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<rrh>Crisis of Masculinity for Gendered Democracies

<AT>The Crisis of Masculinity for Gendered Democracies: Before, During, and After Trump¹

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<ABST>The mobilized masculinity of democracies today is often presented as either a natural way for men to respond to the economic and political challenges of globalization or as a return to the patriarchal style of politics of the past. This article argues instead for an understanding of liberal democracy itself as gendered, being the collective masculinity of brotherhoods representing rivalrous nations. The first great transition from patriarchies and monarchies to brotherhoods and democracies is not being unmade now but facing a second transition to a different understanding of gender and power. This normative rise of a partnership model in families and politics is incomplete and highly contested everywhere. In the United States, it has become a partisan conflict expressed in gender terms. The Republican defense of the brotherhood state and its exclusive version of national good is countered by a newer but increasingly institutionalized vision of democracies as representing women and men equally. By more explicitly demasculinizing family headship and political leadership, social justice movements and the Democratic Party symbolically resist the restoration of gender norms privileging breadwinners and brotherhoods.<end ABST>

<KW>KEYWORDS: breadwinners; democracy; gender; inequality; partisanship; representation.

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<H1>INTRODUCTION

Although masculinity as a concept enters into discussions of the emergence of autocratic tendencies in democracies today, most discussions of current politics leave gender as an underlying structure of society invisible. On the one hand, commentators stress then-candidate Trump's appeal to the individual voter undergoing crises because of racial or economic change (Brooks 2016; Cherlin 2016). White men in America are described as angry because demographic challenges to white supremacy and the disappearance of "good jobs" mean that they are falling in society's "pecking order" and they construct racial-ethnic "others" as their targets (Hughey 2014; Lamont, Park, and Ayala-Hurtado 2017). Rural white Americans are described as having lost a sense of meaning as their families "fall apart" (Cramer 2016; Hochschild 2016). This framing places gender in the position of a "secondary contradiction" rather than acknowledging the direct social mechanisms that connect power and masculinity in practice, and allow men to depend on invisible family labor (Ruggles 2015). Men largely appear in the center of the popular story as victims of impersonal (and ungendered) forces of globalization and demographic change.

On the other hand, patriarchy is presented as a timeless form of symbolic politics (Higgins 2018). In this case, the display of masculinity labeled as patriarchal supplants democratic accountability with personalized demands for power, and Trump, Putin, and others offer up such undemocratic styles of leadership as providing a sense of security to those who are fearful of change (Boatright and Sperling 2020; Sperling 2014). The authority conventionally exercised by men as heads of families and states seems to define men who flaunt their power, sexual or political, as hypermasculine. They use their exaggeratedly masculine gender performance as a means to show their entitlement to domination (Wood 2010). The policies they

champion affirm the subordination of women and the regulation of sexuality as restoring a “natural” order (Datta 2019). Heteronormativity is the spoken or unspoken rule of family formation. As Jesse Daniels (1997:42) summarizes, the word *family* serves as “a code for the protection of white male authority, the appropriation of white women’s labor in the home, the production and ownership of white children, and the insured continuation of heterosexuality.” Patriarchy is the term often used as a label for this symbolic mobilization of the race-gender norms accepted as legitimating power in modern Western society, but use of this term mistakenly implies a return to an older form of predemocratic rule.

This article contests the label “patriarchal” for the masculinity displays of leaders in the established democracies of the United States and Europe, even as it argues for gender as the connection between the material conditions of citizenship for national populations and the symbolic presentations of politicians who assert the right to govern them.³ In considering voters’ preferences and leaders’ performances together as wholly modern disturbances, it places the material and symbolic properties of gender as a glue at the heart of the democratic compact of modern national states (Hoganson 1998; Kováts and Pöim 2015). As a glue, gender has its own distinctive properties, but these are especially effective in connecting intersectional inequalities into vivid displays of power (Ferber 2014). Gender as a glue attaches the identifications of individuals, each with their own masculinity, femininity, sexuality, and nationality, to the postures leaders display, consciously or not, in the theater of democratic politics. Unlike those who would apply the label “patriarchy” to these gendered desires and performances, I connect

³ Although Pateman herself continues to use the term *patriarchy*, modifying it to indicate the democratic/fraternal rather than the authoritarian forms, I prefer the more explicitly modern label of “brotherhood state” to indicate two points central to the feminist theorists who have built on Pateman, as well as Pateman herself. First, the politics of protection and obedience are as central to modern democracies as to classical patriarchies and autocrats. Second, democratic theory uses “the family” not just metaphorically but symbolically to represent the gendered basis of states. The democratic ideal of citizenship rests on waged labor as a collective masculine entitlement and feminizes dependency on and obedience to the state. See discussions in Pateman (1992), Daniels (1997), and Çınar (2019).

the historical emergence of liberal democracies with the construction of collective masculinity as power (Pateman 1988). This model offers a still-powerful narrative of identification with the masculine subject that legitimates unequal citizenship, and makes male leaders and rivalrous nation-states seem “natural” in politics (Hughey 2014; Pateman 1992).

