

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# From savages to snowflakes: Race and the enemies of free speech

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## Abstract

Right-wing free speech advocacy is increasingly shaping global politics. In IR, free speech has generally been viewed within human rights and international legal frameworks. However, this article shows that contemporary free speech advocates often ignore or oppose human rights and international law, focusing instead on (what they describe as) a defence of the nation state against the enemies of free speech. This article examines this articulation of free speech's enemies: first historically as the 'savage' in John Stuart Mill's influential formulation of free speech; and then contemporarily as the 'snowflake', 'mob', and 'cultural Marxist' by elected officials and lobbyists in the UK and US. The article argues that John Stuart Mill's savage is figured within a racialised civilisational hierarchy of degrees of humanity. Today, right-wing free speech advocates extend and reconfigure this hierarchy, imagining the 'snowflake', 'mob', and 'cultural Marxist' as lesser human, subhuman, and extra-human, respectively. Thus, in contrast to rights-based analyses of free speech advocacy – which assume or assess the promotion of rights as a 'public good' – the article argues that narratives of free speech's enemies are deployed by right-wing free speech advocates to underwrite racialised policy responses and global hierarchies.

**Keywords:** Free Speech; Far Right; Race; The Human; White Supremacy

## Introduction

On 3 July 2020, on the eve of US Independence Day, former US President Donald Trump spoke at Mount Rushmore in defence of free speech.<sup>1</sup> According to Trump, the censorious enemies of free speech were engaged in a 'merciless campaign to wipe out our history ... erase our values, and indoctrinate our children.'<sup>2</sup> These enemies had, in Trump's narrative, taken over state and societal institutions, instituting 'extreme indoctrination and bias' in which left-wing domination was enforced through the threat of being 'censored, banished, blacklisted, persecuted, and punished'.<sup>3</sup> Trump described Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests, then taking place globally, as a particular threat: these 'angry mobs' were attacking the free expression of American nationalism and global civilisation. The 'mob' was variously criminalised ('unleash[ing] a wave of violent crime in our cities'), lacking rationality (having 'no idea why they are doing this'), and/or highly intentional ('some know why they are doing this').<sup>4</sup> Throughout, Trump used the language of war. US citizens had 'fought', 'struggled', and 'bled' to secure freedom of speech, which was now

<sup>1</sup> Donald Trump, 'Speech at Mount Rushmore', South Dakota, 3 July 2020, available at: {rev.com/blog/transcripts/donald-trump-speech-transcript-at-mount-rushmore-4th-of-july-event} accessed 20 February 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

under ‘attack’ and ‘radical assault’ from the dangerous ‘weapon’ of ‘cancel culture’.<sup>5</sup> The American people were not ‘weak’ but ‘strong’, and ready to fight in defence of ‘the nation’s children’.<sup>6</sup> Trump closed by announcing the creation of the ‘National Guard of American Heroes’: a ‘vast outdoor park’ in which statues of ‘the greatest Americans who have ever lived’ would defend America and civilisation against the enemies of free speech.<sup>7</sup>

Trump’s speech embodies the concerns of a right-wing free speech movement that has become increasingly voluble and influential in the Global North during the last decade.<sup>8</sup> The speech also illustrates the failure of IR to address this development or its significance in global politics. Free speech in IR is usually viewed, as by some Constructivist IR scholars, as a human right located within international legal frameworks.<sup>9</sup> These scholars join a rich literature beyond IR, in Philosophy, Law and Media Studies, which explores the legal or practical scope of a right to free speech.<sup>10</sup> Yet contemporary right-wing free speech advocates tend not to reference or act on – or are actively opposed to – international law and/or human rights.<sup>11</sup> Further, while Constructivist IR research tends to focus on less powerful actors using rights frameworks to challenge power inequities,<sup>12</sup> right-wing free speech advocates often have disproportionately large public platforms, which they use to consolidate existing hierarchies.<sup>13</sup> In this light, a focus on human rights and international law is ill equipped to grasp the nature of contemporary right-wing free speech advocacy, which, as illustrated by Trump’s speech, is more often concerned with securing the nation against its enemies.

