The Digital Traces of #whitegenocide
and Alt-Right Affective Economies of Transgression

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This article explores how the notion of "extreme speech" can advocate a context-specific, practice-oriented approach to alt-right digital culture while also foregrounding its imbrication in larger histories of racial formation. Designating the popular White-nationalist hashtag #whitegenocide as an alt-right structure of feeling, it uses a data-critical discourse on "digital traces" to support a form of social media ethnography that traces affective communication practices online. Bringing this framework to the analysis of top #whitegenocide retweets, it elaborates the functioning of alt-right affective economies of transgression, which, driven by reactionary irony and a sense of race-based threat, contribute to shaping civil discourse and defining Whiteness in digital spaces. Finally, it investigates how the locative and corporal traces left by individual #whitegenocide retweeters both shape and are shaped by larger affective economies of transgression.

Keywords: White genocide, alt-right, digital ethnography, affect, transgression

In 2016, the proliferation of racist banter, anonymous abuse, and antiprogressive vitriol on social media heralded the rise of the so-called alt-right and a right-wing politics seemingly driven by online hate speech. The prominence of the Twitter hashtag #whitegenocide during the fallout of the European refugee crisis and Donald Trump's successful bid for the U.S. presidency speaks to the potential of this contentious digital speech to stoke an already charged political climate. The most popular hashtag among White-nationalist and neo-Nazi Twitter users in 2016 (Berger, 2016), #whitegenocide also attracted the attention of the wider public and mainstream media after going viral on the platform several times. A common trope in late 20th-century American White-supremacist discourse, the notion of "White genocide" has today become an alt-right meme that reflects the view that White populations across the globe are subject to existential threat as a result of accelerated immigration from non-Western countries. In its wide digital circulation, the patently racist origins of #whitegenocide are often obscured as the slogan becomes an increasingly normalized way of expressing disillusionment with mainstream values like multiculturalism.

This issue raises the question of how to evaluate the uptake and spread of illiberal, exclusionary, and antidemocratic online speech practices. Are they evidence of unbridled hate and the return of authoritarian politics, or driven primarily by a "logic of lulz," which deliberately flouts the strictures of civil

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discourse (Milner, 2013)? In the interest of drawing out this tension and offering an alternative perspective rooted in the discipline of ethnography, Pohjonen and Udupa (2017) argue that contemporary cultures of online vitriol should be treated as instances of "extreme speech." With this they challenge the precedence of a Western regulatory discourse on hate speech to facilitate comparative, practice-based investigations of the function of online vitriol in disparate global contexts. Although the notion of extreme speech has the potential to open an array of meaning-making processes and cultural practices to scholarly scrutiny (especially outside the West), a number of scholars have found that proactive platform regulation vis-à-vis a stringent hate-speech rubric is especially effective in limiting the reach and influence of the U.S. alt-right (Daniels, 2017; Hawley, 2017). Besides this, treating alt-right discourse as hate speech can serve as a way to explicitly tie it to histories of White supremacy in an era where it euphemistically brands itself as "alternative" or "pro-White" (Daniels, 2009).

Acknowledging these concerns, this article nonetheless makes a case for treating North American and European alt-right digital culture as extreme speech. This terminological intervention is driven by two primary objectives. First, it emphasizes the value of ethnographic analyses of alt-right cultural production focused on context-specific, iterative social practices, an approach that is underrepresented in the scholarship on the new extreme right. Second, it draws out the decolonial potential of the term "extreme speech" to maintain the need for race-critical perspectives on the alt-right. Given the particular salience of White-genocide rhetoric in postcolonial contexts like postapartheid South Africa (Ward, 2018), it is crucial to develop comparative concepts that limb speech practices across distinct national spheres and position the emergence of right-wing extremism in Western countries as part of longstanding histories of racial formation and colonial exploitation.

With these objectives in mind, I develop an approach to alt-right digital culture that traces affective economies of transgression. Like my use of the term "extreme speech," the notion of affective economies of transgression forwards both a cultural studies lens on the social construction of race and an ethnographic emphasis on context specificity and cultural practice. To embed these perspectives in the terminology developed in this article, I draw on a diverse range of scholarship dealing with White racial formation and the new digitally mediated far right as well as emotion-laden social practices online. This interdisciplinary critical framework shares a common focus on the circulation of affect, which this article uses to emphasize the relational, fluid, and felt dimensions of a burgeoning right-wing sensibility and related set of digital speech practices that exceed the bounds of political parties, social movements, or individual actors. Along these lines, I treat #whitegenocide as a dominant extreme right "structure of feeling" (Williams, 1977), which, as an affectively resonant claim to White victimhood, has the ability to effect larger epistemological shifts while leaving material traces of its spread online.