As a theoretical argument, the consideration of gender as a glue among multiple inequalities builds on the understanding of gender as a fundamental relationship of politics. Joan Scott (1986:1066) presented gender as changing in its historical specifics but always serving as “constitutive element of social relations based on perceived difference between the sexes, and . . . a primary way of signifying relations of power.” Gender names the differences between women and men as perceptions that have material significance for all social relations; intersectional theories have further expanded on this insight to stress how the nature of these perceptions and of their material consequences differs in interaction with the other social relations of inequality such as race, class, sexuality, age, and nation (Choo and Ferree 2010; Collins and Bilge 2017). So for a person to be perceived as masculine will have different consequences if they are transwomen, or black, young and male, or a white candidate for high office. Those performances of masculinity that citizens accept as appropriate serve to legitimate the actors’ claim to power. Conversely, power, regardless of its source, is also articulated in the language of gender. Thus, one who dominates another is masculinized and one who is dominated is emasculated, and the power to assert one’s desires is to “have balls” as a politician or a nation.

That democracy is gendered is not a new insight and can be traced back to Carole Pateman’s (1988) classic analysis of the sexual contract that transformed patriarchal rule into collectively masculine liberal democracies. The challenge is to explain why and how the gendering of democracy is working itself out in a mode of masculinist self-assertion and

tendencies to autocracy, particularly in relation to the current politics of the United States. Gender relations are contested and inherently ambivalent social relations, and masculinity is formed in different ways over time through its association with power and by the “refusal or repression” of ambiguities and alternative possible associations (Scott 1986:1068). In Scott’s (1986:1058–1059) words, “theories of patriarchy do not show how gender inequality structures all other inequalities or, indeed, *how* gender affects those areas of life that do not seem to be connected to it.” Because these relations change, it is disingenuous to describe current assertions of masculine privilege in the language of patriarchy, as if they were throwbacks to some prior age. Instead, what appears is a new form of racialized hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Hughey 2011).

The plan of the article is first to distinguish more carefully between patriarchy as a style of rule and collective masculinity as a form of political engagement in liberal democracies, then highlight the challenges that ongoing changes in gender regimes internationally have brought to the hegemony of the latter style of modern masculinist politics. The second section focuses on the United States and its specifically gendered structure of politics, showing that ongoing challenges to hegemonic masculinity as organized political power have created a gendered binary in American partisanship, masculinizing Republicans and feminizing Democrats following a marketized script that separates and genders security and dependency. The third section then examines how gender glues together many of the anxieties generated by social change, both in fostering engagement with collective expressions of conventional political masculinity and encouraging a powerful, intersectional resistance to the narrative of “restoring greatness.”

The conclusion stresses that when this broader mobilization on both sides over the masculinization of power is mistaken for simple reactions to the personality and practices of Donald Trump, liberal democracy is imagined as if it were not gendered. This idealized ungendered democracy is thought to rest on purely rationalist practices relying on facts, evidence, science, and elections and thus as being uniquely endangered by Trump's individual irrationality and the blatant inappropriateness of his masculinist displays (Brooks 2016). This failure to account for the performative, emotional, and highly gendered nature of all democracies underestimates both the longer-term pressures that are changing hegemonic masculinity and the intersectionality of the anger that such change evokes (Alexander 2010). In 2020, competing for the elusive "center," the Democratic Party has an interest in showing its "ability to lead," which translates into performative loyalty to racialized hegemonic masculinity, even when the party accepts partnership premises in its policy and inclusive representation among its candidates. The politics of masculinity in liberal democracies long predate Trump, and while they are impossible to ignore in the narrative he crudely offers for his actions, they will persist in the post-Trump era of American politics, whenever that arises, and with whatever president follows him.

<H1>THE GENDER OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES

Liberalism as a political perspective is not to be confused with the neoliberal primacy of markets; rather than market fundamentalism, the commitment to individual rights and universal principles of self-determination for which the classical theorists of liberalism argued still stands at the center of liberal approaches to human rights and civil society as public goods. However, the “individual” liberalism posits as self-determining is arguably an affluent heterosexual white man who has the legal rights and material capacities to enter into the relationships of public and private life without the institutional barriers erected by gender, race, class, and sexuality (Walby 2009).

The Sexual Contract, Carole Pateman’s (1988) theoretically groundbreaking reexamination of how gender domination and subordination were inscribed in the institutional arrangements of liberal democracies, showed how classic patriarchies were overthrown. In her view, the patriarchal ownership relation fathers had with sons and with women constructed them all in familial terms as fundamentally unequal as persons as well as citizens. Such patriarchal relations were consistent with clan-based competitions, monarchies, and aristocracies of birth but coexist and compete for power with weak or new liberal democracies (Hudson, Bowen, and Nelson 2015).

Liberal democracy as a political system introduced a revolutionary new sexual contract, one in which men now related to each other as brothers—that is, rivalrous peers jousting with each other for sexual access and power, rather than as sons under the divinely granted and socially institutionalized authority of their fathers. Pateman discusses the brotherhood relation among men as one that defines the kinds of democratic institutions that men produced in order to organize their relationships with each other, and only indirectly with women, from legislatures to

unions. Male bonding and male-only organizations were embedded in literally fraternal orders (not just Elks or Masons but also Sons of Italy and Sons of Poland) as well as in the practices of political parties that nearly universally prohibited women from membership. Brotherhood as a “contract” shaped the institutional formations of liberal democracies. Such brotherhood-based nation-states recognized neither women nor colonial subjects as individuals with rights but constructed them as dependents outside politics, properly subordinated and impotent, thus inconsequential to democracy (Pateman 2011).