If contemporary right-wing free speech advocacy does not uphold (or even address) human rights, international law and/or a defence of the voiceless, what is its function? To answer this question, this article examines the articulation of free speech’s enemies as a central feature of contemporary free speech advocacy. The article argues that free speech advocates locate their enemies on a hierarchy of development, via an account of their proximity to whiteness, statehood, and humanity. Historically, this civilisational rationality was made integral to free speech in ‘the most famous liberal defence of free speech’,<sup>14</sup> John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty*, which also figured ‘the savage’ as a proto-enemy of free speech.<sup>15</sup> Today, the enemies of free speech are figured

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid

<sup>6</sup>Ibid

<sup>7</sup>Ibid

<sup>8</sup>See overviews of this movement in Gavin Titley, *Is Free Speech Racist?* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2020); P. Moskowitz, *The Case against Free Speech: The First Amendment, Fascism, and the Future of Dissent* (New York, NY: Bold Type Books, 2019).

<sup>9</sup>D. C. Thomas, ‘The Helsinki effect’, in Thomas Risse, Stephen Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink (eds), *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999); D. C. Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); A. Callamard and L. Bollinger (eds), *Regardless of Frontiers* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2021). For broader Constructivist analyses of human rights norms, see Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink (eds), *The Power of Human Rights*; Kathryn Sikkink, ‘Transnational politics, International Relations theory, and human rights’, *Political Science and Politics*, 31:3 (1998), pp. 516–23; Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, ‘Taking stock: The constructivist research program in International Relations and comparative politics’, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 4 (2001), pp. 391–416.

<sup>10</sup>Eric Barendt, *Freedom of Speech* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007); Ivan Hare and James Weinstein (eds), *Extreme Speech and Democracy* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>11</sup>For example, some free speech advocates who supported the UK exit from the EU oppose European human rights legislation and promote ‘British liberties’ as a replacement for human rights. C. R. G., ‘Murray, Magna Carta’s tainted legacy: Historic justifications for a British Bill of Rights and the case against the Human Rights Act’, in F. Cowell (ed.), *The Case Against the 1998 Human Rights Act: A Critical Assessment* (London, UK: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>12</sup>Finnemore and Sikkink, ‘Taking stock’.

<sup>13</sup>This is illustrated, as Will Davies argues, by professors and journalists writing about their own censorship in major news outlets. William Davies, ‘The free speech panic: How the right concocted a crisis’, *The Guardian* (26 July 2018), available at: {<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/jul/26/the-free-speech-panic-censorship-how-the-right-concocted-a-crisis>} accessed 6 December 2022.

<sup>14</sup>David van Mill, ‘Freedom of Speech’, *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (2017), available at: {[plato.stanford.edu/entries/freedom-speech/](https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/freedom-speech/)} accessed 20 February 2021.

<sup>15</sup>John Stuart Mill and Elizabeth Rapaport, *On Liberty* (Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing, 1869). Hereafter ‘Mill, *On Liberty*’.

as ‘generation snowflake’, ‘the mob’, and the ‘cultural Marxist’. These figures – which variously repeat, extend, and refigure a Millian civilisational racial hierarchy – are deployed, the article shows, to enact and/or underwrite (especially racialised and/or colonial) statecraft and global hierarchies.

The article proceeds in four sections. The first section locates right-wing free speech advocacy in IR and, empirically, in global politics. The second section develops an analytic framework based in Critical and Queer IR (on Cynthia Weber’s ‘figuration’ specifically), as well as Black Studies scholarship.<sup>16</sup> The third section reads John Stuart Mill’s account of free speech through this framework, showing how statehood, whiteness, and free speech are connected, in the figure of ‘the savage’, through Mill’s civilisational rationality. The fourth section situates imagined contemporary enemies of free speech – ‘generation snowflake’, ‘the mob’, and ‘cultural Marxism’ – as differently located within, informed by and/or revising Mill’s framework. The article concludes with a discussion of the implications of its analysis for the populations who these figurations are claimed to represent and for future IR research on free speech.

### Locating right-wing free speech advocacy: In global politics and in IR

Research on free speech is relatively absent from IR. This section discusses three exceptions – regarding human rights,<sup>17</sup> right-wing populism<sup>18</sup> and the securitising regulation of speech<sup>19</sup> – where IR scholarship directly or indirectly addresses an aspect of contemporary free speech advocacy. In my reading, scholarship in these fields situates free speech as a human rights discourse potentially open to co-optation or distortion, relating to a rising global populist movement, and entangled with narratives of defence, sovereignty, and exceptionalism. Ultimately, however, the section argues that these approaches fail to capture the significance of free speech advocacy as: part of the white supremacist histories of the US and UK, as well as global imperialism more broadly; undermining divisions between ‘moderate’ and ‘fringe’ right-wing politics; and deploying ‘freedom’ in racially stratifying ways (making a turn to ‘freedom’ a problematic response to the racialised securitisation of regulation).

