

# Hegemonic masculinity in politics and the exercise of a patriarchal leadership: examples of Donald Trump and Emmanuel Macron

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## Abstract

*Power, long thought to be neutral, is fundamentally gendered: the marginal place of women in democratic institutions is not random, but the result of both a conscious and unconscious exclusion of women in politics. To understand its modalities and causes, this article looks into the incarnation of a hegemonic masculinity in Donald Trump and Emmanuel Macron. The former President of the United States has constructed a genuine identity project, marked by the impossible promise of the return of a patriarchal and white America in a contemporary context of rising minority rights. We will also examine the fallen hopes of renewal and rupture carried by the election of Emmanuel Macron. The two presidents stage their virility and overplay their masculinity, sometimes in a violent and even authoritarian manner. The exercise of this predatory and patriarchal leadership is notably apparent in the context of the current health crisis and Trumpian foreign and environmental policies. A masculine parliamentary culture that delegitimizes women in politics remains, as well as an association of governance and the presidential role with supposedly masculine qualities.*

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>THE MASCULINITIES EMBODIED BY DONALD TRUMP AND EMMANUEL MACRON</b>	<b>4</b>
The identity project of Donald Trump	
A Macronist renewal?	5
A virilistic staging and an overplayed masculinity	
<b>THE EXCLUSION OF WOMEN FROM POWER</b>	<b>8</b>
A male dominated parliamentary culture	
Male qualities considered essential for governing	
<b>A PREDATORY POWER OVER THE OTHERS AND THE PLANET</b>	<b>11</b>
Donald Trump's egotistical foreign policy	
Destroy the planet	12
Masculinity and health crisis	13
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>15</b>

## INTRODUCTION

If the number of women in politics has increased since the 1990s in France, in the United States and in most other countries, parity is still not very effective and very few women reach the highest positions of power. Therefore, in the two countries, no woman has yet been elected as president, an exclusion with strong symbolic potential. This article looks into hegemonic masculinity in politics and patriarchal leadership, through the example of the mandate of Donald Trump (2017-2021) and that of Emmanuel Macron (2017-2022).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity was theorized by sociologist Raewyn Connell<sup>1</sup> to refer to the culturally idealized form of masculinity according to a stereotyped representation of what must be a man. It is constructed in opposition to femininity and “subordinate” forms of masculinity such as homosexuality, or “marginalized” ones like black men, thus participating to maintain the gender social order, and therefore the subordination of women.

A feminist analysis of the exercise of power makes it possible to highlight its gendered nature and thereby one that excludes women, in the face of a political power that is thought to be neutral and universal. It is essential to understand how the model of political leadership valued today limits the full participation of women in the management of power, given the fact that even today, only 21 of the 197 countries in the world recognized by the UN are led by women<sup>2</sup>.

On the surface, Donald Trump and Emmanuel Macron seem to have little much in common as to their views on masculinity, power and women. Donald Trump is openly misogynistic and accused of several sexual assaults, while Emmanuel Macron does not openly despise women and even declared himself a feminist during the 2017 election campaign. Despite their undeniable difference (open misogyny versus a feminist facade), Donald Trump and Emmanuel Macron both embody, in their own way, a masculine, virile, Jupiterian, violent and even authoritarian conception of power, that seems to offer little place for women to enter in politics. They stage a hegemonic masculinity and embody a domineering leadership that excludes women from power and therefore participates in the maintenance of the patriarchal order. Above all, the consequences are the same, no matter the intentions: it is (white) men who have power, resulting in both the symbolic and material exclusion of women. A gender order and a masculinist culture that do not say their name reign in the United States as in France.

<sup>1</sup> CONNELL, R., MESSERSCHMIDT, J-W. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender & Society*, vol. 19, n° 6, p. 829–859. [online] 1 Dec. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>

<sup>2</sup> N.D. (2021). Qui sont les femmes cheffes d'État et de gouvernement dans le monde ? *Euronews* [online] Available at: <https://fr.euronews.com/2019/12/18/qui-sont-les-femmes-cheffes-d-etat-et-de-gouvernement-dans-le-monde> [Accessed 18 Apr 2021].