Democracies have changed and gender relations with them. Gender is a symbolic system by which relations of power are organized and made meaningful experientially; as such, gender is not a static “something” but a name for an ever-changing set of meanings about difference and inequality (Scott 1986). Once society was politically organized for and by democratic brotherhoods, the purposes and nature of marriage also changed. As Scott (1986:2066) noted, “changes in the organization of social relationships always correspond to changes in representations of power, but the change is not necessarily one way.” As representations of power became collectively masculine rather than patriarchal, families were reinstitutionalized in new gender terms that redefined binary difference: husbands and fathers were defined by their ability to provide economically, and women were defined by their caring obligations to their husbands and to the family as a whole. This is not what patriarchy had demanded; in that truly traditional form, women were exchanged as property among lineages to secure property and progeny (Rubin 1975).

The neotraditional breadwinner-housewife family was new and revolutionary at the same time as industrialization and urbanization were also transforming how people lived. This new democratic family was “headed” by a breadwinner, a man who went “out to work” and carried

the interests of families (unified and coterminous with his own) into public affairs. The breadwinner-housewife marriage, today so vigorously defended as “traditional,” was a gradual political innovation that responded to industrialization (and the creation of a wage), managed its consequences through the gendered institutions of parties and unions by which men as brotherhoods sought to restrain and direct capitalism. It took over a century of struggle by diverse social movements to reform this. As feminists demanded political rights and social recognition for their roles as wives and mothers, women also gained increasing ability to be citizens, although on profoundly unequal terms. Nationalist movements overturned colonial subjugation and gained citizenship, typically for both men and women at the same time, but in nation-states that remained profoundly unequal in the global order. This struggle for empowerment continues to challenge the liberal democratic breadwinner state (Pateman 2011).

The breadwinner-housewife family is an institutional formation, less a description of how all people lived in families than a normative standard to which law and policy were oriented, as if people lived or should live in this way (Smith 1993). Moreover, brotherhoods had their own exclusions and rivalries. Men and women valued and promoted whiteness, Christianity, ethnic loyalties as signs of being in “the same family” whose advantages constituted a “common good” for members (Ferber 2004; Hughey 2011). The brotherhood model of masculinity had given an answer to who citizens were and why men collectively “had to take care of” only *their* women and children. The welfare state then created stratified rights to subsistence and support that differentiated those that were men’s by virtue of their economically defined citizenship and women’s by virtue of their caregiving, and excluded those with less than full membership in the national “family” (Collins 2001). Extensions of real citizenship to black people in the United

States only began in the 1960s and the political parties have contested this ever since, in both welfare and voting policies (Hancock 2004).

Liberal democracy and its institutions are much more ambivalently masculine now than Pateman saw them as being even 30 years ago. Continuing years of feminist struggle have moved forward from winning property rights and suffrage to removing barriers to education, employment, divorce, contraception, thus securing women's access to many (but not all) forms of choice and self-determination, and a growing space in the political institutions of governance. Most significantly, the formal legal bases of exclusion have been replaced by a legal regime of partnership in marriage and of national independence in postcolonial globalization.

By refusing an antihistorical view of “the fixed and permanent quality of the binary opposition” (Scott 1986:1065), today's breadwinner-housewife compact, as broad and powerful as it might seem to be institutionally, can be recognized not only as a historically limited and changeable social form but also as a powerful symbolic representation of how the world should (or should not) be. It is currently contested both by social movements that aim for continuing transformation toward partnership as a family norm and new postnational state identities. In these movements, the nature of the “demos” in both demography and democracy is at stake. Need families employ a gender binary to secure the reproduction of societies? Need states be defined ethnically in terms of nations? The brotherhood-based liberal order accepted the national “family” and its exclusions as “natural,” but without the appeal to fraternity, borders appear less consensual than an exercise in power, and state power is organized now on “neoliberal” lines to privilege markets rather than shared masculinity (Prügl 2017).

Going beyond Pateman, I suggest that a new family form is already emerging from the ruins of the breadwinner-housewife model. If the first great transition was from patriarchy to

brotherhood, the second great transition being experienced today is from the gender binary of the breadwinner-housewife model to the growing institutionalization of a partnership model of families that is not necessarily heterosexual or binary (Lang and Risman 2006). Obviously, the moral imperatives of the old order are still quite real in many people's experiences, but the institutional scaffolding of law and the normative alignment among diverse institutions that Connell (2005) called the gender order of society as a whole has already changed. In law at least, partners in marriage are not assigned different responsibilities by gender, marriage is increasingly discretionary and takes place after relationships are formed, and women have the same formal rights to education, paid employment, and career mobility as men. As young men's ability to dominate as breadwinners declines, the sense of masculinity in crisis grows (Ruggles 2015).

While the breadwinner-housewife norm is hardly completely gone from anyone's expectations, the shift has already made some ideas "unthinkable." For example, polls since 1983 can no longer ask respondents if "married women have a husband who can support them" should be allowed to hold a job (Roper Center 1983). Partnership as a normative ideal reshaping familial and market institutions also undermines the assumption that masculinity is necessary for the exercise of political power. For some, that is a much-desired change, making democracies more democratic in their descriptive and substantive representation of women and racial-ethnic minorities (Dahlerup 2018). For others, the emergence of a degendered norm of partnership is a threat to the entire institutional order naturalized in brotherhood-based states (Datta 2017).