From the 1960s to the 1980s, free speech was a central demand of left wing, Black, women’s and LGBT rights movements.<sup>20</sup> Today, in Western liberal democracies, free speech advocacy is

<sup>16</sup>Cynthia Weber, *Queer International Relations: Sovereignty, Sexuality and the Will to Knowledge* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 28–33; see also Donna Haraway, *Modest Witness@Second Millennium.FemaleMan Meets OncoMouse: Feminism and technoscience* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>17</sup>Thomas, ‘The Helsinki effect’; Callamard and Bollinger (eds), *Regardless of Frontiers*; Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink (eds), *The Power of Human Rights*; Sikkink, ‘Transnational politics, International Relations theory, and human rights’; Finnemore and Sikkink, ‘Taking stock’.

<sup>18</sup>Sandra Destradi and Johannes Plegemann, ‘Populism and International Relations: (Un)predictability, personalisation, and the reinforcement of existing trends in world politics’, *Review of International Studies*, 45:5 (2019), pp. 711–30; Bice Manguerra, ‘Resisting the “populist hype”: A feminist critique of a globalising concept’, *Review of International Studies*, 45:5 (2019), pp. 768–85; Vedi Hadiz and Angelos Chrysosogelos, ‘Populism in world politics: A comparative cross-regional perspective’, *International Political Science Review*, 38:4 (2017), pp. 399–411; Pablo de Orellana and Nicholas Michelsen, ‘Reactionary internationalism: The philosophy of the New Right’, *Review of International Studies*, 45:5 (2019), pp. 748–67; Jean-Francois Drolet and Michael C. Williams, ‘The radical Right, realism, and the politics of conservatism in postwar international thought’, *Review of International Studies*, 47:3 (2021), pp. 273–93.

<sup>19</sup>Nadya Ali, ‘Seeing and unseeing prevent’s racialised borders’, *Security Dialogue*, 51:6 (2020), pp. 579–96; Andrew Neal, ‘University free speech as a space of exception in Prevent?’, in Ian Cram (ed.), *Extremism, Free Speech and Counter-Terrorism Law and Policy* (London, UK: Routledge, 2019); Randy Borum, ‘Rethinking radicalization’, *Journal of Strategic Security*, 4:4 (2011), pp. 1–6; P. R. Neumann, ‘The trouble with radicalization’, *International Affairs*, 89:4 (2013), pp. 873–93; Mark Sedgwick, ‘The concept of radicalization as a source of confusion’, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 22:4 (2010), pp. 479–94; see also Rita Floyd, ‘Parallels with the hate speech debate: The pros and cons of criminalising harmful securitising requests’, *Review of International Studies*, 44:1 (2017), pp. 43–6.

<sup>20</sup>Cynthia Enloe and *Review of International Studies*, ‘Interview with Professor Cynthia Enloe’, *Review of International Studies*, 27:4 (2001), pp. 649–66.

more often associated with a range of right-wing movements, including those identified as centre-right, right-wing populist, libertarian, and/or conservative. Constructivist scholarship is one of the few fields in IR where free speech has been addressed, either as an explicit and central object of analysis or, more often, within a broader package of international human rights norms or legal frameworks.<sup>21</sup> For example, Daniel Thomas examines how norms surrounding the right to free speech circulate internationally, as well as how shared ideas, identities, or information contribute to (or inhibit) the implementation of international law.<sup>22</sup> Often focusing on authoritarian or post-authoritarian states, such analyses tend to view free speech and its advocacy, along with rights more broadly, as a public good and challenge to the powerful by the powerless.<sup>23</sup> This leaves constructivist approaches ill-equipped to account for contemporary right-wing free speech advocacy in Western liberal democracies, which often opposes human rights and international law, or consolidates rather than challenging existing hierarchies.

Nonetheless, a rights-based approach illuminates some aspects of the landscape of contemporary free speech politics. Assessed against the ‘successful’ diffusion or implementation of the right to free speech, contemporary right-wing free speech advocates can be viewed as claiming but failing to protect free speech *as a right*.<sup>24</sup> Or, contemporary free speech advocates might be viewed as deploying free speech rhetoric to legitimise right-wing political activities and/or to have ‘co-opted’ free speech from ‘the left’ and/or from international human rights advocates. This argument is made in recent longform journalism by William Davies and Nesrine Malik.<sup>25</sup>

