, we can add a third question of identity: 'Who am I, in relation to the people and the world around me?'.

Similarity and Difference

In continuing this practice of sense-making, identity centres both the self and the other (Woodward, 2004; Coulmas, 2019; Hall, 1996; Derrida, 1978). Woodward (2004, p.7) explains that 'identity is marked by similarity, that is of people like us, and by difference, of those who are not. Hall (1996, p.4) emphasises the importance of difference in identity construction, stating that identities are 'constructed through, not outside difference'. In this sense, thinking about who you are relies on thinking about who you are not. We make sense of our self through affirmation (I am this) and opposition (I am not that).

Identity Crisis?

Mercer (1990, p.43) claims that 'identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis'. This touches on the idea that we only consider who we are when who we are comes into question. Fukuyama (2019, p.36) points out that, in most traditional human societies, our modern concept of 'identity' would have been meaningless. He explains that, due to a lack of social and physical mobility, a person's 'identity' tended to be fixed: they belonged to one family, lived in one place, worked in one profession, and so on. This is no longer the case, and the question of 'who am I?' has a multitude of possible answers. Giddens (1991, p.5) explains that 'the more tradition loses its hold and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options'. This diversity of options has led to the 'crisis' of identity that we now face. Indeed, as Bauman (2002, pp.11-12) argues, 'the thought of 'having an identity' will not occur to people as long as 'belonging' remains their fate, a condition with no alternative'. In our current globalised world, belonging is no longer the norm, and therefore the question of identity arises.

In bringing these themes of identity together, we can move forward with the notion that identity is constructed through both affirmation and opposition; it can be employed both individually and collectively;, and it becomes a key topic of concern when it is brought into 'crisis' by the many answers to the question 'Who am I?'.

Alt-Right Identity

Having clarified who the Alt-Right are, and what we mean when we speak of 'identity construction', we can now turn our focus to Alt-Right identity construction.

(Trans) National

Right-wing extremist movements are becoming increasingly transnational, facilitated largely by the affordances of the internet (Gaudette et.al, 2020). Hermansson et.al (2020, p.6) criticise the 'American-centric' approach of much of the research on the Alt- Right, and instead view the Alt-Right as an 'international movement' with a 'transnational outlook', in which 'core activists conceptualise their struggles beyond the borders of their nation state'.

This work recognises the Alt-Right as transnational, however the focus ultimately rests on the construction of a national identity within the US. As Gray (2018, p.142) explains, Alt-Right identity is a ''national' identity founded upon an ethnic/racial basis'. How, though, can Alt-Right identity be both national and transnational? The explanation comes from a proper understanding of how the Alt-Right define their 'nation'. We should view the Alt-Right's nation through the lens of the nation as an 'imagined community' (Schneider, 2018; Anderson, 1983). For Schneider (2018, p.45), nations are 'imagined through discursive and symbolic practices, which imbue members with a sense of community'. In Schneider's (2018) conception, the nation is not defined by territorial borders, but by a shared culture and common historical past. Anderson (1983) explains that, within such an imagined community, members feel a sense of common union without having any contact with one another. So, the nation that the Alt-Right centres is an imagined one which, as laid out by Gray (2018, p.142), is 'founded upon an ethnic/racial basis'. Gray (2018) explains that the Alt-Right view American culture as 'solidly connected with 'white' culture'. Main (2018, p.8) explains that the Alt-Right believe that 'as racial equality has displaced white dominance, the US has declined and no longer merits the allegiance of it's white citizens- they should transfer their loyalty to the white race'. The national identity that the Alt-Right constructs, then, is not a territorially defined one which finds itself restricted by the borders and institutions of the United States, but is rather an appeal to the collective identity of an ideological nation of white people- of, as Zúqete (2018, p.307) puts it, the 'brother peoples' of Europe and America'.

Racial

Alt-Right identity centres (the white) race. Important to the formulation of Alt-Right racial identity is the depiction of the white race as (1) distinct to other races and (2) superior to other races. In other words, the Alt-Right is white supremacist (SPLC, n.d.; ADL, 2020). Wong et.al (2015, p.41) define white supremacy as 'the view that caucasians who have no affiliation with the Jewish faith, known as the Aryan race, make up the elite of all races while other races are considered inferior'. In the context of Alt- Right 'intellectuals', the SPLC (n.d) warn that they utilise vague language, substituting words like 'race' for words like 'culture' and promote 'Western civilisation' as a code for 'white culture and identity'. Although not always explicitly stated, white supremacy forms the basis of the white identity that lies at the core of the Alt-Right.

The Alt-Right's construction of the white race as genetically distinct to other races works by linking race and genetics (Panofsky et.al, 2021; Main, 2018). Main (2018, pp.167-168) provides a useful overview of this process. The first step is 'race consciousness', which holds racial identity at the centre of political identity, arguing that the main goal of politics is to 'strive for the political advancement of one's own race'. The second tenet is 'race realism', which is a form of biological determinism, positing a correlation between race and characteristics such as intelligence. These supposed genetic differences provide the basis for Alt-Right white supremacy. In the context of Alt-Right intellectuals, this is often expressed through the idea of race separatism, which advocates for the separation of races because of these racial differences, serving to underplay themes of white supremacy under the guise of racial difference (Hermansson et.al, 2020; Gray, 2018).

Identity Under Attack

Central to Alt-Right identity is its conception as being under attack by an enemy other (Hermansson et.al, 2020; Main, 2018; SPLC, n.d., ADL, 2020, Nagle, 2017; Beckman, 2021). Beckman (2021, p.236) explains that the subject at the heart of the Alt-Right 'needs to be protected from terrorisations and persecutions coming from independent women, from those of other ethnic- or racial backgrounds or sexual orientations, and from immigrants'. This subject is 'hounded by a left-wing 'elite' that deviously contributes to the undermining of (white) masculinity'. This fits with what Castells (2006, p.64) calls a 'resistance-based identity'- an identity formulated by groups who feel 'pushed to the fringes of society', aiming to construct 'an identity that allows them to resist assimilation by the

system that subordinates them'. It should be noted that I am not suggesting that the white men of the Alt-Right represent a marginalised group. Rather, I am arguing that they *feel* that they have been marginalised and subordinated, and construct their identity accordingly through the lens of resistance.

This feeling of marginalisation has been explained as arising from the unkept promise of the American dream (Kimmel, 2013). Particularly helpful is Kimmel's (2013, p.18) conception of 'aggrieved entitlement', which refers to the feeling of having lost something which is rightfully yours. The men of the Alt-Right feel this aggrieved entitlement surrounding the loss of white male supremacy within American society, reflecting that notion of identity in crisis as discussed by Mercer (1990). The Alt-Right's self-conception as a marginalised group, combined with its commitment to identitarianism and white supremacy, adheres to what Marchelewska et.al (2017, p.152) call 'collective narcissism'- 'an unrealistic belief in in-group's greatness contingent on external validation', which stems from a belief that the group is 'great yet unappreciated'. This narcissism, argue Marchelewska et.al (2017, p.172), serves to compensate for an inability to consider that 'the in-group deserves its disadvantage position'. The Alt-Right construct an identity though this lens of resistance, feeling that sense of being 'great yet unappreciated' and aiming to fight to regain the supremacy that they feel white men once held in society.