From an ethnographic standpoint, these material traces make up a hashtagged digital field site that both "functions semiotically by marking the intended significance of an utterance" and performs the structural work of linking "a broad range of tweets on a given topic or disparate topics as part of an intertextual chain" (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015, p. 5). In the interest of building this practice-based perspective into the investigation of alt-right affective economies of transgression that follows, I forward an ethnographically inspired understanding of data as "digital traces." A growing body of scholarship has sought to challenge "big data fundamentalism" by using the term "digital traces" to refer to the numerical products

of online interactions without essentializing them as "raw" truth or objective fact (Hepp, Breiter, & Friemel, 2018; Reigeluth, 2014). My use of the term cites this critical perspective to explore how data can be repositioned as an ethnographic object. Although my approach does not include interviews with users themselves, I maintain that it can function as a form of "social media ethnography" (Postill & Pink, 2012), which advances an understanding of data not as a neutral reflection of reality but as a window onto the practices of collection, apprehension, and use that subtend its significance. Conceiving digital traces in this manner holds particular promise for studying the online activity of the alt-right, which is less a coherent political entity than a relational sociotechnical phenomenon formed at the nexus of histories of racial formation, subcultural alignments, platform attention economies, and user inclinations. My designation of #whitegenocide as a structure of feeling and field site composed of digital traces is meant to draw out contingent processes of social and political transformation and undergird a conceptualization of alt-right digital culture as a form of extreme speech that manipulates the boundaries of civil discourse and White racial identification.

Although it incorporates a data-critical discourse, this article is not primarily data driven or empirically oriented, but rather aims to make some theoretical openings in the ways right-wing extreme speech is perceived and studied. For this purpose, it performs a qualitative analysis of a small data set of top #whitegenocide retweets from 2016 in addition to considering the ethnographic significance of the lengthy chains of individual retweeter profile data that subtend these retweets. It begins by forwarding an ethnographic conception of "extremism" as sociopolitical construct and outlining an alt-right racial politics of transgression that is shaped both by reactionary Internet subcultures and histories of White racial formation. Following a methodological discussion, which includes a more thorough account of this article's use of the terms "digital traces" and "affect," it illustrates the functioning of affective economies of transgression in top #whitegenocide retweets. Finally, it explores how the locative and corporal traces of #whitegenocide retweeters work as practices of affective positioning that shape and are shaped by larger affective economies of transgression.

Right-Wing Extreme Speech and the Racial Politics of Transgression

The growing consensus that a populist far right is on the rise in both the U.S. and Europe (if not globally) belies the relative unboundedness of the phenomenon. By virtue of a productive symbiosis with social media technologies through which technological affordances and political objectives align, the new extreme right operates more as a loose "amalgam of conspiracy theorists, techno-libertarians, white nationalists, Men's Rights advocates, trolls, anti-feminists, anti-immigration activists, and bored young people" (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 3). This poses an immediate terminological challenge that animates the use of "catch-all phrases" like "the alt-right" (Davey & Ebner, 2017, p. 8). Such terms do the work of referencing an emergent political sensibility that resists containment in established parties or formal organizations, but nevertheless displays the drive of a semi-unified social movement.

Studies of far-right Internet use (Burris, Smith, & Strahm, 2000; Caiani & Kröll, 2015; Krämer, 2017) and alt-right digital subcultures (Squirrel, 2017; Topinka, 2018) reflect an awareness of the movement's unorthodox structure and the need for new means of conceptualizing right-wing collectivity. Gattinara and Pirro (2018) formulate this critical perspective explicitly, arguing that the reigning focus on

far-right electoral manifestations in Europe should be supplemented by scholarship that emphasizes the "interaction of people with their environment, in terms of movement organizations and in relation to their wider societal contexts" (p. 5). Their call to consider the new extreme right as a form of context-dependent grassroots political activism is one that has been realized in ethnographic research on the far right (Blee, 2007). Speaking to the German post–World War II context, Shoshan (2016) describes how the category of "extremism" was introduced "to tame the ambiguity of the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate politics" despite its "inherent tenuousness" (p. 7). This critical take on the extreme/mainstream political nexus repurposes the "extreme" label to signal the far right's imbrication in a larger sociopolitical environment.

A similar sensibility animates the notion of extreme speech that I work with in this article. Indeed, according to Pohjonen and Udupa (2017), extreme speech online is never a "mere sequence of intentional tit-for-tat actions," but contributes to framing "the context where meanings of political participation are reconfigured for a growing number of online users entering the debate culture of new media" (p. 1179). The ethnographic approach to extremism, then, retrofits a problematic political construct precisely to call attention to the contingent nature of social practices that work at the bounds of "preexisting" political categories.

Given this contingency, "extreme ideas" could be understood as those that promote "transgression of widely accepted boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable," and contribute to "remapping these established cognitions and subverting the mainstream frames that support them" (Kallis, 2013, p. 226). In other words, tying extremism to practices of transgression connotes a functional unity rather than a static entity. This nonessentialist lens drives Nagle's (2017) exploration of the interplay of cultural constraints and transgressive practices that comprise alt-right digital culture. Privileging the influence of writers and thinkers like the Marquis de Sade and Nietzsche as well as cultural trends from surrealism to the transgressive leftist culture of the 1960s over other right-wing, conservative, and racist movements, Nagle positions the alt-right as response to "a particular style of humorless, self-righteous, right on social media sentimentality" (p. 10) that has become a hallmark of left-wing callout culture and performative liberal politics. The alt-right's deft repurposing of the transgressive subcultural framework typically associated with progressive political aims points to the ideological flexibility and moral neutrality of the rule of transgression. The stakes of this become clear as the alt-right frees itself "from having to take seriously the potential human cost of breaking the taboo against racial politics that has held since WW II" (Nagle, 2017, p. 38).