Yet this narrative alone misapprehends the history of free speech activism, which, as I show elsewhere<sup>26</sup> and illustrate in the discussion of Mill below, has been co-constituted with racialised state formation and empire since the 1800s.<sup>27</sup> That is, the racial stratification of modern state formation was expressed and extended through free speech advocacy long before its recent uptake by right-wing advocates. The implications of this history are obscured if we assume that right-wing free speech advocacy can be fully explained as a ‘recent’ ‘co-optation’ of human rights discourse. In this way, the article situates free speech within the co-constitution of liberalism, modern statehood, and empire, observed by Critical IR scholars.<sup>28</sup>

For Mill, however, free speech is not simply one of many rights constituting state citizenship but *the* principle upon which both statehood and international order are based.<sup>29</sup> This article argues that this state-forming role is taken up and rearticulated in contemporary right-wing free speech advocates’ accounts of the enemies of free speech: in their accounts of their enemies free speech advocates are not simply failing or dishonest in their claims to promote rights, but are engaged in a long-running project of colonial and racialised statecraft enacted in the name of free speech.<sup>30</sup> This chronology undermines any straightforward narrative that the ‘public good’ of free speech has been appropriated for harmful ends. In fact, this chronology suggests that even 1960s

<sup>21</sup>For example, Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink (eds), *The Power of Human Rights*; Sikkink, ‘Transnational politics, International Relations theory, and human rights’; Finnemore and Sikkink, ‘Taking stock’.

<sup>22</sup>Thomas, ‘The Helsinki effect’.

<sup>23</sup>Finnemore and Sikkink describe this as a trend in Constructivist research in general. Finnemore and Sikkink, ‘Taking stock’.

<sup>24</sup>Moskowitz shows that right-wing free speech advocates are often more invested in controlling or constraining speech than ‘freeing’ it. Moskowitz, *The Case against Free Speech*.

<sup>25</sup>Davies, ‘The free speech panic’; Nesrine Malik, ‘The myth of the free speech crisis’, *The Guardian* (3 September 2019), available at: {<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/03/the-myth-of-the-free-speech-crisis>} accessed 6 December 2022.

<sup>26</sup>Darcy Leigh, ‘The settler coloniality of free speech’, *International Political Sociology*, 16:3 (2022), pp. 1–16.

<sup>27</sup>I argue elsewhere that this is true from the emergence of modern free speech as a concept in the 1700s, but say 1800s here because this is the time period addressed in this article. Leigh, ‘The settler coloniality of free speech’.

<sup>28</sup>Jens Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Jens Bartelson, *The Critique of the State* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>29</sup>Mill, *On Liberty*.

<sup>30</sup>Leigh, ‘The settler coloniality of free speech’.

left-wing free speech activism might – in a similar vein to Critical and Queer IR analyses of other human rights movements<sup>31</sup> – be revisited and resituated in light of the racialised history of advocacy for the right to free speech. This is not to say that all free speech advocacy is determined by or reducible to the civilisational rationality embodied in Mill's 'savage', or to foreclose *how* a range of movements might be situated within the Mill's legacy (resistance or alternative to that legacy may be possible). Rather, this suggestion underscores the potential implications of interrupting the chronology implied by a narrative of free speech as recently co-opted by the right, and refuses to assume that left-wing expressions of free speech are unshaped by a racialising heritage.

A second field in IR that addresses an aspect of right-wing free speech advocacy is the growing body of scholarship on the rise of the neofascist populist far-right and right-wing extremism.<sup>32</sup> Although this scholarship does not address free speech itself, free speech is a central component of the emergent far-right populist 'reactionary internationalism',<sup>33</sup> which IR scholars show is reshaping international politics. Free speech advocacy should be viewed, like far-right populist, neofascist, and extremist movements, as international: even when free speech advocacy is expressed as a concern with the decline of the nation,<sup>34</sup> or an intrusion into the expression of nationalism,<sup>35</sup> these concerns are taken up and deployed internationally on both practical and ideological levels.<sup>36</sup> As such, despite this article's focus on the UK and US, it addresses a movement that spans Western Europe, North America, Australia, and Aotearoa/New Zealand.

However, not only are 'fringe', 'extremist', neofascist, far right, or populist politics not the primary object of this article, but the article calls into question an exceptionalist delineation of those politics. The article shows that the figuration of free speech's enemies is one way in which the neofascist, extremist, and/or populist far right and more 'moderate' free speech advocates are connected and collaborate: the enemies of free speech are figured similarly or jointly across a wide spectrum of right-wing politics. In this way, right-wing free speech advocacy is entangled with populist far-right politics via the figuration of the enemy of free speech. As such, rather than addressing the populist far right directly, by centring the imagined enemies of free speech, this article undermines any clear lines or exceptionalism surrounding far right populism.