## THE MASCULINITIES EMBODIED BY DONALD TRUMP AND EMMANUEL MACRON

### The identity project of Donald Trump

To be elected, Donald Trump relied heavily based on the fear of the identity fears and the frustrations felt by what Michael Kimmel<sup>3</sup> calls “angry white men”, men who are incapable of accepting social changes, especially multiculturalism, immigration and the rise of women’s and sexual minority rights. These men are both afraid of what the future holds for them, terrified for example by the prospect of the United States becoming a minority white nation in twenty years or so, but they also show nostalgia of the past. They indeed frequently refer to a so-called golden age of the 1950s, a period also cherished by Trump. If the 1950s were characterized by a strong economic prosperity and an American hegemony over the world, they were also marked by racial segregation and sexist and homophobic discrimination. It is thus the nostalgia of an uncontested male domination and of an unequal sexual order between the men and women that is expressed.

The disappearance of certain traditional masculine professions since the 1980s (miners, specialized workers, etc.) has been interpreted by these angry white men as a decline in masculinity, as a threat to their identity. This adds to the rise of immigration, of the highly-feminized service sector and the massive entry of women in the working market, leading to a progressive disappearance of the male “breadwinner” model<sup>4</sup>, interpreted by some men as a true emasculation of identity. Therefore, Donald Trump, like Ronald Reagan before him, has presented a project of remasculinization of America. Trump has instrumentalized this fear of a decline of the white man, of a loss of male privileges and power, for electoral purposes. He has promised, with populism<sup>5</sup>, to respond to the aspirations of these angry men in order to consolidate patriarchal power, considered to be declining.

This populism and this identity project also relied on the designation of scapegoats, considered to be responsible for the so-called decline of America, for the chaos, and even as a threat to the nation: Democrats, Muslims, climate activists, feminists, or anti-racist protestors. A slogan of Donald Trump said: “They want to destroy our country”<sup>6</sup>. Trump has crystallized the divisions, notably through the use of Manichean vocabulary distinguishing the “good” and the “bad”, the “kind” and the “evil”.

This identity-based tension thrives on the fear that the egalitarian demands of women, ethnic minorities, migrants and LGBTQI+ people will deprive white heterosexual men of so-called rights, which in reality turn out to be privileges. A part of the electorate of Donald Trump believes itself to be a victim of social progress: victims of an “anti-white racism”, of an “extremist” feminism, of a dictatorship of political

<sup>3</sup> KIMMEL, M. (2013). *Angry White Men: Masculinity at the End of an Era*, Nation Books.

<sup>4</sup> The breadwinner is a term designating the person in the household who earns money and thus financially supports the family. Before the massive entry of women in the labour market, the model of the male breadwinner was omnipresent, with men bringing home salary and women would be taking care of the household and the children.

<sup>5</sup> Jan-Werner Müller in *Qu'est-ce que le populisme ?* (English translation: “What is populism?”) (2016) establishes 3 criteria of the definition of populism. First, critique of the elites. Second, populists pretend to have a monopoly on representing people and refer to the people as an indisputable moral entity. In fact, populists speak of the people as a whole, which hold the one truth. They are anti-pluralists and therefore anti-democrats. Other criteria can be added, like a particular political style, wanting to be representative of ordinary people and therefore, taking up their codes (clothing, language, etc.)

MULLER, J-W. (2016). *Qu'est-ce que le populisme ? Définir enfin la menace*. Paris, Éditions Premier parallèle.

<sup>6</sup> NAVES, M-C. (2020). Donald Trump, ou la masculinité hégémonique au pouvoir. *Revue internationale et stratégique*, vol. 119, no. 3, p. 89-96. [online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3917/ris.119.0089>

correctness, etc. A real victimisation reversal is at work: they see themselves as a minority, as “strangers in their own land”<sup>7</sup>, to cite the expression of sociologist Hochschild, having the feeling of losing their social status and that the balance of power is no longer in their favour.

The radical right thus seduces them, promising them the return of a patriarchal and white America, and of a certain social and identity order, thanks to a tough and masculine political authority. The hegemonic masculinity staged by Donald Trump therefore promises the rehabilitation of an ancestral patriarchy, of American pride and of an imaginary Western civilization. Donald Trump has understood the electoral potential of this identity obsession and has managed to instrumentalize it to present himself as the saviour of the nation. As demonstrated by the slogan of the Tea Party “Take our country back”, his election promises to re-establish, or rather to reinforce, a gendered and racialized social order as well as an American identity supposedly spoiled by feminism. His slogan “Make America Great Again” would then mean more “Make American White Men Great Again”<sup>8</sup>.