The destructive potential of transgression coupled with the ways it is both generated by and generative of broader social context suggests that an ethnographic reconceptualization akin to those I have highlighted with respect to "extremism" may be imperative following the rise of the alt-right. Nagle's (2017) attention to modes of alt-right articulation via an "obscure style of ironic cynical mockery" (p. 10) suggests that this critical work might benefit from understanding how alt-right transgressive practices are linked to humor. The role of humor and fun in driving extreme speech online has been discussed variously in scholarship on the North American alt-right (Milner, 2013; Topinka, 2018) as well as scholarship addressing other global contexts (see De Seta, 2018; Haynes, 2019, this Special Section; Udupa, 2017). With respect to alt-right digital culture, Topinka (2018) describes how the desire to deliberately offend and "transgress among transgressors" (p. 2054) creates a space where "transgressive humor becomes a cloak disguising a network

of racist sentiment" (p. 2055). This observation illustrates the importance of maintaining a race-critical perspective in tandem with the practice-oriented study of alt-right digital culture. Scholarly attention to modes of articulation, then, should also be attuned to the effects of extreme speech to avoid reproducing the antinomy between "for the lolz" humor and racist antagonism that the alt-right maintains and profits by. As I present it, a critical ethnographic treatment of transgression entails taking into account its role in reconstituting race-based identity politics in the digital era.

The U.S. alt-right in particular reproduces an explicitly racial discourse that places it in continuum with an earlier generation of neo-Nazis, KKK members, Holocaust deniers, and Christian Identitarians that comprise "Alt-America" in the long duration (Neiwert, 2017). Omi and Winant (2015) identify far-right racial activism and the legacy of White supremacy it upholds as part of an attempt to "rearticulate Whiteness" in the wake of the 1960s Civil Rights movement. Like the category of "extremism," "Whiteness" is a historically shaped construct with no definitive substance. Indeed, "as a normative space it is constructed precisely by the way it positions others at its borders" (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 232). Importantly, the relational nature of White racialization bridges the racial consciousness of the political extreme and mainstream in the U.S. (Blee, 2002). The racially explicit politics of the far-right are mirrored by a mainstream liberal discourse in which "a professed desire to be colorblind bumps up against the ubiquity of race consciousness, both in political life and everyday life" (Omi & Winant, 2015, p. 5). These crossovers illustrate how Whiteness and extremism work as coconstitutive categories tied to common histories of racial domination.

The imbrication of race and political identification shapes the reception, articulation, and apprehension of #whitegenocide in the present. Popularized in the late 1980s after the publication of American neo-Nazi activist David Lane's "White Genocide Manifesto," the notion of Whiteness under siege served handily as a rallying point and calling card for a highly fragmented U.S. White-nationalist movement beset by in-group conflicts (Berger, 2016). More recently, White-nationalist politician Bob Whitaker installed himself as figurehead of an anti-White genocide movement in creating the "Mantra," which can be boiled down to the statement, "Anti-racist is a code word for anti-white" (Lenz, 2017, p. 3). Strategically recoding mainstream cultural values, the Mantra and the idea of White genocide are forms of extreme speech which, by positioning White individuals as the victims rather than perpetrators of racial oppression, ostensibly abide by the post-civil-rights consensus and the taboo on White supremacy for the purposes of undermining that consensus.

Far from being unique to the U.S., the same strategy animates current European immigration politics where "immigration acts as a substitute for the notion of race" (Balibar, 1991, p. 20). Cleansing its ideology of racial references, the European extreme right co-opts an "emerging (left-wing) identity politics discourse" to articulate its anti-immigration agenda (Guibernau, 2010, p. 13). Discursive manipulation of this sort can be traced to the French Nouvelle Droite, a postwar school of right-wing political thought that disguised its fascist leanings by arguing for the separation of populations across the globe, supposedly in the interests of preserving diversity (Bar-On, 2013; Griffin, 2000). Recently, the Nouvelle Droite's rationale has been recalibrated by a growing European Identitarian movement, which, in a manner similar to the American alt-right, has launched a countercultural defense of "the endangered ethnic dimension of European peoples and cultures" (Zúquete , 2018, p. 12). A leading figure of the movement goes so far as to identify "the right of the people to self-preservation" as the central issue of the 21st century (Zúquete, 2018, p.

31). The feeling that "White genocide" is taking place, then, crosses national borders and manifests as extreme speech that manipulates boundaries of civility and incivility, political right and left, and dictates the strictures of racial belonging.

As I mean it, construing "White genocide" as extreme speech indicates not only its relation to a transgressive alt-right sensibility but also its implication in larger histories of racial formation. Further, the extreme speech designation provides a lens on the ways these characteristics are mutually reinforcing. Indeed, right-wing appropriation of leftist anti-imperialist discourse is articulable only with respect to histories of Western colonialism ("White genocide" being perhaps the most apt illustration). Intervening on the meaning we take from these histories, a "neo-racism" that allegedly respects cultural difference is a hallmark of the "era of decolonization" and "the reversal of population movements between the old colonies and the old metropolises" (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991, p. 21). Recognizing this, De Genova (2010) positions modern White racial politics as a "postcolonial cancer" that "metastasizes across distinct historical moments and disparate geopolitical spaces . . . throughout the trans-Atlantic body of 'the West'" (p. 414). His interpretation emphasizes the historical conditions of possibility for extreme-right responses to the incursions of progressive politics, immigration, and globalization, and, as I discussed previously, for crossovers between a mainstream White racial consciousness and a radical right worldview that similarly draw on longstanding raced and gendered social schemas.