It is helpful to view the relationship between the Alt-Right and its self-perceived enemies through Travis' (2023, p.593) notion of 'nationalist nostalgia', which he explains as coalescing 'a feeling of longing for lost cultural values at the hands of enemy 'others' who threaten the very core of one's identity as tied to his homeland'. Further than feeling that the enemy other threatens their identity, the Alt-Right view this as a deliberate process in which white identity is being intentionally erased . This is reflected in Beckman's (2021) notion of 'paranoid masculinity'. Beckman (2021, pp. 235-242) explains that Alt-Right identity 'thrives with, on, and through, conspiracy theories', and that the men of the Alt-Right feel as if they have been 'duped by other narratives ... primarily those offered by feminists and progressives'. Through the construction of an enemy other who seeks to take from the white race what is rightfully theirs, the Alt-Right construct a resistance-based identity in the context of a multicultural, left-wing, progressive conspiracy to destroy white culture and erase white pride.

The Alt-Right and the Ancient World

Now, we will discuss Alt-Right cooptation of the ancient world into their identity construction. The research on this area is fairly limited, however there are two key resources which discuss it at considerable length. The first is pharos.vassarspaces.net, a site dedicated to discussing appropriations of the ancient world by extremist groups. Particularly relevant to the current study is that Pharos (2021a) posits the most prevalent distortion of the ancient past in this context as the claim that 'Greco-Roman antiquity was a racially 'white' civilisation whose accomplishments demonstrate the supposed superiority of white people'. The second is Donna Zuckerberg's (2018) *Not All Dead White Men: Classics and Misogyny in the Digital Age*. Zuckerberg focuses on the invocation of the Classics by the manosphere- a community which overlaps with and informs the Alt-Right, focusing primarily on issues of gender and masculinity.

The Classics as a Status Symbol

Zuckerberg (2018, p.23) discusses the correlation between the Classics and class status, explaining that the study of the Classics has historically been a 'signifier of high social class'. The Alt-Right make use of this reputation by invoking ancient history to provide legitimacy to their claims of white supremacy and affirm their white identity. Hermansson et.al (2020, p.109) explain that the Alt-Right 'regularly incorporates artistic and architectural motifs from Greco-Roman antiquity into its propaganda, aiming to give the movement a more sophisticated and 'high culture' sheen'. Pharos (2024) explain that the 'familiarity and prestige of Greco-Roman antiquity make it an attractive source of symbols and ideas for white nationalists to promote their racist politics'. Morse (2018) explains that the 'iconicity and cultural capital' of Classical imagery serves the overarching goal of linking the ancient world to 'white European heritage'. The Classics, and its reputation, are utilised by the Alt-Right to construct their white identity and provide legitimacy to the claims that they make.

This use of Classics to legitimise white supremacy through appeals to 'high culture' is by no means a new phenomena, and there is a long relationship between the Classical tradition and far-right movements (Zuckerberg, 2018; Pharos 2021b; Beard, 2014; Ram- Prasad, 2019). McCoskey (2019) discusses such uses of the Classics, from the advent of scientific racism in the Enlightenment period, to fascist regimes such as Hitler's Nazi Germany or Mussolini's fascist Italy. Alt-Right invocation of

ancient history to legitimise their identity construction follows in a long tradition of distorting the classics to serve different ends.

They're Just Like Us!

Ancient history, for the Alt-Right, provides proof of white greatness. DuBois (2001, p.25) states that, in this context, the ancient Greeks 'serve as a fixed, immutable point of beginning, a single origin for a monolithic Western civilisation'. Hermansson et.al (2020, p.110) explain references to the ancient past as 'intended to invoke a sense of racial achievement, for which modern white men can claim vicarious credit'. Zuckerberg (2018, p.24) explains that when the men of the manosphere 'look back to the dead white men of the ancient world as the sources of ultimate wisdom, the takeaway is that white men *are* better'. Here, we return to the Alt-Right's imagined community (Schneider, 2018; Anderson, 1983) as resting upon a shared culture and historical past. The shared culture and past of the Alt-Right begins with the ancient civilisations of Greece and Rome. This view of the nation as defined by history and culture rather than territory is essential for Alt-Right Americans to claim ancient European achievements as their own.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study aims to bring together the themes of identity construction, the Alt-Right, and the misuse of the ancient world. In the above literature review, this study discussed the nature of the Alt-Right community as varied, but united by common beliefs. It discussed high-brow and low-brow communicative practices within the Alt-Right, viewing the two as intimately related, and specifying that the 'high-brow' intellectuals of the Alt- Right form the basis of this study.

The literature review discussed key explanations of 'identity', and follows Hall (1996) in viewing identity as constructed. This correlates directly to the decision to research this topic through an examination Alt-Right discourse, because it views discourse as central to identity construction. The study views 'collective identity' primarily thorough the lens of the imagined community which is formed through appeals to a common history and culture (Anderson, 1991; Schneider, 2018). This is central to the nature of the research question, which involves investigation of the use of history to construct identity. This study understands the process of identity construction through opposition with reference to Said's (1978) notion of *Orientalism,* in which the orientalist fabricates the orient in

opposition to the occident, as a method of defining the occident. The occident becomes centred, representing 'us', whilst the orient remains on the exterior, representing 'them'. This constitutes self-definition through opposition, in which the self is defined by the other. In the Alt-Right context, the white men of the Alt-Right represent 'us', and their constructed enemy others represent 'them'.

This study views Alt-Right identity as centring both white supremacy and white disadvantage. It recognises the white supremacist nature of the community, coupled with the resistance-based identity (Castells, 2006) it constructs as representative of Kimmel's (2013) notion of aggrieved entitlement, Marchelewska et.al's (2017) notion of collective narcissism, and Travis' (2023) notion of nationalist nostalgia. The men of the Alt-Right feel that they are marginalised because they have lost their place in society, but at the same time feel inherently superior to those who have stolen their rightful position.

Despite focusing on the US context, this study follows Hermansson et.al (2020) in viewing the Alt-Right as transnational[1]. Acknowledging the transnational nature of the movement is particularly important to this study, because it sees the link between Europe and the US as integral to US Alt-Right identity construction through appeals to ancient history. When speaking of Europe in reference to Alt-Right identity construction, it is important to remember that the Alt-Right's Europe is necessarily ideological. When I discuss, for example, immigration in Europe, it remains relevant to US Alt-Right identity construction because they view Europe as their ideological homeland.

