

Patriarchy is the sea in which Trump and his sharks gather

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If someone declared publicly that some of their best friends were racists, there would surely be a sharp intake of liberal breath – even if they were to follow it up with the “I just like to get out of my echo chamber and have friends of all political persuasions” argument. Tolerance has its limits. Being openly racist is at that limit. Being openly misogynistic, however, is apparently fine. How else can we have TV host and blancmange of smugness Piers Morgan boasting of his friendship with Donald Trump while [declaring himself a feminist and a supporter of women’s rights](#)? As Trump – surrounded by his consiglieri, the newly made men, nervous of their Twitter-y boss – [signs an executive order that will result in the death of women](#), I care not for an explanation of how Trump isn’t as bad as he seems. He is.

I care not for these delusional men crawling out like woodlice from under a rotting log. In turn, they each tell us they support feminism while doing it down. There is a slew of them everywhere you look. Conservatives posing as radicals. They often claim to love women, but are impelled to impart common sense; the segregated golf-bore wisdom of “funny chaps, women”. They know what women want. They are all for equality, just not extremity. They laud each other for saying dull things routinely deemed “unsayable”. This is wit, we are told, this predictability – iconoclasm even – this grey, elderly skewering of liberalism. It is enlivened only when one of these primates lamps another.

The online equivalent are the young guys, pumped on inchoate rage, semi-literate, radicalised by the “alt-right”, spewing hatred at women. These guys don’t say they love women; they don’t even pretend to like them. They are at least honest. Indeed, one of the reasons that the establishment/Republican party failed to challenge Trump was because of its own dishonesty. It has legitimised a level of woman-hating and racism that it pretends is not there. It kids itself that it is decent, while knowing that what festers underneath are expressions of white supremacy and rage against women that it does not want to name and cannot control. To identify all this as the rage of the left-behinds, as simple class war, too often becomes a way of justifying it.

Those on the frontline of this rage know it is there. Millions of us marched last Saturday. This has rattled Trump, who is obsessed with size, with ratings and with reviews. But let us now pursue clarity and strategy, and name what is happening.

Patriarchy is the sea in which these sharks gather. I am glad to see that people are using this word again. It went out of fashion for a bit when feminism was portrayed as a series of tedious personal choices over shoes, shopping and sex toys. But the concept of patriarchy is essential to understanding what is happening right now. It is a system by which men hold power over political leadership, moral authority and every kind of social privilege, over women and children.

Patriarchy is not some men-only affair. Many women play a role in sustaining it. The far right, by the way, is not afraid of using this word. It claims it as the basis for all that is good in western civilisation. The elevation of Trump is absolutely patriarchal fundamentalism. He has swept up a lot of the Christian vote because of it. The adulation of

Putin is the worship of another white power based on patriarchal rule: unapologetically anti-women, anti-gay, anti-black and anti-Muslim. It is obsessed with displays of masculinity to the point of fascist camp. The right promises the restoration of a time when men were men and women were sanctified mothers or whores. Such authoritarianism may be delivered by both men and women. As the American author and feminist bell hooks says, patriarchy has no gender. It is not situated only within the individual – which is why screaming “Sexist!” at someone only gets you so far. Were the women who voted for Trump furthering patriarchy? Yes, obviously. They may believe it can protect them.

The dismantling of this power cannot possibly come from those who won't name it and spend the entire time shoring it up, largely reaping its benefits: that is, much of the liberal establishment. By assuming the culture war had been won, the myths of impartiality and neutrality have allowed far-right voices to go unchallenged. The assumption that we all believe in equality, are anti-racist, love an art gallery and some heated debate turned out to be wrong.

Patriarchal power asserts itself through cultural as well as economic resentment. And that is everywhere. The oft-repeated sentiment that feminism is itself an extreme movement is evidence of how liberalism bows down to authoritarianism.

So much more important now than whether dullards profess their allegiance to women's rights while refusing to listen to women is understanding who will get down on their knees to service the new man-child patriarchy. And those of us who won't. The power of telling it like it is is ours.

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