Used in service of highlighting this critical historical perspective, the notion of extreme speech is not euphemistically race neutral but draws attention to structural influences on right-wing extreme speech. Besides challenging the hegemonic Western regulatory lens in promoting practice-based investigations of online speech globally, it can help to critically reconceptualize right-wing extremism in a Western context with respect to legacies of colonial domination and the historical production of Whiteness. Spinning extreme speech as a postcolonial concept also sheds light on the multidimensional nature of an alt-right racial politics of transgression. Although transgression defines the alt-right reaction against progressive leftist culture and its attempted incursions on mainstream politics, it also, in a distinct but related manner, animates a White racial consciousness that has historically been driven by imagined racial transgressions against White populations. In what follows, I show how this variegated affective landscape comprises alt-right affective economies of transgression.

Methodology: Digital Traces and Affect in an Ethnography of Online Extreme Speech

This article employs a cross-disciplinary methodology rooted primarily in critical race studies and digital ethnography. As stated in the Introduction, it is not classically empirical but rather undertakes a close reading of affective tones and dispositions with an ethnographic sensibility. The analysis centers on a small data set of top #whitegenocide retweets during the year-long period from January 2016 to December 2016. The most active period in #whitegenocide usage, it corresponds with the escalation of a charged migration politics in both the U.S. and Europe, including key political events such as Brexit and the election of U.S. president Donald Trump. Tweeted a total of 746,708 times in 2016, #whitegenocide garnered disproportionate public visibility due to the increasing salience of the meme in right-wing activism and discourse and its two-time ascendance to Twitter's trending topics (one of these incidents spurred by a White-genocide-related retweet from Trump himself). For the purposes of this article, I isolated a relatively

small data set comprising the 10 most retweeted #whitegenocide tweets per month (making for a total of 120 tweets) using Borra and Rieder's (2014) Twitter Capturing and Analysis Tool (TCAT), a software that sequesters data from Twitter's API based on preset queries. Retweets seemed especially relevant given their role in determining the most visible and significant content on the platform via trending algorithms (Asur, Huberman, Szabo, & Wang, 2011), and the fact that more than two-thirds of #whitegenocide tweets during 2016 were retweets.

The advent of Web 2.0 has spurred a reevaluation of the practice, application, and role of ethnographic research. Such reflection has prompted methodological innovations like "hashtag ethnography," which positions hashtags as "entry points into larger and more complex worlds" (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015, p. 7). In the context of this article, this provides a useful framework for conceiving #whitegenocide as a window onto the implications of alt-right extreme speech and the workings of an alt-right racial politics of transgression. More broadly, notions like hashtag ethnography function as forms of "social media ethnography," which emphasize "qualities of relatedness in online and offline relationships" and the ways in which "social media practices are implicated in the constitution of social groups" (Postill & Pink, 2012, p. 132).

This, along with the call "to reflexively interrogate the concepts we use to understand the Internet" (Postill & Pink 2012, p. 132), are points at which the digital ethnographic perspective can be connected to the critical discourse emerging on "digital traces." Responding to the problematic treatment of "social media data as natural traces and of platforms as neutral facilitators" (van Dijck, 2014, p. 199), the notion of digital traces repositions data as the "trace of a relationship" between user and digital technology (Reigeluth, 2014, p. 248). Digital traces speak to a "technical procedure of construction" rather than capturing a direct representation of the social world (Hepp et al., 2018, p. 440). Further, the term foregrounds the way data serve as "agency machines" and "narrative builders" that "make meanings actionable" (Milan, 2018, p. 10). This practice-based perspective holds promise for anthropological investigations of complex digital social formations engendered by iterative extreme speech acts online. The foundation for such disciplinary crossovers is already laid by anthropological mobilizations of the "trace" as "an analytical tool and an ethnographic site for inquiry," which emphasizes the material dimension of "the coming into being of the social and its recession" (Napolitano, 2015, p. 49). A digital trace-based ethnography that builds off this critical tradition, then, supports the study of social relations in motion.

As it has been used in various scholarship, the construct of affect similarly foregrounds the fluid, relational aspects of social formation. Describing the transformative materialization of affect on social media, Papacharissi (2016) argues that hashtags comprise "affective publics" that "become what they are and simultaneously 'a record or trace' of what they are" (p. 310). The digital traces of affective exchange suggest that "structures of feeling" might "open up and sustain discursive spaces where stories can be told" (Papacharissi, 2016, p. 320), stories that have the potential to shape social wholes. Indeed, as a structure of feeling or "social experience in solution" (Williams, 1977, p. 133), #whitegenocide reflects a shared right-wing consciousness that shapes and is shaped by everyday affective exchanges. As such, affect exceeds the individual, driving intersubjective and context-specific social production which blurs "the boundaries of self, technology and other(s) that make up digital 'interaction' and produce affective response" (Boler & Davis,

2018, p. 76). In this sense, affect and digital traces are not only complementary critical heuristics but also inextricable elements of online social constitution.