## A Macronist renewal?

By examining the masculinity embodied by Emmanuel Macron, one might think of a renewal, a modernization of a presidential function. Young, without children, married to an older woman, “accused” of homosexuality, the private presentation of Emmanuel Macron suggests a disturbance to the social order of gender. These rumours surrounding Emmanuel Macron’s sexual orientation during the 2017 electoral campaign to discredit him underlined the heteronormativity of the presidential gender: discrediting Macron as a candidate implied discrediting him as a man, and thus calling into question his masculine attributes and virility. The presidential role is relentlessly thought to be in compliance with hegemonic masculinity and thus heterosexuality.

These rumours, pretending that Macron would have a double life with the head of a public radio station, have probably been reinforced by the much discussed age difference of 24 years with his spouse Brigitte Macron. That the latter is the oldest of the couple is often highlighted, even mocked, while the 33-year age difference between Donald and Melania Trump is much less commented on. This one, who is a model, is on the contrary considered as a trophy, an asset for her husband and a symbol of his social success.

Moreover, contrary to all his predecessors, Emmanuel Macron does not have children. Therefore, he “refuses the real and symbolic injunction of a responsible fatherhood which represents one of the strong moments of the conventional virile experience”<sup>9</sup>. However, this (partial) questioning of certain attributes considered as “masculine” has not translated into substantial changes. The private person was

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<sup>7</sup> HOCHSCHILD, A-R. (2016). *Strangers in their own Land*, The Free Press.

<sup>8</sup> NAVES, M-C. (2020). Donald Trump, ou la masculinité hégémonique au pouvoir, op. cit.

<sup>9</sup> « il refuse l’injonction réelle et symbolique d’une paternité responsable qui représente l’un des moments forts de l’expérience virile conventionnelle » (free translation)

FEFERBERG, E. (2017). Masculinité hégémonique en politique : le cas Macron. *The Conversation*. [online] 10 May. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/masculinite-hegemonique-en-politique-le-cas-macron-77739>, para. 11. [Accessed 3 Mar 2021].



differentiated from the public one, whose political discourse and manner of exercising power remained in compliance with traditional archaic norms: the trouble in gender did not lead to a trouble in power.

We should also note the paradox of the incarnation of a political renewal during the 2017 electoral campaign by Emmanuel Macron, who falsely presented himself as an “outsider” although he studied at Sciences Po and ENA (National School of Administration) and was Minister Economy under François Hollande. Already during his campaign, Macron was always surrounded by men, and this was despite the announced parity of his government. Even though he declared himself a feminist during the electoral campaign and presented equality between women and men as “the grand cause of the five-year term”, these declarations, possibly for electoral purposes, were not reflected in the facts, nor in his authoritarian and masculine way of exercising power.

## A virilistic staging and an overplayed masculinity

If interpersonal as well as institutional violences are omnipresent in the United States (armed, racial, police-related, sexist violence...), Trump has exacerbated it, whether it is real violence (by threatening for example to hit his opponents or by encouraging police brutality) or symbolic one by exacerbating social divisions. While the Republicans were already frequently attacking women's rights or the ones of ethnic and sexual minorities, Trump has made it a real battle and fully assumed his sexist and racist positions. It is therefore notable that David Duke, one of the leaders of Ku Klux Klan<sup>10</sup>, saluted Trump's victory, or that Sebastian Gorka, editor-in-chief of *Breitbart News*<sup>11</sup> and then an advisor to the White House, declared that the election meant the return of the “alpha males”<sup>12</sup>.

Trump embodies a masquerade masculinity, that is to say overplayed, performed to the extreme, giving the impression of a parodic, caricatured, buffoonish figure. He constantly seeks to assert his dominating virility in an exacerbated way, notably through phallic references. He bragged about the size of his penis during the Republican primaries in response to Marco Rubio, who mocked his small hands<sup>13</sup>. We can also think about his manly duel with Kim Jong-un over the American nuclear button, which he claimed was bigger than the one of North Korea. The 2016 electoral campaign has likewise been an occasion for Donald Trump to stage a “redneck” virility in a unabashed and vulgar way, notably by discrediting and even trying to intimidate Hillary Clinton with misogynist remarks on Hillary Clinton, or by commenting non-stopppingly the physical appearance of the females politicians and journalists.

This assumed sexism is not only discursive but also translated in acts: Donald Trump has been accused of sexual assault and rape by several women. He has notably responded to one of these accusations by affirming that his accuser “would not have been his first choice” and has openly bragged to have taken advantage of his notoriety to commit sexual assault. During the 2016 electoral campaign, Candice

<sup>10</sup> The Ku Klux Klan, or KKK, is a far-right American secret society which defends white supremacism through conspiracy, racist and anti-Semitic theories.