RESEARCH AIMS

This research aims to fill the gap left by the two key resources on the topic. Zuckerberg (2018) considers far-right use of the ancient world in the digital context, but narrows her focus to gender politics. pharos.vassarspaces.net consider the racial politics of the far right, and consider the movement both online and offline, but the work constitutes a survey of different groups rather than a coherent argument surrounding Alt-Right identity construction and invocation of ancient history. This research aims to consider the Alt-Right's processes of identity construction and how they bring the ancient world into it, as it is communicated through their discourse in their online communities.

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[1] Admittedly, the study remains 'American-centric' (as Hermansson et.al (2020) criticise), and further research would benefit from considering this research topic in the broader international context.

The study will be grounded in identity theory, seeking to consider the construction of identity through discourse.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This research will proceed by conducting a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of Alt- Right blogs, aiming to understand Alt-Right identity construction through appeals to ancient history.

Justification for Methodology

The decision to conduct discourse analysis relates to (1) the centrality of identity to the research question and (2) the nature of the Alt-Right community.

The study of identity lends itself well to discourse analysis. Kuhn and Simpson (2020) explain identities as both *expressed by* and *formed through* discourse and communication. Hall (1996, p.4) explains that identities are 'constructed within, not outside discourse'. If discourse expresses and constructs identities, it makes sense to study Alt-Right discourse as a way of understanding their identity construction. Gill (1996, p.141) notes that discourse analysis does not seek to find the 'reality' that lies behind the texts that it studies, but is rather interested in 'texts in their own right'. This research takes a constructivist approach to identity, not seeking to find the 'true' identity behind Alt-Right discourse, but rather viewing the texts themselves as contributing to the construction of identity. Foucault (1987, p.18) explains that 'discourse is constituted between what one could say correctly at one period (according to the rules of grammar and logic) and what is actually said'. This research method seeks to study 'what is actually said' is said by the Alt-Right, and how it contributes to their identity construction.

The Alt-Right community can best be researched through discourse analysis. They often employ language that is difficult to understand without a proper knowledge of the Alt- Right context. Colley and Moore (2020, p.6) point to the 'fast evolving' nature of Alt- Right language, which makes use of 'word boundaries or synonyms'. Salazar (2018, p.138) discusses Alt-Right language as embedding a 'parole' within the 'langue' of memes as part of their discourse. With specific reference to 'high-brow' Alt-Righters, we have discussed their use of clever rhetoric to avoid making explicit claims to white supremacy (SPLC, n.d.; Hermansson et.al, 2020; Main 2018). Chouliaraki (2008, p.674) explains that

discourse analysis views texts as 'implicated ... in their social contexts, and thereby come to shape various forms of knowledge and identity'. Conducting a discourse analysis places Alt-Right texts within the wider context of Alt-Right culture and language, allowing for a better understanding of their discursive strategies. This also explains the decision to conduct discourse analysis over a quantitative approach. Colley and Moore (2020, p.21) explain that, because of the complex language of the Alt-Right, a quantitative analysis would inevitably lead to 'misrepresentations or omissions'.

In choosing CDA, the role of power was central. For Chouliaraki (2008, p.691), digital CDA treats 'the linguistic and visual choices on screen as subtle indicators of the power of media technologies to represent the world to us and orient us towards others in the world.' Considering this, CDA contributes to understanding Alt-Right co-optation of Classical antiquity with reference to power, considering they hold the 'symbolic power' (Bourdieu, 19992, p.166) to construct reality. Yan and Santos (2009, p.300) argue that CDA seeks to understand the 'power dynamics embedded in social and cultural practices by identifying the relationship between ... communicative practices and the larger social contexts of power in which they are produced, circulated, and consumed'. CDA allows for an investigation of the power dynamics present in Alt-Right discourse, which is inherently white supremacist and male supremacist, and requires the oppression of a foreign and feminised other to enable the affirmation of white identity and supremacy (Hermansson et.al, 2020; SPLC, n.d.; ADL, 2020).

Weaknesses/ Unexpected Problems

A key drawback to CDA is reflected in the fact that it does not seek the 'truth' behind discourse, requiring a significant amount of interpretation (Gill, 1996). The Alt-Right's fast-evolving language and rhetoric, which aims to avoid explicit references to white supremacy (Colley and Moore, 2020; SPLC, n.d,), adds to this issue of interpretation, making it harder to discern what is being communicated by the texts. In this study, this is mitigated through (1) a thorough and varied data collection process, allowing for a strong understanding of Alt-Right rhetoric within the proper context, and (2) through a proper consideration of researcher positionally.

Zuckerberg (2018) discusses her decision to focus on the 'manosphere' and their gender politics, rather than the racial politics of the Alt-Right, explaining that white supremacy is less consistent than misogyny, and is more difficult to apply to the ancient world, given the lack of meaning that ancient

societies attributed to skin colour. This lack of coherence and clarity in racial theorisations, coupled with the fast-evolving language of the Alt-Right meant that during the initial research process, it was difficult to organise and understand references to white identity and supremacy constructed with reference to the ancient world. However, once data had been collected from a variety of platforms, and had been analysed using CDA, Alt-Right language and rhetoric became clearer and more obvious, and consistent themes emerged. This setback proved fruitful to my research, because the disorganisation of white supremacist thought with reference to the ancient world led to the focus on 'high-brow' intellectuals, which provided extremely fruitful analysis.

Data Sampling

The data collected was limited to (1) the study of 'high-brow' Alt-Right discourse, and (2) the study of blogs.

The decision to focus on 'high-brow' discourse stems from the fact that this aspect of the Alt-Right are much more consistent in their invocation of classical antiquity (Hermansson et.al, 2020; Zuckerberg, 2018). This is not to say, however, that the 'low-brow' meme culture of the Alt-Right does not invoke the ancient past in expressions of white supremacy. It makes references and produces memes using ancient imagery (Zuckerberg, 2018; Pharos, 2024) however, as discussed by Zuckerberg (2018), their expressions of white supremacy are more inconsistent and less coherent. Further research would benefit from considering Alt-Right identity construction with reference to the ancient world through an analysis of Alt-Right low-brow meme culture.

The reason for focusing on blogs rather than other social media reflects the fact that this format is popular amongst Alt-Right intellectuals, who produce lengthy theorisations in these settings (Hermansson et.al, 2020; Gray, 2018). Additionally, due to their reputation as a hate group (SPLC, n.d.; ADL, 2020), many popular Alt-Right intellectuals have been de-platformed by mainstream social media (Hermansson et.al, 2020; Nagle, 2017), and even relatively unknown writers often see their content taken down due to community guidelines and moderators (Hermansson et.al, 2020; Nagle, 2017). Given the focus on Alt-Right intellectuals, as well as the fact that blogs operate as key sites for identity construction (Gurak et.al, 2004; Mathesson, 2005), it makes sense to carry out a discourse analysis on blogs. Further research would benefit from considering not only the blogs produced, but also user interaction with blogs in their comment sections.