The idea that emotions are not possessed by individuals animates Scheer's (2012) ethnographic conception of emotion as practice, performed through the auspices of a knowing body. The embodied, performative nature of affect has implications for the way we understand racial formation. Linking emotion and race-based identification, Ahmed (2004) describes the functioning of "affective economies" in which the circulation of affect "generates the surfaces of collective bodies" rather than being contained in any one object or sign (p. 128). In the case of White-nationalist anti-immigration politics, an affective economy of fear, which enfolds the emotional registers of love (of the White-national collective) and hate (of those that would threaten it), continuously works to police and retrace the boundaries between White self and racialized others (Ahmed, 2004). Incorporating these perspectives on race and embodied emotional practices, this article contends that the digital traces of affective exchanges proceeding under #whitegenocide can shed light on the construction of Whiteness online. As discussed previously, alt-right affective economies are driven not just by fear but also by irony and amusement. To present a more expansive account of the machinations of affect and race in contemporary right-wing extreme speech, I designate an affective register of transgression that includes the pleasure of "edgy" subcultural belonging and irony as well as the anxiety spurred by imagined transgressions of racial outsiders.

Affective interplays of alt-right transgression are intensified in a platformed environment where algorithmically enabled "affective feedback loops" tether "affective economies to the commercial economy, at enormous rates of profit" (Boler & Davis, 2018, p. 83). The implications of the so-called attention economy have been especially pronounced on Twitter, which, as a key point of far-right intervention on mainstream public discourse, grants the alt-right "new mechanisms for the furtive spread of propaganda and for vicious harassment with little accountability" (Daniels, 2017). In an attempt to respond to rising critique of the laissez-faire policies that earned it the reputation as an "online Wild West" (Hawley, 2017, p. 161), Twitter suspended a number of alt-right accounts in late 2017 (an action that *Breitbart* called the "Great Twitter Purge"). Potentially helping put the alt-right "back in its Internet isolation" (Hawley, 2017, p. 161), this regulatory measure also has methodological ramifications on this study as it means that many of the #whitegenocide tweets from 2016 can no longer be accessed. At the time this study was conducted, 22 of the 43 user accounts responsible for the 120 top #whitegenocide retweets I collected had been suspended. The top retweets authored by these accounts were available only via TCAT in the form of archived text record and metadata.

This case facilitates reflection on how the digital traces of right-wing extreme speech might speak to the absent presence of the alt-right online, and how researchers and users alike apprehend shifting alt-right digital landscapes. Following a close reading of affective economies of transgression animating the circulation of #whitegenocide, I illustrate how retweet metadata serve as locative and corporal traces that can be used to forward an ethnographic perspective on alt-right digital culture. I argue that these traces work as practices of affective positioning that can give the researcher more clues about user alignments and experiences in lieu of interviews.

Tracing Affective Economies of Transgression in Top #whitegenocide Retweets

The 120 top retweets I gathered dealt evenly with the dangers posed by racialized others and the follies of liberal politics and mainstream cultural norms. The former theme typically involved framing "non-White" immigrants or minority groups in Western countries as sexual, demographic, criminal, or cultural threats. The discourse of threat characterizing top retweets primarily concerned with racial outsiders speaks to the efficacy of an affective register of fear in the spread of #whitegenocide. As Ahmed (2004) points out, White-nationalist affective economies associatively stick an array of actors, objects, and symbols together so that the object of fear is never clearly delineated but composed of an expansive conglomeration of interrelated signifiers. This sort of "stickiness" is especially pronounced on Twitter where individual tweets form multimedia assemblages that combine textual and visual content to malign targeted groups.

One tweet, retweeted 412 times in February 2016, reads, "'Refugees' in Germany are responsible for 6,000 criminal incidents per day #whitegenocide." It includes a photo of refugees boarding a German train en masse as well as a link to a news article (see Figure 1). Although the photo is not connected to the criminal acts the user reports, their combination in the tweet works to relate phenomena of mass immigration and criminality. As a result, the otherwise innocent thumbs up one of the refugees gives to the camera reads as a mocking sign of ill intent. Tweets like this one illustrate how the possibility of "passing"— in this case, the potential of the criminal to pass as a refugee—works to undermine the distinction between these figures (Ahmed, 2004).

Figure 1. Retweeted content, February 2016.

The immediacy of the association between refugees and criminals in the tweet is reinforced by the linked article in an online publication with a clear racial bias. The article goes a step further than the tweet, referring to refugees exclusively as "non-White invaders" who commit daily sexual and criminal transgressions against White populations. The fear of such transgression slides elastically sideways to spin new objects (like the photo of the refugees boarding the train) as scenes of invasion. But because the "rippling effect of emotions" also moves backward, the digital traces of #whitegenocide speak as much to the "absent presence of historicity" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 120) as they do to the affordances of social media platforms. The historical dimension of affect emphasizes the necessity of a trace-based paradigm that includes "seeing digital technology in continuity with 'previous' or existing social, political, and economic structures, and not only in terms of change, revolution or novelty" (Reigeluth, 2014, p. 249). Indeed, extreme speech acts, like the above tweet, partake of a host of racial stereotypes historically rooted in colonial encounter. Citing the inherent untrustworthiness and amoral nature of non-White outsiders, the tweet employs a well-established discourse suggesting that digital traces should be seen less in terms of epochal shift than historical recalibration.