While women-led feminist struggles in the United States and elsewhere in the world have introduced many of these changes, deliberately seeking the recognition of full citizenship that classical liberalism obscured, the emerging expectations of a partnership marriage norm have

wider implications for reconstructing family, market, and politics on intersectionally egalitarian lines. Thinking in terms of “white/native-born men’s jobs” or a collective masculine obligation to protect “their national family” with borders and guns is challenged by denaturalizing brotherhood as the logic of the state. This is a profoundly unsettling state of affairs to those women and men who have organized their identities and their commitments in relation to the normative standards of the highly gender-binary breadwinner-housewife model. In response, the Vatican and its allies have since 1995 at Beijing been pushing an agenda of “restoring the natural order” and denouncing not equal rights but the “gender ideology” of non-intrinsic, nonbinary differences that it attributes to “gender feminists” and frames as the cause for all societal ills today (Buss and Herman 2006; Datta 2017).

The increasingly explicit critique of gender binaries and essentialized, permanent identities is a historical product of the multigenerational struggle to unmask and unmake the masculine norm hidden in the liberal individual. As is often pointed out, simply asking for equality with men of the same class, race, generation, and nation is a very limited goal and not sufficient to capture the depth of feminist critique. Nonetheless, the degree to which this very limited form of gender equality has now been normalized makes it difficult for even such clearly nonfeminist actors as the Vatican that to continue to claim patriarchy in the classic sense is the “natural order” that can or should be “restored.” Like many other conservatives, the Vatican’s formal position has shifted to endorse equal entitlement to civic and political power for mothers, rather than deference to husbands (Datta 2017). Religious conservatives advocate equal recognition and reward for care work, while they still hold that women have both a biologically-founded, natural talent and divinely sanctioned responsibility for care. The conservative position is now to defend a modernized brotherhood model in which it is appropriate for women to

campaign, lobby, and vote for equal rights—as long as these are granted on the basis of sexual difference, epitomized in motherhood, and men collectively continue to hold the responsibility to govern.

The classical liberal position of universality of a subject entitled to rights and representation has thus retreated but not to a defense of the masculinity of this individual but rather to a claim of doubly gendered equal subjects (Scott 2005). Disregarding need for a long struggle to open up the breadwinner-housewife marriage to women's rights, this modestly reformed relation now appears in the popular imagination as the “traditional family.”

Degendering the brotherhood state becomes possible when the category of “spouse” is no longer role-defining in law or hegemonic in norms. Powerful women such as Angela Merkel and Nancy Pelosi are remaking the idea of power itself in less masculinized terms. Replacing brotherhood with a new norm of partnership is contested in the political struggles over gender around the globe, but this struggle over the gendered meaning of power has taken a distinctively partisan form in the United States.

<H1>THE GENDERED PARTISAN BINARY IN THE UNITED STATES

In the United States, as in Europe and the Commonwealth, the symbolic value of gender extends well beyond the actual contestation over appropriate family forms, as politicians appropriate the breadwinner-housewife binary of the brotherhood state to organize the meaning of issues and use their performances of masculinity to legitimate themselves as leaders. What the rise of the partnership norm has allowed, however, is the appearance of women in politics who challenge the rule that they must distance themselves from femininity—the antithesis of masculinity and, in the brotherhood model, a sign of lacking legitimate power (Irving 2019). Women members of Congress have given birth while in office, breastfed in public, brought

children onto the floor of the Senate, and used symbols of femininity (jewelry, wearing white or red outfits) to symbolically assert their right to not be a “brother” and yet still be powerful (Greenlee 2018).

George Lakoff (2016) notably used the language of gender to describe the differences between conservative and liberal visions of a good society. The Democrats, he argued, stood for a family imaginary of the state that valued care and compassion and looked to support even-handedly all the members of the family in need, a depiction of values he described as maternal. The Republicans instead imagined a family that needed discipline and defense, considered citizenship as tied to financial contributions, and affirmed the display of masculinity as toughness (Christensen and Ferree 2008). These divisions are clearly gendered in the framework of the binary of brotherhood states. Lakoff argues that attempting to rebut such deeply anchored frames is like asking someone not to think of an elephant—the negation merely encourages and reinforces the thought (Lakoff 2004).

This understanding of framing as fundamental to political choices is part of a wider understanding of democracies as emotional and performative in their uses of symbols (Alexander 2010; Edelman 1985). Frames make use of implicit and even unconscious associations with gender and power, but politicians rarely articulate the binary they use or challenge when they define issues, nominate a candidate, choose a wardrobe, or make a statement (Dittmar 2015). Voters themselves rarely articulate gender as a reason for party or candidate preference, but the frames on which they draw are gendered (Francis 2018) and in elections they seek a candidate whose performance of gender symbolizes their affirmation of shared collective values (Alexander 2010:134).

For Americans, the liberal premises of undifferentiated citizenship for all in equal liberty still resonate most deeply, and frames such as choice, freedom, and individual rights appeal to the Democratic Party faithful who imagine liberalism as nongendered as well as to Republicans who associate these values with masculinity. Europeans' more generous welfare states have made feminists there more likely than those in the United States to continue to see gender difference and care work as a viable strategy for claiming enhanced citizenship rights for women (Ferree 2003). African feminists drew on women's solidarity around mothering to challenge ethnic divisions and militarism (Tripp et al. 2008). Nonetheless, the Republican emphasis on the brotherhood-based gender order encourages sisterhood as a political response, and maternal versions of Democratic politics have also mobilized broad coalitions glued together by gender, as the so-called women's march in response to Trump's inauguration demonstrated.