<sup>11</sup> *Breitbart News* is a far-right American media outlet known for supporting Donald Trump.

<sup>12</sup> NAVES, M-C. (2018). *Trump, la revanche de l'homme blanc*, Paris: Textuel.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

Jackson was even responsible for dissuading women accusing Trump from speaking out publicly<sup>14</sup>. One can also remember the revelation by the *Washington Post* during the campaign of a video in which he said he could “grab them [women] by the pussy”, or even the time he said he would gladly date Ivanka if she were not his daughter.

However, the sexist attacks of Trump do not only concern his personal relationships but have been embodied more generally in his political decisions, endangering reproductive rights: cutting federal fundings for Planned Parenthood, decreasing reimbursement of sexual healthcare covered by Obamacare<sup>15</sup>, appointing conservative and anti-choice Supreme Court Judges Neil Gorsuch (2017), Brett Kavanaugh (2018) and Amy Coney Barrett (2020), re-establishing by decree the “Mexico City policy”<sup>16</sup>, etc. Donald Trump has not missed the opportunity to question LGBTQI+ rights, having for example limited the access of gay and transgender people to the army. Only white and heterosexual men thus seem to be legitimate to exist in the public space, and depriving women or minorities of rights would restore their supposedly lost privileges.

Claiming that the president exercises an anti-feminist domination leadership seems more acceptable in the United States with Donald Trump, openly misogynistic, than in France where it is an interpretation of a behaviour that is intended to be neutral. Macron seems more measured in face of Trump’s assumed anti-feminism. His way of exercising power can be analysed as masculine and virile, but not as masculinist, like Trump.

However, since his election campaign, Emmanuel Macron has been attributed qualities traditionally associated with hegemonic masculinity, such as audacity, courage, ardor, determination, tenacity or self-confidence; qualities mobilized towards the conquest and practice of power. Since the beginning of his mandate, Macron has played with a monarchical image (concentration of power, tone without nuance, affirmation of an incontestable masculine authority, etc), in total continuity with the traditional incarnation of power. He even reaffirms the Gaullist way of exercising power: omnipotence of the president, strong state, virile and vertical conception of power, strong will to control, etc. Emmanuel Macron had declared during his campaign that he would exercise a Jupitarian power, a promise that he has kept, reaffirming at the same time the attachment of the presidential role to masculine values. If Macron himself is not targeted by accusations of sexual assault, he disregarded those of rape targeting his Minister of the Interior, declaring that he and Gerald Darmanin had had a “man-to-man discussion”. Thus, the domineering and patriarchal leadership embodied very explicitly by Donald Trump is not totally foreign to France, almost always accustomed to it, considered the only and right way to embody power.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Obamacare refers to the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act passed in 2010 under the mandate of Barack Obama. It is a law reforming the American healthcare system with the aim of allowing more Americans to have access to health coverage.

<sup>16</sup> Mexico City policy prohibits federal funding of foreign NGOs deemed to support abortion rights around the world. This policy had been put in place by Ronald Reagan in 1984 and then cancelled by Bill Clinton before being reinstated by George W. Bush and again cancelled by Barack Obama.



## THE EXCLUSION OF WOMEN FROM POWER

### A male dominated parliamentary culture

The legitimacy of women in the public space, especially in politics, the field of power by excellence, is still not acquired. This is visible in the vocabulary: a “public man” is a man of power, while a “public woman” is a prostitute.

Women in politics, including in the French National Assembly, are less listened to, are frequently cut off during debates and their physical appearance is constantly commented on, judged and even mocked to discredit them. Female politicians are also more often referred to by their first name than male politicians. Compared to men, they must be irreproachable, they have no right to make mistakes, especially if they are part of visible minorities like Christiane Taubira, Rachida Dati or Myriam El Khomri.

Politics thus remains a masculine institution, a social universe of men, in accordance with the preferential attribution of the public and political sphere to men and the private and domestic sphere to women. The legitimate body in politics remains that of the man, and politics, a world created under a paradigm of masculinity, virility and power. As evidenced by the remarks and whistles of deputies towards Cécile Duflot and her flowered dress in 2012 or their cries of chicken in 2013 to interrupt the speech of deputy Véronique Massonneau, the National Assembly is not free of sexist attitudes. Even worse, as sociologist Jean-Louis Fabiani points out, these attitudes would no longer be allowed in a company or a university, and thus “the very place where national representation expresses itself seems exempt from the rules that it itself produces with regard to society”<sup>17</sup>.