Top retweets concerned with rejecting normative values pose mainstream cultural norms, and media outlets as, at best, subject to the blinding cultural imperative of "political correctness" and, at worst, active conspirators in the perpetration of "White genocide." The affective register of these tweets projects the sort of transgressive glee that Nagle (2017) identifies at the heart of alt-right antagonism. Many employ satirical rhetoric that ironically frames Whites' complicity in their own destruction. One tweet retweeted 215 times in June 2016 reads, "This MORON=>> @DavidAFrench has no idea how the Internet works. What a Jackass!!! 😂😂😂 #WhiteGenocide." The attached visual content appearing below the text juxtaposes a meme featuring David French, a prominent American attorney and journalist, with one of French's own tweets (see Figure 2). The meme identifies him as "Bill Kristol's candidate," aligning him with a right-of-center conservative politician who has been outspoken in his opposition to President Trump. It quotes him saying White working-class communities "deserve to die" (although it provides no source or context for this statement). French's tweet, on the other hand, critiques Republican politicians who support Trump stating, "The leaders of the party that ended slavery now endorse a man who bullies women, lies habitually, and incites violence. My heart breaks." Highlighting the apparent inconsistency of French's position, the tweet uses irreverent language as well as an emoji connoting hysterical laughter to ridicule his ignorance of his own digital traceability. The tweet's jubilant humor contrasts with the earnest tone of French's tweet, using parody to redress the evident hypocrisy of mainstream politics.

Figure 2. Retweeted content, June 2016.

In other top retweets, the emotional registers of fear and wry humor are intertwined. Instances of this cross-affective referencing include statements such as, "African invader rapes 15 French Women to stop their racism . . . #nrx #whitegenocide," and "#Milwaukee Whites Being Hunted & Beaten by Blacks. Multicultural Enrichment for White Generosity Stop #WhiteGenocide." In both cases, mainstream buzzwords like "multicultural enrichment" and normative political prerogatives like "stop their racism" are used in ironic juxtaposition with sensational accounts of non-White violence. Tweets like these illustrate the inextricability of White-nationalist prerogatives, ironic digital subculture, and the technical affordances that amplify them. This troubling nexus points to the possibility that alt-right social media users may be "both ironic parodists and earnest actors in a media phenomenon at the same time" (Nagle, 2017, p. 11). The affective blend of fear and irony even within the limited scope of individual tweets illustrates the parallel I drew previously between the relational categories of Whiteness and extremism. In top #whitegenocide retweets, opposition to mainstream values is defined in terms of race, whereas racial framing develops precisely in opposition to normative values. Tracing affective economies of transgression, then, entails investigating how the range of sentiments driving the circulation of alt-right digital culture can be mutually reinforcing.

**Affective Positioning: Digital Traces of Place and Identity
in #whitegenocide Retweet Chains**

The digital traces of the most popular #whitegenocide retweets encompass not only replicated content but also the lengthy chains of their iteration at the hands of individual users. Although, on the surface, the Twitter retweet function produces a uniform output, the aggregate of individual user profiles that underlie the most popular retweets comprise varied and distinctive retweet chains. Within these chains, locative and corporal traces relating to place and identity are denoted by metadata including time zone, self-provided location, username, and user self-description. Recalling Scheer's (2012) definition of emotional practices as "bodily acts of experience or expression" (p. 209), I treat these traces as acts of affective positioning through which users situate themselves with respect to their environment and contribute to collectively tailoring that environment. If access to emotional practices is "achieved through and in connection with other doings and sayings on which emotion-as-practice is dependent and intertwined" (Scheer, 2012, p. 209), then digital traces, the "narrative builders" (Milan, 2018) that comprise datafied environments speak to practices of affective positioning that, in

this case, shape the larger #whitegenocide structure of feeling and the circulation of alt-right affective economies of transgression.

Although hashtag ethnography works with field sites apparently untethered to physical locations, the geographical focus and place-related traces of top #whitegenocide retweets associate the hashtag with a range of regions spread primarily across the U.S. and Europe. The transnational appeal of #whitegenocide fits with patterns in the U.S.—where the "problem of immigration" serves as the "lowest common denominator" for a fractured new extreme right (Davey & Ebner, 2017, p. 25), as well as Europe—where extreme right parties, movements, and individuals across the continent gravitate around racial, anti-Muslim, and nationalist networks (Zúquete, 2015). Further, it squares with Froio and Ganesh's (2018) finding that transnational exchanges among far-right groups on Twitter occur most commonly in tweets reflecting anti-immigration discourse. From the race-critical perspective I foregrounded earlier, these findings reflect the functioning of a historically shaped White racial imaginary that animates the geopolitical construct of the "West." Making the affective resonance of disparate invocations of Whiteness legible, this postcolonial lens grounds my analysis of the locative traces of #whitegenocide and the transnational construction of Whiteness in right-wing extreme speech online.

Several functions reference geographic location on Twitter. Users have the option to "geotag" tweets (sharing precise geographic coordinates), but this feature is notoriously underused (Wilken, 2014). Other means of locative identification are available as optional user profile information, including a customizable location field as well as a region/time-zone drop-down menu. The creative potential afforded by the former is well-represented in top #whitegenocide retweet chains. Among the 1,106 user profiles associated with a June 2016 top retweet reading, "Diversity means chasing down the last white person #Whitegenocide," one finds self-crafted locations like "Das Trumpenreich," which triangulates the contemporary American political landscape and Hitler's Germany to form a sort of White ethnonationalist utopia. Other locational idiosyncrasies in the same retweet chain include, "Among blue-eyed blonds," "Gunshine State, USA," and "Jewmerica," demonstrating how users invest the geospatial imaginary of #whitegenocide with White racial ideals, progun politics, and anti-Semitic overtones.