In the United States, Republican uses of masculinity have made less use of the benevolent versions of brotherhood as their breadwinner-based framing has become ever more embedded in the logic of markets: "makers and takers" are moral categories; private wealth is a qualification to exercise public power; taxes/regulations limit "independence," and recognizable state benefits induce "dependency" (Francis 2018). In the United States, collective masculinity also is expressed in nationalism, militarism, and privatization of public goods, with gun ownership taking a particularly prominent role as a way of expressing masculinity among men whose grip on the breadwinning role is precarious (Carlson 2015; Cassino and Besen-Cassino 2019).

This overlay of a strongly gendered imaginary of maternal care and masculine breadwinning in liberal democratic states and of the gender relationship of care/dependency and security/provision on the binary of political party identities in the United States has gendered the

American parties themselves, not just candidates or issues (Winter 2010). The Republican Party has embraced the symbolic value of masculinity in its pursuit of power, and rather than the “subordinated” symbol of the feminine, the Democratic Party has chosen to identify with the new partnership model. In the less gendered, post-breadwinner understanding of political authority, so-called maternal values are open equally to men and women, as the positions of economic and political leadership also should be. For those men schooled to repress emotions other than anger and to use violence to show power, the partnership model of political authority is feminine and weak (Cassino and Belen-Cassino 2019). In the new normative context in which the equation of masculinity with power is at least questionable, men whose feelings of dominance are experimentally threatened overcompensate with increased displays of attitudes and behaviors they associate with masculinity such as homophobia or buying an SUV (Willer et al. 2013). The salience of gender in the definition of how to show leadership is a significant predictor of policy positions as well as of overcompensatory political performances of masculinity, especially for those whose self-concept is more insecure (Francis 2018; Willer et al. 2013).

The ongoing feminization of Democratic candidates and policies has been becoming more prominent ever since the first emergence of the notorious “gender gap” by which women voted in significantly greater numbers for Carter rather than Reagan in 1980 (Mueller 1988). Despite election-to-election fluctuation, the overall trend toward women’s preference for Democrats has been steadily increasing the party’s own willingness to nominate women for office and support their candidacies at all levels. Simultaneously, the supply of women candidates for Congress has disproportionately grown on the Democratic side, especially as state legislatures have shown increasingly gendered partisan patterns of representation (Matthews

2019). From 1998 to 2019, the number of Democratic women in the House of Representatives increased from 37 to 88, while the number of Republican women fell from 17 to 13 (CAWP 2019). The strongly masculinized performances of Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush, and Donald Trump widened the gender gap in those elections, while the Democratic Party struggled in vain to remake itself more masculine-seeming with war-hero candidates like John Kerry (Alexander 2010; Christensen and Ferree 2008). College-educated white women joined black and brown women and men as Democrats, but even more notable is the extent to which white men, especially those not college educated, became steadily more Republican identified, even in the 1990s (Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999). From 1992 to 2016, this group of men shifted from being 7% more likely to identify as Democrats to being 38% more Republican identified (Kurzleben 2016). Noncollege-educated white women—those most likely to be unable to be able to bring a family out of poverty on their own wages—are still less Republican identified than white men, but majorities of this group followed the breadwinner model in voting for both Romney and Trump (Tyson and Maniam 2016).

Gender-polarized images of the two parties became not merely an analytic shorthand for understanding candidate support and the particular alignment of issues each offered but an increasingly recognizable symbolic framework for interpreting partisanship itself. As Winter (2010) shows experimentally, among voters the response time for associating feminine images with Democrats or masculine ones with Republicans is significantly less, a standard implicit bias test for unconscious ties among perceptions. Because feminine associations by definition convey less power, Republican imagery has less ambivalence in its deployment of masculinity as an appeal to which both men and women may respond, especially if they feel threatened by social change in any dimension. The current political scenario is not only one with the blatantly

misogynistic Donald Trump representing the Republican Party leadership, but Nancy Pelosi leading the House as its first woman Majority Leader. The party she leads has distinctively changed its appearance as a whole, since only 38% of current Democratic congressional representatives are white men (but 90% of Republicans are). While party was a poor predictor of the proportion of women in the legislatures of individual states in the 1980s and 1990s, by 2011 Democratic Party control itself had become the primary determinant of the gender composition of state legislatures (Matthews 2019).

Nonwhite voters, however, often see their own precarious status as full citizens reflected by the exclusionary logic of white men as “protectors” of white women/families, a logic in which gender and race have been glued together historically. While masculinities are various, the symbolic logic that links masculinity and power in this context can feminize even male candidates. In the classroom example of this logic, a fork when compared to a spoon is perceived as masculine but not in comparison to a knife. John Kerry, for example, was feminized as French-speaking and water-skiing in contrast to George W. Bush’s “simple” forms of speech and reputed taste for “tough” brush clearing as relaxation (Christensen and Ferree 2008). Gender, having no fixed meaning, shifts in relation to the practical comparison being drawn, and Republicans have “won the battle to appear more manly, though a combination of claims about personal character and assertions that they are strong” across a variety of policies (Winter 2010:593). Obama, as a black man, could not afford the display of masculinizing anger without being seen as “dangerous” and was often demasculinized by depicting him as playful, comfortable with children, and not dominant over his wife (Alexander 2010). The broader alignment of Republicans with military and police, bastions of brotherhood masculinity, also predated Trump and has been used to mobilize white resistance to #BlackLivesMatter, a

movement not coincidentally led by queer women of color who have the least investment in the brotherhood/breadwinner ideals of citizenship.