Data Collection

The method for selecting the blogs followed Vasquéz's (2022, p.78) approach of a 'screen based study'- a study which focuses solely on information that is available online. Vasquéz (2022) recommends beginning with systematic online observations, making use of keywords or user accounts. In starting my research, I first searched 'Alt- Right' and gained information about popular figures, platforms, blogs, and topics of conversation. Following this initial search, I visited popular blogs, and searched for key terms relating to my research question such as 'identity', 'white identity', 'ancient Greece', 'ancient Rome', and 'Western Civilisation'. On platforms that did not have a search function, I browsed the blogs manually. Ultimately, six blog sites were selected for analysis. From each site, fifteen to twenty-five blog posts were selected, and the dates range from 2014-2024.

Design of Research Tools

In analysing the texts, I utilised Fairclough's (1989) CDA, which centres three dimensions: textual, discursive, and sociocultural. Textual analysis looks closely at the text, analysing aspects such as structure and word choice. Discursive analysis considers texts within the broader context of other texts, centring things such as genre and style. Sociocultural analysis considers texts in the context of broader society. Fairclough (2005, p.7) argues that such an analysis allows for the 'micro-analysis' of texts to be linked to 'various forms of social analysis of practices, organisations, and institutions'. A CDA on Fairclough's (1989) terms allowed for a consideration of Alt-Right blogs at the level of 'micro-analysis', which was linked to the fields of power that they operate in- an essential consideration when discussing white supremacy. CDA entails a *critical* analysis of texts, oriented towards power dynamics (Rafiah, 2018; Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). This ability to discuss power dynamics through Fairclough's (1989) three dimensions allowed for a thorough consideration of Alt-Right discourse and identity construction. Once analysed through CDA, key themes became apparent: linking white history to ancient history, emphasising the importance of identity, stressing the 'right to difference', white achievement, decline due to immigration, decline due to feminism, decline due to left-wing politics, archaeofuturism, and themes of heroism. All the blogs had aspects which fit into many of these themes. The results section is structured according to these themes.

Ethics and Reflexivity

Due to the extremist content involved in this research project, a thorough consideration of ethical practice was central. Ethical decisions were made with reference to key three responsibilities. The first responsibility is to those being studied, ensuring that privacy was taken into account (AOIR, 2019). The second is to myself, because I am, as Kelly and Weaver (2020, p.7) put it, 'multiply marginalised' as a female Pakistani researcher dealing with misogynistic and racist content, researching a volatile community (Colley and Moore, 2020; Zuckerberg, 2018). The third responsibility is the wider ethical responsibility to avoid contributing to the spread of hate speech (Colley and Moore, 2020). Bearing these responsibilities in mind, I avoid the application of generalised ethical decision-making, and instead focus on implementing a case-based strategy, taking into account the individual specificities of this project (Whiteman, 2014; McKee and Porter, 2009; AOIR, 2019).

In the data collection process, no metadata was collected, and screenshots only included blog content. These screenshots were labelled with codes, including a letter and number, allowing me to differentiate between the different posters and platforms. In the research output, no metadata is included, and blogs are referred to only by their assigned code. A key concern in reproducing quotations that appear online is that this can easily lead back to the original poster through search-features (Townsend and Wallace, 2016). Bearing this in mind, the quotations reproduced in the final output are limited to a maximum of five words, and in the very few cases where quotations are published at length, they come from highly visible members of the Alt-Right who are discussed at length in the literature on this topic. Similarly, the images included in the final output are labelled simply as images from blogs, rather than being linked to their specific codes, making it harder to put together the images and quotations to find the original poster. This relates to those three key responsibilities in that (1) it makes it harder for the identity of the bloggers to become exposed, (2) this in turn limits my risk of exposure to a community that is notorious for its harassment of academics (Zuckerberg, 2018; Colley and Moore, 2020), and (3) because it is harder to find the original source of quotations, it limits the spread of hateful content. Regarding responsibility number (2), my risk of exposure was further reduced by conducting a screen-based study (Vásquez, 2022), ensuring that I had no contact with any community members.

The decision to avoid complete anonymity should be explained. LSE Research Ethics (2022) states that it may be unnecessary to avoid direct quotations 'if the posted content contains dehumanising, hateful, and/or other material that it is public interest to draw attention to'. My research falls into this category, as it discusses the production and spread of dangerous extremist content, facilitated through distortions of history. Similarly, although anonymity is important to proper ethical practice, the use of direct quotations is pragmatically important for a CDA which aims to look at specific language choices as part of its study (Colley and Moore, 2020). This illustration of anonymisation practices reflects the case-based ethical approach of the project, which balances the key responsibilities with the duty to shed light on an important issue.

My positionally as a researcher should also be considered. As noted, I am a Pakistani woman, meaning that much of the content I encounter in this study will include hate directed towards people like myself. It is important to address positionally in a self- reflexive way, because it inevitably affects the research process and output (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). Although this is not something that can be changed, it is important to acknowledge it so that this can be considered when reading my work. This positionally statement should not be seen as mitigating me from interpretive bias, but rather it should be viewed as a statement recognising the position that I am writing from- a position that was considered throughout the research process.

RESULTS

Constructing an Imagined Community

A key first step in the use of ancient history to construct Alt-Right identity is the reinforcement of white Americans as the inheritors of ancient tradition. Alongside this comes the claim that our history makes us who we are, and that an identity based in the past is central to a strong and legitimate sense of self. This need to have a strong identity is framed as 'the right to difference', which is placed in opposition to multiculturalism, and the supposed left-wing agenda to 'remove' cultural difference.

White Inheritors of Ancient Tradition

In linking white Americans to ancient Europe, the first step is to create that 'imagined community' (Schneider, 2018; Anderson, 1991) of white people, united by common European descent. R8 explains

that most European-descended Americans 'self-identify as ... white'. R4 explains that 'European' means 'Aryan', arguing that such an identity is founded on 'Greek science', 'Roman culture', and 'Germanic tribalism'. IE1 describe 'American identitarians' as descended from 'the great traditions of Europe'. R4 argues that European identity is essential to white identity. This tactic of reinforcing the European ancestry of white Americans reflects the fact that if the Alt-Right's imagined community was territorially defined, their claims to ancient Greece and Rome would be meaningless. The blogs not only establish this common descent, but also attempt to insert whiteness in the ancient world, creating the impression that the white people of this imagined community are the same as those that created the great Western civilisations that they hold dear. AR3 places 'two racial types' in ancient Greece: 'dark- haired whites' and 'fair-haired whites'. AR10 provides an extensive account of white people in ancient Greece and Rome, interchangeably using the terms 'Aryans', 'ancient Aryans', 'ancient Europeans', 'Indo-Aryans', and 'Indo-Europeans'. This formulation of a national community based on common culture and history allows for the co- optation of ancient history in Alt-Right identity construction.