Lending a spatial dimension to the #whitegenocide structure of feeling, anomalous imagined locations like these combine with more standard user-provided place names to demonstrate the added significance of location in the digital era. Rather than diminishing in relevance following the advent of a global Internet, locations "acquire dynamic meaning as a consequence of the constantly changing location-based information that is attached to them" (De Souza e Silva & Frith, 2012, p. 9), a process that is facilitated by location-based practices of self-identification online. These practices actualize the affordances of "geomedia" and respond to the "need to organize information in a way that makes it relevant to the body" (Lapenta, 2012, p. 138), tying location to user identity in the form of data.

Back (2002) describes how such locative practices are prevalent in networks of White supremacists whose attempts to delineate "racial homelands" online provide the grounds for digitally mediated "translocal whiteness" (p. 130). By this logic, the locative traces of #whitegenocide constitute a sociotechnical environment where "the rhetoric of whiteness becomes the means to combine profoundly local grammars of racial exclusion within translocal and international reach" (Back, 2002, p. 98). The function of Whiteness

in this milieu is indicative of the ways in which "race itself has become a digital medium, a distinctive set of informatic codes, networked mediated narratives, maps, images, visualizations that index identity" (Nakamura & Chow-White, 2012, p. 3). With respect to the spatial interventions of translocal Whiteness, this technocultural convergence yields "whites-only digital spaces" where White nationalists can "retreat from pluralistic civil engagement" and "question the cultural values of tolerance and racial equality unchallenged by anyone outside that frame" (Daniels, 2009, p. 8).

The digital traces of user region/time zone in the retweet chains hint at the sort of cross-border collaboration that subtends the production of translocal Whiteness. Although time-zone data are more standardized than the self-crafted location data I discussed above (limited to a drop-down menu of 141 options), it should not be seen as a reliable means of establishing user location (Maude, 2014). The region and/or time zone attached to a user's profile is preselected according to the location-sensing technology of the user's device, but users have the ability to manually change or delist their time zone. This data were indicated for approximately half the users in the #whitegenocide retweet chains I analyzed. Given the relative indeterminacy of time-zone data and the incompleteness of the data set, I consider how these traces can speak to affective flows of translocal Whiteness rather than providing a definitive account of the transnational spread of #whitegenocide.

According to the available time-zone data, the vast majority of #whitegenocide retweeters were based in the U.S. and Europe. In nearly all of the top retweet chains I analyzed, the number of U.S.-based retweeters exceeded the number of Europe-based retweeters. These proportions varied, however, given the content of the top retweets themselves. Tweets that addressed issues pertaining to Europe were retweeted more evenly by U.S. and European users. Content of this sort included top retweets like, "Two 14-year-old girls gang raped by three Syrian men in small German town. #WhiteGenocide," and, "This is Gare Du Nord (Train station) in Paris, 2016. Watch this and please tell me that #WhiteGenocide isn't real." In these cases, U.S.-based retweeters accounted for roughly 60% of the total retweets, whereas Europe-based retweeters accounted for roughly 30%. In another Europe-focused top retweet—"German govt is literally explaining to migrants how to properly impregnate German gals using pictures #WhiteGenocide"—U.S. and European retweeters were equally represented.

Interestingly, there were relatively few top #whitegenocide retweets that explicitly cited U.S.-related issues. The majority of the top retweets that did not reference Europe-based issues performed discursive manipulations that support claims of "White genocide." Tweets like these included, "Again, you cannot coexist with people who want to kill you. #Diversity is codeword for #WhiteGenocide #IslamIsEvil," and, "Love your race and don't race mix! #WhiteIsRight for white women and white men. #WhiteGenocide." In the associated retweet chains, users based in the U.S. were much more highly represented than those in Europe, comprising around 80% and 15% of the data sets, respectively. The users responsible for these tweets often sported usernames crafted from alt-right subcultural references like @Whitest_Rabbit and @kek_sec.

This suggests several things. On one hand, it points to the U.S. origins of White genocide discourse and the tradition of race-based epistemological intervention from which it derives. But on the other, it shows how the European refugee crisis resonates with alt-right affective publics across borders as well as the

formative role this event and its prolific representation are playing in reinforcing and expanding a translocal White racial imaginary. Together, the self-crafted and automatically recorded locative traces of #whitegenocide top retweets point to the ways in which alt-right affective economies of transgression cohere around spatial (re)productions of Whiteness across the internal borders of the postcolonial West.

Beyond the spatial construction of a transnational White racial homeland, top #whitegenocide retweet chains evidence the ways users occupy this digital space by practices of self-projection captured in data collected on retweeter user name and self-description. These corporal traces constitute digital "bodies of text" through which individuals perform their identities online (van Doorn, 2011, p. 535). Characterized by a range of emotional tones, individual textual bodies are forged by practices of affective positioning that shape the larger #whitegenocide structure of feeling and, by extension, the meaning of Whiteness in a particular technocultural context. The traces embedded in the retweet chain of a tweet by well-known White supremacist and former KKK leader David Duke (which was retweeted 834 times in August 2016) illustrate this process. Twisting mainstream antiracist values, the tweet stated, "A racist used to be someone who hated Blacks. Now, a racist is someone who doesn't hate Whites. #WhiteGenocide." Performing the sort of epistemological intervention Daniels (2009) links to digital cultures of White supremacy, Duke's tweet serves as a textbook case of "White genocide" discourse rooted in the long-standing tradition of organized racist activism in the U.S. The tweet's standard rhetorical strategy and the sense of threat it imparts, however, are complicated by the diverse array of corporal traces that subtend it.