The process by which a gender binary has been written symbolically into partisan identification depends in part on the unique nature of the U.S. political system in which there are only two viable parties. The overall result is to make the Democrats into a “party of transformation” and Republicans into a “party of restoration” (Brownstein 2012) in which family politics are the bellwethers of institutional change. In the United States in particular, the party binary extends to the politics of race and immigration, where demographic change is emphasized as a threat to “the family” at both the household and national level.

The party binary thus becomes an identity that overlays the gender binary in ways that push both voters and their representatives toward greater consistency in gender-family policies and daily-life practices. Glass and Levchak (2014), for example, compares “red state/blue state” divorce rates to show how the symbolic politics of white evangelicals affirm breadwinner normativity and foster a brotherhood politics affirming women’s dependency that makes them politically Republican. Reading demographic change as threatening has a strong intersectional component in which gender as the focus of concern with reproduction of the nation becomes an aligning symbol for a variety of specific fears and political responses to them. In the United States, abortion has been the reproductive political issue best symbolizing this wider view, but its salience is not a cause but a reflection of this division (Ferree et al. 2002; Lewis 2019).

<H1>GENDER AS BOTH INTERSECTIONAL GLUE AND POLITICAL FOCUS

The “demos” or people reproduced through gendered relations of family life define both national belonging in the state’s demography and in the democracies that govern the state politically (Ferree 2013). When gender relations change as deeply as the current rise of

partnership norms and laws suggest, the state itself is challenged to respond. Not only is instability of gender relations a trigger for state insecurities, but in times of rapid social dislocations, gender relations frequently become a focus of state repression (Beinart 2019; Gal and Kligman 2000). The current dislocations experienced in Western, industrialized, educated, rich democracies are simultaneously systemic fractures in the normative masculinity of institutions and collective anxieties about demographic replacement and moral recognition of individual identities. Because both institutions and identities produce and rely on historically variable gender meanings, the change in the gender order introduces real instabilities in both. The unraveling certainties of a gender order grounded in masculinity allows autocrats to use florid displays of virility as signals of a return to political stability, even as their (attempted) repression of gender equality politics is a signal of the remasculinization of citizenship (Sperling 2014).

Family politics has played an explicit role in the party realignment into its current gendered binary form. In the Carter administration, the emergent “new right” mobilized its opposition to International Women’s Year, the United Nations–sponsored kickoff of its conferences on women’s rights in terms of objections to use of the term *families* rather than *the family* as a dangerous moral relativism (Olcott 2017). Able to stop progress on state ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment by stoking fears of women in the military and men in women’s bathrooms, the right also mobilized against school desegregation and abortion as threats to “the family,” by which they meant the breadwinner-housewife norm (Ferree 2003). As the Republican Party “southern strategy” embraced the defenders of white supremacy, evangelicals also saw their interests align with Catholic advocates of Christian schools and male authority over reproduction (Lewis 2019).

While the culture as a whole had left the idea of sexuality as corruption behind, the “defense of life” and “men’s rights” became empowering slogans for an evangelical mobilization that the Republican Party endorsed and co-opted (Lewis 2019). “Abortion” became powerful in U.S. politics, not as an actual social choice that could be reduced by better contraception or sexual education but as a symbolic statement about the significance of motherhood for women (Ginsburg 1989). Other policies more subtly underline the gender of the state. For example, “the male breadwinner/female caregiver distinction implicitly underpinned the Congressional decision in 1980 to revive male-only draft registration, and the Supreme Court’s subsequent support of Congress’s decision” (Geva 2015:•).

This is an intersectional argument at a systemic level (Choo and Ferree 2010). Gender is a glue connecting diverse forms of institutional fragility to the institutionalization of democracy as a project *for* men and *about* masculinity (Korolczuk and Graff 2018; Kováts and Pöim 2015). Gender as a glue ties nationalism, imperialism, and militarism together as sites for affirming masculinity by the projection of power and the solidarity of brothers (Hoganson 1998). The use of gender to symbolize stability in social relations of difference is thus central, but this is not to imply that it is “just” a symbol or lacks constitutive force. Exercising symbolic power is how politics is done (Scott 1986).

Gender as a glue connects race/nation with reproduction as a gendered process organized by the presumed descent and belonging that family signifies (Collins 2001). Reproduction as both a biological and social process rests on sex/gender as a system (Connell 2002; Yuval-Davis 1997). The politics of reproduction generates both divisions and solidarity by gender identity, sexuality, class, race, nation, and age (Ferber 1997; Roth 2018). In the United States, the political parties not only divide sharply in their relationship to this new partnership model but also in their

willingness to embrace diversity of representation as better realizing the values of human rights and social justice latent in liberal democracy (Viebeck 2018). Neither party position finds itself fully mirrored in the attitudes of its voters, although their internal divisions are also surprisingly consistent across issues. Among Republicans, differences in attitudes by age are most notable, while among Democrats, it is education that separates views most. This difference emerges across diverse issues: whether more than two genders should be available on forms, the value of diplomacy over military force, the perception of racism, and support for government aid for the poor (Graf 2019; Pew 2019).