As a result, French women in politics seem to have to adopt codes that are considered masculine in order to be heard: speaking loudly, being aggressive, cutting off their interlocutor, etc. They have to over-invest the male model and conform to a male arena in order to be forgotten as women. Most women in politics do not fight to be recognized as women but on the contrary to be considered as men, and in addition very rarely declare themselves feminists.

By distancing themselves from gender stereotypes, however, they may be subject to criticism, such as Martine Aubry, who was accused of being brutal, alcoholic and even homosexual, described as a “tobacco pot” by the comedian Stéphane Guillon. Ségolène Royal’s anger was also mocked during the 2007 election campaign, notably by her opponent Nicolas Sarkozy who called her hysterical in his *Lettres de mon château*<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> « le lieu même où s’exprime la représentation nationale semble exempté des règles qu’elle-même produit à l’égard de la société » (free translation)

FABIANI, J.-L. (2017). Matonti (Frédérique), *Le genre présidentiel. Enquête sur l’ordre des sexes en politique*, Paris, La Découverte, coll. « Genre et sexualité », 2017, 318 p., Politix, vol. 119, no. 3, p. 161-165. [online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3917/pox.119.0161>.

<sup>18</sup> *Lettres de mon château*, Lettre no 22, Les Échos, 23 août 1995. Cité par ACHIN, C., & DORLIN, E. (2008). Nicolas Sarkozy ou la masculinité mascarade du Président, *Raisons politiques*, vol. 31, no. 3, p. 19-45. [online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3917/rai.031.0019>



But the opposite is also true: exacerbating their supposedly feminine qualities makes them prone to stigmatization, essentialization and hypersexualization, as were Fleur Pellerin or Aurélie Filippetti. Their behaviour evokes the concept of “masquerade femininity” developed by the psychoanalyst Joan Riviere in 1929<sup>19</sup> In reference to women who, because they enter masculine professions, overplay their femininity as if to compensate for their gender transgression, as if to make amends. Therefore, whether they show themselves to be “feminine” or whether they imitate men, women always lose out. Deviating from the dominant norm of femininity is just as sanctioned as excessively conforming to it.

Despite the laws on parity introduced in France in 2000, very few women still hold the most coveted and prestigious positions. Thus, “quantitative parity is still not qualitative”<sup>20</sup>. For instance, the functions considered to be feminine (family, education, health, etc.) are mostly held by women, while the ministries in charge of sovereign functions (interior, economy, foreign affairs, etc.) are held by men. The results of parity are thus minimized internally by the selection of candidates. Politics is therefore still a very unmixed environment, not only in terms of gender, but also in terms of social class, race and age. The overwhelming majority of politicians are men, white and come from the same schools (Sciences Po, ENA), resulting in a white, bourgeois, masculine milieu. This social, racial and gendered endogamy is very little questioned, unlike the non-mixing between women or between racialized people, which is denounced and qualified as communitarianism.

## Male qualities considered essential for governing

We can notice that the normative traits valued by hegemonic masculinity (virility, aggressiveness, strength, competitiveness, rationality, leadership, etc.) are also associated with the dominant conception of power and even considered essential to succeed in politics. The rules of politics are still masculine, as evidenced by the handshake between Emmanuel Macron and Donald Trump in 2017 in Brussels, which looked very much like a duel of manhood. In politics as elsewhere, virility is a guarantee of credibility and legitimacy. As Mathilde Larrère and Aude Lorriau point out “If the success of negotiations is measured by the strength of a handshake, won't women be judged losers from the start?”<sup>21</sup>.

One of the typical traits of male leadership is the inability to admit mistakes, as if this would mean admitting weakness. It seems necessary to be constantly sure of oneself and to control everything. For example, Emmanuel Macron on the set of the French TV channel TF1 confidently declared about the Tous Anti Covid application: “I wouldn't say it's a failure, I would say it didn't work”, a laughable turn of phrase that nonetheless illustrates this standard in politics: acknowledging one's mistakes is seen as a mark of weakness, vulnerability, and therefore non-masculinity. German Chancellor Angela Merkel, on

<sup>19</sup> RIVIERE, J. (1994). La Féminité en tant que mascarade in Marie-Christine Hamon (dir.), *Féminité mascarade. Études psychanalytiques*, Paris: Seuil.