These claims are also made less explicitly, through vague references to a collective Western civilisation or tradition, reflecting that tactic, as noted by the SPLC (n.d.) of employing such vague references to insinuate white supremacy. A11 describes the ancient Greeks as having founded '*our* Western civilisation'. A17 argues that '*we*' are the 'sons' of 'Homer, Ulysses, and Penelope'[2]. A16 makes claims to 'the spirit of *our* peoples' and the 'wisdom of ... *our* ... ancestors'. A2 discusses '*our* kin' and 'age-old role models'. A13 discusses collective 'eternal values and traditions' stemming from an 'ancient well', reflecting the Western man's 'mighty inheritance'. These claims make use of collective phrasing to invoke a shared (ancient) past, and feelings of group belonging through collective identity (Appiah, 2019). This collective identity is further legitimised and clarified through the inclusion of ancient imagery. As writers make claims to their great collective culture and traditions of the past, they scatter the pages with images of ancient heroes, philosophers, and architecture [imgs.1-4]. This fits with the wider theme of utilising, as Morse (2018) puts it, the 'iconicity and cultural capital' of ancient imagery to affirm white identity. For these writers, the mere appearance of some ancient figure or artefact on the page does much of the legitimising work for

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[2] These are all figures from ancient Greek myth.

them, allowing them to link these cultural and historical bonds that tie the imagined community together to the ancient world.

The Importance of Identity

Having established that they are the legitimate inheritors of classical tradition, the Alt-Right turn to claiming that (1) having a strong sense of identity is essential and (2) this identity should be grounded in a strong sense of the past.

IE1 explains that 'identity unties us'. AR14 argues that progress is impossible with 'reliance on deep identity'. AR17 argues that our 'roots … make us who we are'. R8 stresses the importance of considering 'our place in history'. A16 explains that we find our 'common racial soul' by looking to our ancestors and traditions. This further represents the Alt-Right's imagined community as relying on the past, and the centrality of white identity to the movement. In our discussion of identity, I posited the following as one of the questions of identity: 'Who am I, in relation to the people and the world around me?'. The Alt-Right seek to answer this question through their formulation of a group identity which is rooted in a common past. Kimmel (2013, p.264) argues that right wing movements 'almost always' seek to 'restore something that has been lost rather than create something new'. The Alt-Right construct their identity not through some new conception of white identity, but through the restorative frame of reigniting the traditions of their ancestors, and bringing back something that has always existed.

Img.1. Ancient imagery from Alt-Right blog.

Img.2. Ancient Imagery from Alt-Right blog.
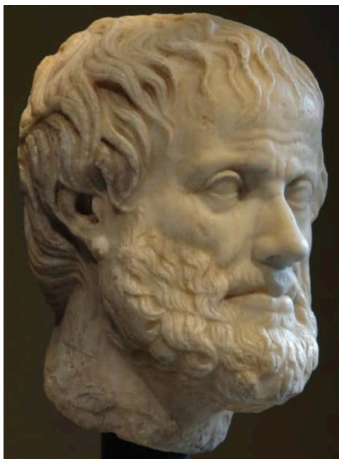
Img.3. Ancient Imagery from Alt-Right blog.

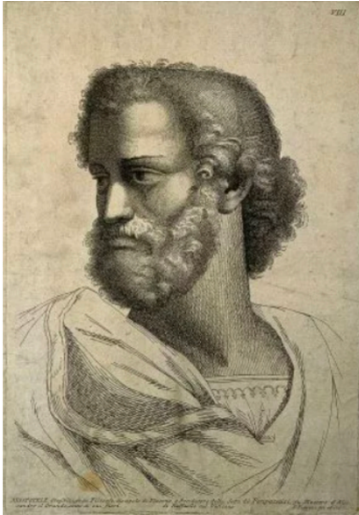Img.4. Ancient Imagery from Alt-Right blog.

These claims are bolstered by appeals to the ancient world. We see the same convention of including ancient imagery alongside identity claims [imgs.5-8], as well as more explicit references to ancient sources. This reflects not just the use of imagery to legitimise, but also a well-thought out theorisation of identity which co-opts the ancient world in its construction process. Below is a quotation from ancient Greek historian Herodotus, who is quoted by multiple blogs.

> *'For there are many reasons why we [the Athenians] should not do this [collude with the Persians] … the kinship of all Greeks in blood and speech, and the shrines of gods and the sacrifices that we have in common, and the likeness of our way of life' -Herodotus, Histories, (8.144.2)*

Herodotus defines Greek collective identity through common blood, language, religion, and culture. For CC3, this is the best conception of a 'national identity', providing a 'formula' for the 'cohesion' and 'health' of a nation. The idea is that, as long as we stick to our own kind (in relation to Herodotus' conception of identity which, importantly, does not mention territory), we will have a happy and

healthy nation. MU1 bolsters the claim that the ancient Greeks were against multiculturalism with reference to Herodotus' notion of identity, emphasising the importance of recognising 'common ties'. AR13 invokes Herodotus to explain that Greek recognition of common identity was central to their fight against an 'alien' enemy. CC5 does not reference Herodotus directly, but invokes an almost identical explanation of national identity as a 'pillar' of white identity.

Herodotus is one of the many ancient figures who is co-opted into Alt-Right identity construction. The purpose of considering this example is to show that the Alt-Right go further than simply making vague claims to ancient ancestors and scattering images of famous ancient figures throughout their work. They study the ancient texts (some more accurately than others), and use them to make academic-style theorisations and analyses. This raises the pseudo-academic style that we discussed with reference to Alt-Right intellectuals. Pharos (2019) notes that many Alt-Right writers make relatively accurate observations about the ancient world, adding to the sense of legitimacy that their invocation of the classics provides. By making claims using direct quotations and (mostly) accurate understandings of ancient theories, their academic style is presented as not simply a surface-level application of impressive rhetoric, but as a legitimate mode of thought and argument. Of course, the prestige that is attached to knowledge of classical texts (Zuckerberg, 2018) adds to this intellectual sheen. Although, when considered closely, many of the claims made by Alt-Right intellectuals are flawed, their presentation of academic style and engagement with ancient sources presents the image of well-thought out theories surrounding white identity.
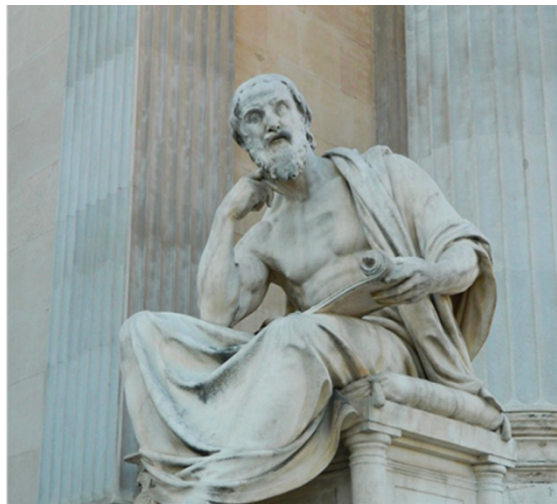
Img.5. Ancient imagery from Alt-Right blog.