This complex division is a reflection of the second demographic transition. As demographers Lesthaeghe and Neidert (2009:391) put it, “residents of geographic areas with more unconventional forms of family formation, such as cohabitation, children born to cohabiters, postponement of partnership, marriage, and parenthood, and acceptance of interference with fertility through abortion and efficient contraception tend to vote for the Democratic Party. Conversely, voters in areas that retain classic forms of family formation (early marriage and parenthood) and more conventional gender roles should display a preference for the Republican Party.” These relationships have been found to make place of residence, age, education, and gender together into an intersectionally complex strong predictor of vote on many issues (Lesthaeghe and Neidert 2009; Morrill, Knopp, and Brown 2011).

Reflecting not only gender but race, the political relationship with demographic change has been mobilizing for both those who welcome the coming “majority minority” in the United States and for those who fear it. Reproduction takes center stage as a question of “who will replace us” by highlighting the makeup of society “in 2050”—that is, in the next generation. While progressive-leaning pundits, demographers, and committed Democrats understand these

numbers as presenting a future in which society will be more inclusive and governed more democratically, the responses of the general population and independent voters suggest that this is often a threatening frame. Craig, Rucker, and Richeson (2018) review a series of experimental studies, including their own, that demonstrate that references to the United States becoming a “majority minority” country increase conservative voting and preferences for Republican candidates.

Additionally, brotherhood-affirming masculinity becomes mobilizable in favor of policies that can be deeply destructive of both current and future generations, and a false binary between “jobs” (masculine) and “care for the environment” (feminine) endangers the ability to agree on pragmatically achievable earth-preserving measures (Anderson 2018). Gendering the extension of health care for all as “socialism/dependency” that reduces (masculine) “freedom of choice” is another party-based strategy to underline a gendered binary and undermine compromises. Gun ownership also draws gendered identity into partisan activity; U.S. men increasingly give “defending their family” rather than hunting or sport as their primary reason for buying guns, and gun regulations are prominently promoted by mobilized “moms” against the endemic violence of U.S. gun culture (Cassino and Besen-Cassino 2019).

The overall effect of the instability of gender relations in the United States, however, has not been unidirectionally to affirm a need to “restore greatness” and bring back the brotherhood state and its masculinist political priorities but to mobilize the gender binary in service of a broader set of political conflicts. The social movements that are aligned around the emerging partnership model are not merely feminist in the narrowly liberal, equal rights sense that was the norm when the goal was reforming the brotherhood state to create some space for (white, privileged) women in its institutions. The rise of masculinist politics in defense of the

brotherhood state has been intersectionally supportive of militarism, repressive of reproductive rights, hostile to institutionally acknowledging degendered intimate partnerships and parenting, and opposed to any recognition of nonbinary gender identities. This has provoked a resistance movement that is similarly broad in its agenda. Because the two political parties in the United States vie to capture and build on the political energy of the binary framing of the conflict in gender terms, many issues that are not intrinsically obviously “about” gender are increasingly polarized on the same lines as responses to partnership versus brotherhood as political ideals. Environmental protection, science-based decision making, police accountability, mass incarceration, international diplomacy, and even a nonpartisan civil service all have now become aligned with the reproductive politics of gender itself.

<H1>CONCLUSION

American politics are still fundamentally those of liberal democracy, but the nature of the liberal ideal is now itself contentious. The classical model of liberal democracy institutionalized the gender relations of the brotherhood state and placed boundaries on brotherhood based on conceptions of the nation that elevated whiteness to a prerequisite for full citizenship. Brotherhood was the gendered element in the founding of modern liberal democracies, rather than the political ideal of divine right that animated patriarchies. It was institutionalized in the divided roles of breadwinner and housewife, and initially men’s form of citizenship was the only basis for participation in democracy, this revolutionarily new political form.

This transition to democracy was also a demographic moment of transition. This “first great transition” offered women opportunities for controlling and using motherhood politically and provided both education and employment as tools and theories to feminist politics of equal rights. Today, a “second great transition” has emerged in which family and nation are becoming

relations in which rights and citizenship are constructed normatively on the basis of degendered partnership relations (Lesthaeghe and Neidert 2009). The experience of these relationships, as well as the value given to them, varies by political party. Feminism is thus brought into the mainstream of “high politics,” the contestation over the parameters of governance that was once deemed exclusively the province of men. With the declining institutional authority for exclusionary norms of brotherhood, the political parties of the United States have polarized into advocates of restoration of the masculinity-enhancing brotherhood state and the supporters of achieving a fuller institutionalization of degendered partnership norms. At the time of writing, it is still unclear whether the nomination process of the Democratic Party is able to move toward the intersectionally transformative agenda this implies (Borosage 2017).

In the United States, the restoration of the classic liberal democracies built on brotherhoods also implies a defense of the white supremacy that defined the boundaries of the national family. In European and other democracies where brotherhood implied a male-led expansion of the welfare state, the defense of the borders that limited welfare provision to an ethnically defined nation also connects the democratic with the demographic challenge (Roth 2018). The historical construction of governance in the demos as masculine and sex/family as women’s responsibility has made gender crucial in many countries to specific debates about reproductive policy issues, responses to the greater representation of women in political leadership, and reactions to masculinized political performances.