<sup>20</sup> LARRERE, M., & LORRIAUX, A. (2018). Les femmes en politique, depuis quand ? in Esther Benbassa éd., *Violences sexistes et sexuelles en politique*, Paris: C.N.R.S. Editions, p. 9-15. Available at: <https://doi-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.3917/cnrs.benba.2018.01.0009>.

<sup>21</sup> « Si on évalue la réussite des négociations à l'aune de la force d'une poignée de main, les femmes ne seront-elles pas jugées d'emblée perdantes ? » (free translation) *Ibid.*



the other hand, was not afraid to apologize to the German people and to reconsider her decisions, acknowledging mistakes in her handling of the health crisis<sup>22</sup>.

This self-assurance is taken to its extreme by Trump, who refuses to question, doubt, or even reflect. Trump claims to hate thinking, but rather prefers to act on instinct, to take risks, not to fear conflict, as a “real man” must do according to him. He thus despises debate, the conflict of opinions, and thus the very essence of democracy, reinforced by his inability to listen to other points of view than his own or to accept criticism, compromise or cooperation. Donald Trump despises the press and the checks and balances, and has established himself as the sole decision-maker, refusing any humility or questioning. His harshness, his rudeness, his narcissism, his contempt, his sexism, his inflexibility, his desire to appear virile, his lack of empathy, etc.: everything converges towards the incarnation of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal power.

This type of power thinks itself neutral, universal, while it is deeply gendered. It seems impossible to imagine another way of conceiving and exercising power, one which is non-violent, non-hierarchical, non-predatory, as if politicians had to act in this way. The embodiment of this implicit hegemonic masculinity has a direct impact on the legitimacy of the president: if he deviated from it, he would be accused of being weak, not firm enough, too conciliatory, etc. Political power is therefore not neutral, nor is the masculine, and it is necessary to highlight “the fact that all these Presidents were men, white and heterosexual”<sup>23</sup>, with the notable exception of Barack Obama in the United States. Gender, sexual orientation and race are political categories that must be emphasized in order to understand that the political class has a gender, a sexuality and a colour, against the republican universalist discourse that maintains the illusion of neutral individuals.

## A PREDATORY POWER OVER OTHERS AND THE PLANET

### Donald Trump's egotistical foreign policy

Donald Trump's foreign policy has been directly impacted by his personality, resulting in a unilateral diplomatic strategy that rejects compromise and multilateralism. During his mandate, the United States has exited the Paris Climate Agreement, left the UN Human Rights Council and even threatened to withdraw from NATO. His chauvinism, narcissism and even selfishness were strongly felt on the international stage through his provocative and impulsive behaviour, characterized by the “America First” doctrine.

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<sup>22</sup> N.D (2021). Covid-19 : Angela Merkel s'excuse d'avoir voulu renforcer les restrictions à Pâques en Allemagne. *France24*. [online] Available at:

<https://www.france24.com/fr/europe/20210324-angela-merkel-s-excuse-d-avoir-voulu-renforcer-les-restrictions-%C3%A0-p%C3%A2ques-en-allemande> [Accessed 18 Apr 2021].

<sup>23</sup> « le fait que tous ces Présidents étaient des hommes, blancs et hétérosexuels » (free translation)

ACHIN, C., DORLIN, E., & RENNES, J. (2008). Capital corporel identitaire et institution présidentielle : réflexions sur les processus d'incarnation des rôles politiques. *Raisons politiques*, vol. 31, no. 3, p. 5-17. [online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3917/rai.031.0005>.



Targeting nostalgic 1950s Americans and relying on a mythicized past, Trump has sought to advocate the return of a powerful, virile and combative America. Political scientist Marie-Cécile Naves points out that the US military spending today is higher than it was during the Cold War, even though the country is no longer militarily threatened<sup>24</sup>. This belligerent behaviour has also been reflected in the maintenance of tensions with North Korea. The duel of manhood between the two presidents has allowed Trump to cultivate his image as an unsympathetic, arrogant and authoritarian man, even threatening to remove North Korea from the world map. The threats, bluffs, and even insults exchanged between the two men have created a climate of uncertainty, leaving the possibility of a military or economic war in doubt.