One retweeter, @vonjagerbomber, evidently identified with edgy, alt-right counterculture, self-describing as, "Intersectional Trans-Anime Nazi-Positive Autistkin | Pronouns Hic/Haec/Hoc | Helping oppressed minorities feel those feels since 1488." In this performative textual body, references to White-nationalist ideology combine with distinctly ironic invocations of leftist rhetoric including the specification of pronouns and a concern for "oppressed minorities." The number 1488, a common White supremacist reference to the "14 words" (the infamous final line of Lane's "White Genocide Manifesto") and "Heil Hitler" (*H* being the eighth letter of the alphabet), blends hallmarks of German Nazism and American White nationalism to form a transatlantic mode of neofascist identification (Anti-Defamation League, 2019). Another retweeter provides the following self-description: "22. Catholic. Revelation 21:6," and yet another characterizes as a "Socialista y Nacionalista Español, Anticapitalista, Antifeminista, Antiglobalista, AntiUE, ProNatura," and still another lists, "Animals Are My Angels🐾 My First LOve Lionel Andrés Messi❤ Culé⚽ Força Barça💪Visca Barça♆ I LOve Argentina💗Vegan🌿37. Twilight Saga & Enrique Iglesias Addict🎸." Implicating Christianity, Spanish nationalism, and pop cultural references in the spread of #whitegenocide, these performances contribute to a range of political alignments, personal beliefs, and cultural aesthetics that undergird the retweet. Whether in-the-know irony, religious reverence, patriotic fervor, or innocent fun, each endows the retweeted content with an emotive spin all its own.

Together the diverse affective positionings of individual users constitute a more variegated picture of a collective White self under siege. Where normative data discourse might forward a flattened, proscriptive view of alt-right identity, seeing these user practices of self-presentation as corporal traces challenges the notion that these material outputs stand as "mimetic textual copies of the 'real thing'" (van Doorn, 2011, p. 535). If, indeed, race itself works as a technology (Chun, 2009), providing a framework of inclusion by exclusion in a given use context, the invocation of Whiteness in #whitegenocide retweet chains

generates an array of sociotechnical assemblages inflected by the performative practices of users. This perspective posits the contingency of individual acts of affective positioning and larger structures of feeling. On the one hand, encounters between platform architectures and affordances, histories of race formation, and cultural practices that shape the #whitegenocide structure of feeling compel certain kinds of individual performances and bind these distinct textual bodies via an operative unity. On the other, individual acts of creativity expand the conditions of possibility for extreme right expression and contribute to shifting the bounds of permissible political participation. In this sense, apparently discordant affective positionings like earnest patriotism, ironic humor, fearful projections, religious sentiment, and pop cultural adulation exceed the signifying power of the retweet itself and widen the reach of extreme right affective economies of transgression. The generative interplay of historically shaped modes of racial identification and user practices in top #whitegenocide retweet chains demonstrates why race-critical and ethnographic perspectives are indispensable in evaluating the digital traces of polyvocal alt-right extreme speech.

Conclusion

Recognizing latent decolonial potential in the concept of extreme speech, this article related #whitegenocide to persistent legacies of Western colonial influence and racial oppression. In a shifting regulatory environment where markers of racial exclusion combine with droll humor online, the notion of extreme speech offers a context-specific, practice-based, and, as I use it, race-critical means of addressing alt-right digital culture. It also supports an ethnographic approach to alt-right affective economies of transgression, which are forged in relation to a political and cultural mainstream as well as a racializing system based on delineating and valorizing Whiteness. The coconceptualization of affect and data as digital traces of "the uncertain, conflictive, and problematic manifestations of our becoming" (Reigeluth, 2014, p. 253) served as the cornerstone of a social media ethnography that forwarded a relational outlook on social relations in motion. Following from this, I framed #whitegenocide not as a self-same reflection of established new extreme right prerogatives but as a structure of feeling that sets the bounds of their continuous transformation.

I supported this framing through several interrelated analyses of top #whitegenocide retweets. The first illustrated the interplay of affective economies of transgression in retweeted content and showed how divergent affective registers can be mutually reinforcing. The second conducted an ethnographically inspired reading of retweeter-generated digital traces that endeavored to stay close to user practices. It concluded that retweeter's locative and corporal traces record practices of affective positioning that influence the larger #whitegenocide structure of feeling and contribute to the sociotechnical constitution of Whiteness on social media. As such, the current iteration of White identity politics examined here is not only a product of historically shaped norms, discourse, and social systems, but a varied set of practices that act back on those restraints in the course of "colliding with one another, causing misunderstandings, conflicts, and crossovers between fields" (Scheer, 2012, p. 205). Future research could further explore the intersection among historical norms, data-based environments, and affect in the case of online extreme speech that works less as a static category than as a mobile repertoire of transgressive social practices.

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