Img.6. Ancient Imagery from Alt-Right blog.
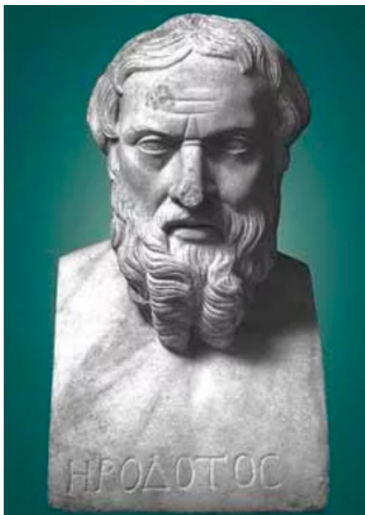
Img.7. Ancient Imagery from Alt-Right blog.

Img.8. Ancient Imagery from ALt-Right blog.

The Right to Difference

Having stressed the importance of having a distinct identity, the Alt-Right advocate for the 'right to difference'- that is, the right to express your distinct identity. This is formulated as a resistance against the left-wing enemy who seek to take that identity away.

Here, we are introduced to that enemy other who seeks to erase white pride (Beckman, 2021). A1 explains that the 'Liberal World Order' aims to 'erase' identity, encouraging people to 'blend … into the herd'. A2 describes liberalism as 'an enemy of identity', denying 'the very existence' of distinct groups. A5 discusses this as a state of 'total pluralism'. A17 explains that this prevents people from understanding that 'other men' feel, think, and live differently than 'us'. The overarching theme here is that the liberal enemy aims to remove the free expression of identity. Here, we should revisit

the notion that white identity needs to be protected, and is thus formulated as 'resistance-based' (Castells, 2006). The Alt-Right depict themselves as being marginalised in that their right to identity is being erased by the 'Liberal World Order'. Having crafted a strong sense of identity, which is legitimated through appeals to its grounding in an ancient past, the Alt-Right present this rich 'cultural heritage' as at risk of erasure by the liberal elite.

White Achievement

Following the erasure of white identity comes the erasure of white pride. Although, as we have seen, explicit claims to white supremacy are often avoided, the Alt-Right consistently invoke the ancient world to signify white achievement. The following quote comes from a prominent Alt-Right writer:

> *'The globalists don't want whites to know their history, and they certainly don't want whites to gain any pride in the unparalleled achievements of their ancestors, otherwise they might start wondering why they should hand over their heritage to alien and hostile immigrants'-Alt Right Thought Leader, EC1*

Alt-Right writers express white supremacy through clams to the 'unparalleled achievements' of the white race- achievements that are depicted as white through that construction of an imagined community which claims that (1) Americans are descended from ancient Europeans, and (2) ancient Europeans were white. A11 notes that the Greeks founded 'our Western civilisation', explaining that European identity possesses the 'soundest ... intellectual and cultural foundations'. MU3 points to ancient Greek philosophers and mathematicians, whilst MU6 points to architectural and poetic style. AR10 discusses Greek science and Mathematics in comparison to other cultures such as Babylonia and Egypt, insisting that the Greeks were the only ones who 'systematised' their 'scientific and mathematical knowledge'. A12 notes that 'European man' conquered the world, rising above all unworthy opponents. CC6 notes that, despite their relatively small number, Europeans were able to 'control the entire planet'. Here we can return to Zuckerberg's (2018, p.24) claim that references to the ancient world show the man of the Alt-Right that 'white men are better' and that 'we, their white male descendants- deserve to be in charge'.

This white greatness is conceived as under attack by a left-wing elite. The pseudo- academics of the Alt-Right level this charge agains 'progressive' academics who seek to insert multiculturalism into a

white ancient past, or, as AR2 puts it, they 'fake' history to 'make ... Black kids feel good'. CC6 explains that academics minimise Western achievements by reinforcing the influence of other cultures. EC1 explains that this is a 'planned erasure' in which academics aim to reduce 'Western supremacy' to a 'kumbaya of multicultural history'. Bloggers conclude that attempts to erase white pride actually prove white supremacy. AR0 explains that Afrocentrists[3] 'inadvertently acknowledge' Western superiority in trying to claim it as their own. Similarly, AR2 describes Afrocentrists as providing the 'ultimate validation' of Western civilisation. This combination of erased pride and unparalleled achievement adheres to Kimmel's (2013) notion of aggrieved entitlement and Marchelewska et.al's (2017) notion of collective narcissism: the Alt-Right not only feel that they have lost a sense of white pride and supremacy, but also that (as reinforced through references to white achievement) this is something they deserve to have as a result of their inherent supremacy.

Western Decline

Having established a strong sense of identity which is under attack, the Alt-Right proceed to discuss western decline, warning that the future of the West, is under imminent threat. This is achieved through appeals to western decline at the hands of multiple enemy others. We will discuss decline with reference to three key enemy groups: immigrants, women (particularly feminists), and the left-wing.

A5 describes Western decline as 'tangible', explaining that 'our greatness is behind us'. A7 describes Europe's present position as 'tragic' and 'corrupted', arguing that Europe is 'in danger of disappearing'. This fear of disappearance reflects the ideological status of Europe in Alt-Right rhetoric— the fear is not that the land itself will disappear, but rather that its (white) culture is under imminent threat. A12 describes the 'decay of Western civilisation'. A16 explains that Europe is 'suffering'. For A8, Western civilisation is failing because of the 'decay of morals'. R8 explains the western 'crisis' as occurring due to 'cultural denigration'. AR5 compares Europe to Atlantis (the lost city in ancient myth), discussing a 'lost homeland' and a 'fall from grace'. The common sentiment

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[3] Afrocentrists emphasise the importance of African history, arguing that African achievements have been underplayed

across the blogs is that Europe, and the West more generally, has lost the esteem it once held. Let us consider then, those enemy others who have brought on Western decline.

Immigrants

> *'Rome declined because Rome fell short of Romans through constant warfare, and also morally through an excess of wealth and a decline of traditional nationally-oriented and nation building traditions, mores of religion, and finally through the rise to power of non-Roman elements within the vast cultural empire ... Rome decayed because it lost both its cultural and its genetic heritage'*-Alt-Right thought leader, AR9

For the Alt-Right, a key contributor to Western decline is (non-white) immigration. A5 describes immigrants as 'ticking time bombs'. A8 talks of an Islamist conspiracy to conquer Europe. A17 warns of 'masses' of immigrants. A1- describes 'hordes' of immigrants who will 'engulf' civilisation. MU7 warns of 'waves' of immigrants who will 'drown' non-white citizens. This language is reminiscent of the common convention of describing immigrants with phrases relating to natural disaster to increase feelings of crisis (Dempsey and McDowell, 2019), evident in terms such as 'engulf', 'drown', and 'waves'. Immigration, then, is presented as a crisis for Western civilisation.

The Alt-Right argue that the multicultural/multiethnic society that follows from immigration simply cannot work. A2 argues that a multiethnic society will lead to 'civil war', and the ultimate 'demise of ... European peoples. A9 explains that there are no examples of 'peaceful' multiculturalism, explaining that immigration causes 'soft genocide', and is one of the greatest crimes against humanity. A17 describes immigrants as 'completely incapable of assimilation'. CC4 explains that multiculturalism cannot work, because trying to 'force different cultures' together, will only cause disorder. This rejection of multiculturalism relates back to that emphasis on cultural difference and white achievement, providing the foundation for Alt-Right separatism.