Through his nationalistic defence of unilateralism and what he believes to be America's ethno-national identity, Trump has entertained the illusion of a unipolar world under American leadership. He has also fostered the fantasy, impossible in our globalized world, of a self-sufficient and self-enclosed America. He thus wished to put in place a nationalist and protectionist economic system, fighting, for instance, against the import of manufactured products, especially from China and Germany, or against the delocalization of American companies. As such, he appears to be expressing a fear of the loss of U.S. leadership as the world's leading power. This is what makes economist James Galbraith<sup>25</sup> say that Trump's economic vision is mercantilist rather than protectionist, in that he feared that U.S. economic wealth would leave the country and wanted to protect the country's borders, viewing trade as an economic war. This would ensure an offensive, uncompromising, triumphant and even virile posture on the international stage.

This authoritarian and arrogant behaviour of Donald Trump in his foreign policy sharply contrasts with that of his predecessor Barack Obama, often described by Republicans as a "weak" and "apologetic" president; feminine traits that call into question his virility. Joe Biden is, according to Donald Trump, the puppet of China and Iran, just like Obama was for him the puppet of the Islamists. Radio host Rush Limbaugh, who coined the neologism "feminazis", called Obama a "Halfrican American" and declared that his award of the Nobel Peace Prize was a sign of femininity leading to the emasculation of the US<sup>26</sup>. Gender is therefore used to disqualify their opponents: the Republican Party is sometimes referred to as the "daddy party", the party of breadwinners, of strength, of security, and the Democratic Party as the "mommy party", of care, of assistance, of weakness, of laxity<sup>27</sup>. Obama, cultivated, a man of compromise, seems radically opposed to Trump, informing himself on Fox News and Twitter, and famous thanks to the tabloids and reality TV. It thus seems that Trump's ambition during his mandate was to do the opposite in every regard of his predecessor, as if he felt personally attacked by his culture and his skin colour, as if Trump's election meant revenge on Obama's America.

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<sup>24</sup> NAVES, M-C. (2018). *Trump, la revanche de l'homme blanc*, op. cit.

<sup>25</sup> N.D. (2017). Plutôt que protectionniste, Trump est-il mercantiliste ?. *Nouvelobs.com*. [online]. Available at: <https://www.nouvelobs.com/monde/20170314.AFP9290/plutot-que-protectionniste-trump-est-il-mercantiliste.html> [Accessed 1 Apr. 2021].

<sup>26</sup> NAVES, M-C. (2018). *Trump, la revanche de l'homme blanc*, op. cit.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*



## Destroy the planet

Donald Trump, in a relationship of predation with everything around him, has affirmed his will to dominate others as well as the planet. The destructive capitalism that he has promoted is based on the modern Western ideology of science as the omnipotence of man over his environment, following Descartes' famous formula "to make oneself as master and possessor of nature"<sup>28</sup>. This one values reason, objectivity, spirit, knowledge and progress (considered as masculine) and devalues irrationality, affectivity, emotivity, body and nature (considered as feminine).

The valorization of a production-driven economy is therefore achieved through a disregard for the environment, but also for indigenous populations, as evidenced by the giant Keystone XL oil pipeline project with Canada that Trump has revived after Obama vetoed it in 2015. According to Naves, "the overuse of natural resources is the mark of a combative, dominating nation, proud of the physical strength of its men, able and willing to tame the great outdoors."<sup>29</sup> The limitless appropriation of fauna and flora is thus linked to hegemonic masculinity, and stems from a short-termist and selfish vision of production and consumption.

Besides, the defence of the environment or animal welfare are associated with feminine passivity, gentleness and attentiveness, which are opposed to values presupposed to be masculine such as strength, action or work. The economy (masculine) is thus opposed to ecology (feminine). Ecological activism is indeed mostly carried by women, and thus the protection of the environment is considered by the climatoskeptics as a weakness or a mothering. The destruction of nature follows the same logic as the antifeminism of leaders such as Donald Trump or the Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro: to preserve a certain social order, which is felt to be threatened by the rise of feminist and ecological demands, their media coverage and therefore the entrance of these issues into the public arena.

Donald Trump denies the reality of climate change, although it is now scientifically supported. Unlike in the past, contemporary climatoskepticism is therefore a denial and even a disregard for science and research. Not only is Trump attempting to roll back national environmental protections, but his 2017 withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement also indicates a real desire to impose a climatoskeptic narrative into the public arena and onto the international stage.