The U.S. party binary on these dimensions is unusual, but across the globe, the assertion of masculinity as symbolic empowerment is on the rise. In European states, feminists have visibly split into “femonationalists” who present the defense of the brotherhood’s rules for defining women (sexualization and maternity) as bringing liberation and those with a broader

and more intersectional view of the transition to partnership as desirable (Farris 2017). In the United States, the appeal of racialized hegemonic masculinity to white voters who depend on conventional breadwinner-housewife marriages is likely to prevent any coherent “women’s vote” from emerging, no matter whom the Democratic Party nominates. Evangelical churches that have developed a victimization narrative for white masculinity and breadwinner family relations are effective mobilizers of both men and women for a vision of Republican-led “restoration” (Brownstein 2012; Lewis 2019).

The resurgence of such masculinization of politics is not a “return” to patriarchy’s rules but rather active defense against the rising institutionalization of a normative alternative to the brotherhood state. The partnership model that empowers women and men equally as citizens extends beyond the changes in education, family structures, and economic globalization being widely experienced. It offers a broader transformative agenda that would demasculinize power symbolically and offer opportunities for concurrently defeminizing, denationalizing, and de-ethnicizing the relations of care for a population understood more inclusively than the “demos” of contemporary democracies. The freedom of movement of populations—experimentally attempted within the boundaries of the European Union and naturalized in the federal citizenship shared by members of individual U.S. states—mobilizes men’s and women’s anxiety about being “left behind” in a postnational economy and their commitments to defending the collective masculinity of the nation-state.

The first great transition not only created an apparently natural relationship between collective masculinity and collective power but also unleashed feminist and anticolonial resistance to the reproductive relations that secured them. The second great transition, now under way, responds to the long series of partial victories that loosened the boundaries of brotherhood

to include increasing proportions of women and non-European men. The partnership ideal is normative change at a global scale, and it is felt not only demographically. It defines women and men as entitled to represent and be represented in democratic governance. If the ethic of care ascribed only to women as their maternal responsibility is extended beyond the masculinist bounds of rivalrous nation-states to include care for the next generations of all peoples and for the earth as a biogeographic system that supports them, the politics of feminism will have to extend beyond women as well. The “gender feminism” that the Vatican conjures up as a threat to all the institutions of modern states has hardly begun to find its voice, but the revolutionary implications of transition to partnership are already being experienced as a challenge of transitioning politics to protecting this global family.

The defense of the old brotherhood order remains a viable political alternative for many. Misogyny, in other words, is not just an individual attitude that is currently visible and associated with open racism and embattled nationalism, nor an expression of masculine overcompensation by men whose jobs are less privileged and protected today and feel “emasculated” by their lesser economic power. Misogyny is a political claim. The politics of misogyny is a reactive one at present because feminism has successfully deinstitutionalized gendered citizenship in many (but not all) regards. Misogyny when securely institutionalized in a liberal democratic rule of brotherhoods did not need to do battle with its alternative; the soft repression of silencing and mocking feminist alternatives served to keep gender equality all but unimaginable in law and policy (Ferree 2005).

In the United States, the conflict is now polarized. It sets the masculinized Republican Party’s commitments to “restoring greatness,” understood as the advantages of white American families in the immediately post–World War II era, against the transformative agenda as

expressed in Obama's reiteration of its goals as "bending the arc of justice" toward a less conventionally masculine, more inclusive, and care-centered politics (Brownstein 2012). The Democratic Party often falls short of making such changes its priority. Nonetheless, it is visibly being transformed into a party represented by those who are not inside the brotherhood of white men. Parties engage in political reproduction as well in that they actively recruit, train, and support candidates for office. The parties are reproducing their representation in terms of the new model of partnership, with the Democratic Party and Democratic organizations (such as Emily's List) making reproduction of race-gender-inclusive politics a priority.⁴ Given the spatial sorting of constituencies and their different investments in the old or new gender model, the binary of party gender ideals is unlikely to be significantly altered in the next decade, regardless of what specific candidate is chosen by Democrats to represent them in 2020.

Yet from the first demands of suffragists through the so-called second wave to the diversity of more contemporary gender activists, democratic changes have undercut the institutionalization of binary gender, its separation from diverse sexualities, and the status of motherhood as defining women's relationship to power. With motherhood more optional for women, and men still reluctant active fathers, the second great demographic transition is producing the aging of societies, the deinstitutionalization of marriage as a social and economic necessity, and the decline of the heterosexual nuclear family as the essential context for childrearing (Esping-Anderson and Billari 2015; Lesthaeghe and Neidert 2009). Both democracy and demography are in need of reinstitutionalization along new, less binary lines for societies to continue to reproduce themselves.

⁴ This is a point made by Morgan Matthews, personal communication, January 13, 2020.

While today's open conflict over the gender order is disturbing, the prospect that the gains of the past can be reversed is even more so. As the conflict over changes in the racial order of the U.S. Civil War were resolved by the repression of black citizenship after Reconstruction, it is not inconceivable that the institutional changes that have unmade brotherhood and made partnership possible could be overturned. The 2016 election alone is insufficient to do this, no matter how disturbing the resultant Republican politics are. Focusing on gender and reproduction as the stakes in this conflict over the nature of liberalism makes the changes that have been made already more visible and makes more urgent the need for political mobilization. This calls for an intersectional feminism for which partnership and global inclusivity is definitional. Such feminism is neither inevitable nor yet in any meaningful sense politically dominant. It is, however, a vision of equality that appeals to many women and men in the rising generation, even among younger Republicans, and offers at least one possible future.

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