The inviability of multiculturalism is bolstered through claims to the ancient world. It rests on that conception of a strong identity grounded in the past that we have seen so far, reinforced through references to the ancient past. A popular reference is the fall of the ancient Roman Empire. This is reflected in the opening quote of this section, which blames cultural differences and a lack of tradition for the fall of empire. R3 explains migration as central to Roman decline, warning that the same will happen in the West today. MU3 explains that immigrants 'diluted' traditional Roman values. AR9

explains the cause of roman decline as a 'burgeoning alien population', stating that the customs of non-Romans changed the 'character of ... [Roman] institutions' and 'weakened the empire'.

This theme of crisis, as told through the lens of the collapse of the Roman Empire, foregrounds what the Alt-Right refer to as 'the great replacement', or 'white genocide'. This supposes that the rightful white inhabitants of Western countries will be replaced by unworthy, non-White people who will corrupt traditional Western values. A5 explains that migrants constitute the 'replacements' for the older, white generation. A7 describes immigration as 'population-replacing colonisation'. AR7 describes this phenomena as 'Global replacism'. AR9 warns that 'The Great Replacement' is happening all over 'Northern and Western Europe'. Here we return to the idea that Alt- Right intellectuals do not simply make vague claims to the ancient past but they construct their identity through it, utilising references to the past to construct elaborate (albeit, conspiratorial and inaccurate) theorisations about society, and the place of their identity within that society. CC1 explains that 'white genocide is ... happening', and is being deliberately promoted by 'people in ... power'. CC2 explains that the 'migrant crisis' is part of the 'project' of white genocide. Thalamann (2019, p.2) defines conspiracy as 'the view that a group of powerful agents is operating in secret to pursue a malevolent goal, which is, in most cases, the take-over of power over a cultural, religious, ethnic, or political community'. This narrative, which claims that (1) immigration is a threat so large that it risks the 'genocide' or 'replacement' of the white race, and (2) that this is a deliberate move, made by unnamed elites, fits with Thalmann's (2019) definition of conspiracy, and Beckman's (2021) conception of paranoid masculinity.

Feminists

The immigrant is not alone in causing white genocide: the woman, especially the feminist, plays a key role in the 'great replacement' of the white race. The argument goes that by (1) refusing her duty to bear children, or (2) by having children with a non- white person, the woman contributes to white genocide by failing to produce white offspring. CC1 explains the following as key causes of white genocide: feminist advocacy for pursuing a career rather than focusing on 'family life', birth control and abortion, and 'miscegenation'- the act of having a child with someone outside of your race. A12 warns that those who 'betray their blood' through race-mixing will face 'punishment'. A15 explains that women have 'forgotten their purpose' because they 'do not want babies'. R6 criticises the

encouragement to become 'career women'. A18 warns that Europe is shrinking because of modern women's 'voluntary childlessness'. Futrelle (2019) discusses white genocide as the 'intersection of sexism and racism'. Immigrants are to blame for coming to western (white) countries, imposing non-western (non-white) values, and producing non-western (non-white) children, who settle in western (white) countries. Women, particularly those who have fallen victim to feminism, are to blame for choosing their careers over the production of children, or choosing to reproduce with those non-white people who have settled in the west as a result of immigration.

These women, in the eyes of the Alt-Right, have lost their womanly virtue. It is not women, per se, that are the enemy, only those women who have betrayed their 'natural' essence. For R2, women have lost their 'pudicitia'[4], becoming 'demystified'. For R6, women have become 'masculinised'. For MU6, modern woman has lost her 'mystique'. In stark contrast to these now-undesirable women, the men of the Alt-Right yearn for women of the past who embodied true femininity. R2 romanticises Beatrice, the female lead in Dante's Divine comedy, a woman who was worthy of the longing of a man. R6 appeals to Penelope, the wife of Odysseus who 'waited many long years' for him to return from his journey, all the while rejecting 'legions of suitors' and maintaining her domestic duties. For R6, Penelope embodied 'faithfulness and virtue', for MU9, Penelope represents that which modern woman should strive for. This longing for the past virtue of women is symptomatic of the Alt-Right's nationalist nostalgia (Travis, 2023). The Alt-Right condemn the state of the modern woman, who has declined from her once virtuous position, at the cost of the white race.

The Left

We have already touched on the left-wing enemy with reference to the erasure of white pride and the insistence on multiculturalism. To explore this enemy other further, I wish to turn the focus to a current event which sparked outrage within the Alt-Right and beyond- the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics.

Paris' opening ceremony was criticised beyond the Alt-Right, for a multitude of reasons including its diversity, its disregard for the Christian faith, and its alleged inappropriate nature for families (Leicester, 2024; Bindel, 2024; Dicker, 2024; Fouché, 2024). The Alt-Right were vocal in their outrage.

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[4] Ancient Roman concept of modesty and virtue (Purcell, 2016)

A20 describes the opening ceremony as 'the final judgement' on Western civilisation, urging readers to 'take up arms'. AR15 explains that, in the context of immigration and multiracialism, the Olympics have become an 'exercise in anti-white propaganda'. CC7 criticises the inclusion of 'transvestites', 'obese women', and 'negroes' in the ceremony, condemning it as intentionally 'grotesque'- a part of the project of 'the modern liberal-left'. A21 discusses the controversy surrounding Imane Khelif- a female Algerian Olympic boxer who was accused of being a biological male, following her defeat of Italian olympian Angela Carini (BBC Sport, 2024; Al Jazzera, 2024; Pattle, 2024). For A21, this situation reflects the left-wing view of sex as 'arbitrary'- they explain that Khelif is, in fact, a 'deformed man'.

This outrage is linked back to the ancient origins of the Olympics, illustrating the Western decline that has placed the Olympics in its current state. Blog writers include ancient imagery in their discussion [imgs 9-10], images from the actual ceremony [img.11], and material intending to mock the event [img.12]. A19 explains that, because the Olympics is an ancient Greek event, its condemnation is necessary in preserving the 'racial soul' of Europe. They explain that the Olympics once revolved around 'virtual gods' with perfect physiques.

Img.10. Ancient imagery from Alt-Right blog.

Img.9. Ancient imagery from Alt-Right blog.

Img.11. Images from Paris Olympics Opening Ceremony from Alt-Right blog.

Img.12 Image of caricature of Paris Olympic branding from Alt-Right blog

Now, they complain, the opening ceremony represents a 'revolting display of human lowness', showcasing 'genetically unfortunate ... orcs'. CC7 discusses the Olympics as the creation of the 'Aryan Greeks', explaining that its essence was insulted, replaced with 'woke filth' and a 'circus act'. Because of this, CC7 explains that 'Europe itself was mocked', mourning the loss of what was once a proud Western civilisation. The complaints surrounding the Paris Olympics reflect Alt-Right hatred for the values that they perceive as representing the left, allowing for the inclusion of things such as multiculturalism, homosexuality, and 'obese women'. The reason I focus on this case study is to show that, within less than a week of this event, multiple articles have been produced by Alt-Right intellectuals condemning it as 'woke', and linking it back to the ancient past. It signifies the fact that Alt-Right use of the ancient past is ongoing and regular.