The defence of environmental and animal exploitation seems to follow the same logic as that of carrying weapons: as a mark of virility, to question it would also be to question a certain masculine identity. In this regard, we can highlight Trump's cancellation of a measure taken by Michelle Obama to fight against junk food in school cafeterias. As demonstrated by the researcher Hank Rothgerber<sup>30</sup>, hegemonic masculinity is also constructed by the refusal to take care of one's health, notably by a mode of eating that is very much centred around meat consumption. Vegetarianism is in fact easily associated with women,

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<sup>28</sup> DESCARTES, R. (1637). *Discours de la méthode*.

<sup>29</sup> NAVES, M-C. (2020). *La démocratie féministe: réinventer le pouvoir*, Paris: Calmann-Lévy, p. 48.

<sup>30</sup> ROTHGERBER, H. (2012). Real Men Don't Eat (Vegetable) Quiche : Masculinity and the Justification of Meat Consumption. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 14(4), p. 363–375. [online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0030379>



and endangering oneself or others is considered a mark of virility, from which stems men's unconditional of hunting and the carrying of weapons.

## Masculinity and health crisis

Several studies<sup>31</sup> have shown that women take better care of their health than men, particularly because they are more willing to accept their vulnerability. For example, they go to the doctor more often and wash their hands more frequently than men. Trump has, particularly in the early days of the pandemic, downplayed the risks and severity of it, marking a radical and manly refusal to give in to weakness, to protection, to vulnerability. His lack of health decision-making to contain the pandemic was matched by Trump and his vice president Mike Pence's refusal to listen to the scientists and to wear a mask. Instead, they have continued to shake hands and ignore physical distancing measures, as if protecting oneself was a mark of weakness or femininity. An American-British study<sup>32</sup> found that men were less likely to wear masks than women, partly because they saw it as a sign of shame, weakness and docility. Therefore, men put themselves and other people at risk simply in order to appear virile and invulnerable according to the norms of hegemonic masculinity.

As for Emmanuel Macron, we can highlight his virilization of the “fight” against the pandemic through warlike rhetoric. From his famous “we are at war” during his first speech to recurring references to “front lines”, Macron has used virile, belligerent images to valorize the “fight” against Covid-19. Once again, virility is a guarantee of credibility, of importance. This so-called “fight” is however mainly carried out by women, who represent the overwhelming majority of nurses, teachers, care assistants or even home helpers (care work). The pandemic has thus underlined the essential role of these devalued professions in the functioning of society.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, we saw the differences, but also the similarities, in the way Emmanuel Macron and Donald Trump embody hegemonic masculinity in politics. Trump asserts himself as the defender of a conservative and reactionary society by defending a masculinist, racist and even neo-fascist project of society. He relies on an assumed virility and a will for power over others and the environment. As for Macron, it is rather indirect that one can perceive the impact of hegemonic masculinity's imperatives on his discourse and leadership style. He did not embody the much promised and expected renewal, but rather a continuity and even a reaffirmation of traditional political customs. Despite the undeniable contrast between the attitudes and political decisions of both heads of State, the result remains the same: the exclusion of women from power, particularly from the dominant places in the governmental hierarchy, none of whom have ever been president in the United States or France. The idea of power is still thought of in masculine terms, leaving little room for the entrance of women into politics and leading to an appropriation of power by men. The analysis in terms of gender in fields as varied as foreign policy, the environment or

<sup>31</sup> See for example : VIDAL, C., & MURIEL, S. (2017). *Femmes et santé, encore une affaire d'hommes ?*, Paris: Belin.

<sup>32</sup> CAPRARO, V., & BARCELO, H. (2020). The Effect of Messaging and Gender on Intentions to Wear a Face Covering to Slow down COVID-19 Transmission. *PsyArXiv*. [online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/tg7vz>



the health crisis has finally allowed us to take this manner of embodying power out of its supposed neutrality to reveal its gendered springs.

Nevertheless, the point here is not to present women as naturally more gentle, altruistic and peaceful than men. This portrayal of a stereotypical femininity, full of empathy and kindness, in the face of a violent, agonistic and destructive male power, would be essentialist. Women do not necessarily do politics differently, and integrating them equally into the governance would not miraculously solve the world's political, economical, social, and environmental problems. Talking about masculine leadership does not rely on the existence of natural masculine qualities, but rather admits that gendered socialization creates divergent behaviours, interests and aptitudes between men and women, that have no biological basis. It is therefore not a question of advocating a "feminine" leadership but a different, more practical, inclusive and cooperative power, respecting individuals as well as the planet.



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