Saving Western Civilisation

We have seen the Alt-Right warn of the dire future that awaits Western civilisation. Now, we turn to Alt-Right visions of the future, which are ultimately grounded in that past that they have so carefully constructed and centred in their identity. Appeals are made to restore key values of the past and recognise a collective white/ European identity. This project is placed as the 'true' way to save Western civilisation, framing the men of the Alt-Right as the heroes who spread that truth.

Archaeofuturism: Restoring the Past

A2 lays out the project of 'archaeofuturism', which looks to the past for 'models for a good life'. This entails not just some 'nostalgic longing' for the past, but rather represents to goal to 'live' these memories in the present, and use them to look towards the future. This reflects the restorative nature of the Alt-Right's nostalgia (Kimmel, 2013; Travis, 2023), and their identity construction more broadly. Travis (2023, p.594) explains that restorative nostalgics 'do not think of themselves as nostalgic; they believe the their project is about truth'. For the Alt-Right, the collective recognition of white identity and its ancient origins is they key to saving Western civilisation- a project which can only be spread by the true inheritors of Classical tradition.

In adopting an Archaeofuturist approach, says A11, Western man must study the ancient past. He must view it as a 'compass' for a successful future (A16), he must 'read old books' and position himself within 'that which preceded him' (A5). Western man, says A19, must recognise his racial

group. He must 'recover' a collective 'racial heritage' (AR10), he must seek 'family and like-minds' (AR5), and white people must 'consciously' recognise their group identity (A5). Western man must restore the position of western woman. He must combat feminism and restore a 'masculinised' society' (A15). He must restore women to the status of pudicitia, through 'social controls' surrounding promiscuity, the prioritisation of (heterosexual) marriage, and the banning of homosexual marriage and abortion (R2). Western woman must return to her duty through 'chastity and unaffected femininity' (A15), and 'burn her male frippery', returning to motherhood (A18).

Becoming the Ancient Hero

The future, say the men of the Alt-Right, depends on this return to the past. But who will enforce this future? Who will be the brave hero, standing up to the feminised, liberal, non-white enemy other who seeks to tear down the rightful position of Western man? The men of the Alt-Right, of course.

A10 explains that the ancient Spartan hero distinguishes himself from 'the mob and decadent elites', carrying out his heroic duties despite being 'attacked from above and below'. Appeals to ancient heroes are further reinforced through ancient imagery [imgs.13-14]. A10 Appeals to ancient Greek heroes Achilles and Heracles, who function as protectors of civilisation, unable to be 'controlled by institutions'. A4 appeals to the ancient philosopher, explaining that they have historically persecuted, because they 'questioned everything'. AR10 points to the 'early Aryan' heroic notion of 'Cosmic Order', Which entails that some things are 'simply true', regardless of 'what you prefer to think'. For AR10, white men are descended from the heroic tradition of cosmic order, and have an unparalleled ability to recognise the truth- even when the conspiratorial left do all they can to distract you from it. Here, we see a combination of that resistance-based identity (Castells, 2006), in appeals to the attacks on the hero and the philosopher, we see 'collective narcissism' (Marchelewska et.al, 2017), in the idea that the men of the Alt-Right represent an epistemologically privileged group with a unique access to the truth (Gray, 2018). We see the theme of conspiracy, in the notion that the hero must fend of 'attacks' to spread to the truth. Hall (1996) explains identity construction rooted in the past as not only 'who we are' or 'where we came from', but 'what we might become'. The man at the centre of the Alt-Right, through reference to his mighty ancient past, seeks to

become the necessary hero, fighting off attacks from an enemy other, spreading the truth to save his worthy civilisation from collapse.

Img.13. Ancient imagery from Alt-Right blog.

Img.14. Ancient imagery from Alt-Right blog.

CONCLUSION

The ancient world plays an essential legitimising role in Alt-Right identity construction. Appeals to the past legitimise in two key ways: (1) in a more general sense, appeals to ancient history provide an intellectual sheen to Alt-Right rhetoric, and (2) appeals to the ancient past provide a historical origin for white identity, and illustrate white supremacy.

Ancient history provides the basis for the Alt-Right's construction of an imagined community centred around the white race- the white race finds its common culture and history in the ancient past of Greece and Rome. The ancient world provides the basis for white supremacy, with appeals to ancient achievements serving to place white culture as distinct and superior to other cultures. This grounding in the ancient past further legitimises the Alt-Right identity as resistance-based (Castells, 2006). The past that they co-opt is one of huge cultural significance- in co-opting an ancient history that is widely recognised as worthy of preservation, the need to protect it from demise is granted legitimacy. This reflects the nature of Alt-Right identity, in which the white race is conceptualised as simultaneously marginalised and oppressed, yet inherently superior to those who oppress them- reflecting feelings of 'aggrieved entitlement' (Kimmel, 2013) and 'collective narcissism' (Marchelewska et.al, 2017).

The enemy other is necessary for Alt-Right identity construction, allowing them to contrast their great culture with the degenerate cultures of their enemies, and further present their identity through the lens of resistance, by battling these enemies and preserving their own identity in the process. If we return to the notion that identity is constructed through both affirmation and opposition (Woodward,

2004), we can see that the Alt-Right construct their identity through affirmation by appealing to a common ancient past (which they construct as a white past), and through opposition by appealing to enemy others whose values deviate from those of the sacred Greeks and Romans.

In consolidating white supremacy, the Alt-Right adopt a restorative framework (Kimmel, 2013; Travis, 2023), positioning the ancient ideals of the people who they have constructed as their ancestors as the proper way of living, and the true path to saving the west. The men of the Alt-Right identify with the role of the ancient hero or philosopher, conceptualising themselves as the rightful saviours of the west who will enact the return of ancient traditions through the heroic deed of spreading the truth.

This study has illustrated that the men of the Alt-Right are more than the uneducated thugs that they are often compared to (Burton-Cartledge, 2019; Malecková, 2005). Conducting a CDA of the material produced by these individuals has revealed that their theorisations are well-thought out, and their manners of expression are rhetorically impressive. This intellectualism has dangerous potential, because it presents the extremist ideas of the Alt-Right in a rational, and academically justified manner. Further research would benefit from considering this identity construction through the past with reference to the low-brow meme culture of the Alt-Right. It would also be beneficial to consider user interaction with Alt-Right blogs. Finally, further research would benefit from consider those Alt-Right academics who publish books on these topics. Such research would allow for a well-rounded view of Alt-Right identity construction through the ancient past, considering the different communicative practices spanning the movement and gaining clarity on interaction between different members and groups of the Alt-Right.

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