A final field of IR scholarship relating to free speech addresses the regulation or constraint of speech in the name of 'counter-terror'<sup>37</sup> and 'deradicalisation'.<sup>38</sup> In these cases, some speech is designated as threatening to the security of the nation-state and in need of (often exceptional or violent) constraint. This securitisation of the regulation of speech, some Critical IR scholars

<sup>31</sup>These arguments are often focused on the roles of women's and LGBT rights in military intervention, border policies, and neocolonialism, see, for example, Weber, *Queer International Relations* and Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>32</sup>Destradi and Plagemann, 'Populism and International Relations'; Maiguashca, 'Resisting the "populist hype": A feminist critique of a globalising concept'; de Orellana and Michelsen, 'Reactionary internationalism'; Drolet and Williams, 'The radical right'.

<sup>33</sup>This term is borrowed from de Orellana and Michelsen, 'Reactionary internationalism'.

<sup>34</sup>As in Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas are Setting up a Generation for Failure* (London, UK: Penguin, 2018); Hara Estroff Marano, *A Nation of Wimps: The High Cost of Invasive Parenting* (New York, NY: Broadway Books, 2008).

<sup>35</sup>As in Trump, 'Speech at Mount Rushmore'.

<sup>36</sup>This was evidenced in March 2018, when Martin Sellner, the Austrian leader of far-right European group Generation Identity, was denied entry to the United Kingdom. UK-based far-right leader Tommy Robinson then delivered Sellner's speech in his stead, citing the refused entry as censorship. Later it was revealed that both activists collaborate to circulate funds internationally. James Poulter, 'The far right are uniting around their right to free speech', *Vice* (20 March 2018), available at: {<https://www.vice.com/en/article/j5ax9d/the-far-right-are-uniting-around-their-right-to-free-speech>} accessed 20 February 2021; Ben Quinn, 'Far-right fundraising not taken seriously by UK, report finds', *The Guardian* (31 May 2019), available at: {<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/31/far-right-fundraising-not-taken-seriously-uk-government-extremists>} accessed 20 February 2021.

<sup>37</sup>Ali, 'Seeing and unseeing Prevent's racialised borders'; Neal, 'University free speech as a space of exception in Prevent?'.

<sup>38</sup>Borum, 'Rethinking radicalization'; Neumann, 'The trouble with radicalization'; Sedgwick, 'The concept of radicalization as a source of confusion'; Floyd, 'Parallels with the hate speech debate'.

argue, underwrites white supremacy and other racial hierarchies. For example, analyses by Nadia Ali<sup>39</sup> and Andrew Neal<sup>40</sup> show how defence of the state against terrorism via regimes of speech is racialised, whether by assigning whiteness to narratives of the state<sup>41</sup> or targeting communities of colour in practice.<sup>42</sup> While this scholarship addresses specific policy contexts (for example, Prevent in the UK), and does not consider free speech or its imagined enemies explicitly, it does reflect the concerns of contemporary free speech advocates when it comes to figuring the enemies of free speech, as well as the securitising and racially stratifying effects of this figuration.

Yet focusing solely on the regulation of speech implies that the ‘unfreedom’ of regulation is in some way tied to the ‘unfreedom’ of racialised state suppression<sup>43</sup> – or, to put it another way, that the racialised constraint of speech is an affront to free speech and/or could be corrected with freer speech. Without disputing the observation that speech is restricted along racial lines, the current article complicates any simple turn to ‘free speech’ or its advocacy as a response to the racialised constraint of speech: the article shows that, through the racialised figuration of free speech’s enemies, calls for free speech can restrict freedoms and enact white supremacy as much as calls for restriction do.

Overall, when free speech has been considered in IR, it has been primarily addressed within a framework of rights as a ‘social good’ or international legal norm. This not only fails to account for the contemporary right-wing expression of free speech, but risks obscuring a history in which free speech is articulated through state-formation and racialised state violence. While free speech is a concern of right-wing populist, extremist, or neofascist movements, centring the figuration of the enemies of free speech shows that these movements are not exceptional nor fully distinct from more ‘moderate’ politics. Finally, while calls for the regulation of speech highlight speech as a site of racialised securitisation, they fail to address the ways in which, through references to an imagined enemy, calls for free speech do not necessarily oppose, but rather extend, racially hierarchical state formation. The following section further situates the current article within IR scholarship, developing a methodology grounded in Critical, Queer, and Decolonial IR.

### Analytic framework: Figuration, developmental temporality, and racialised degrees of humanity

Since Richard Ashley’s 1989 account of ‘statecraft as mancraft’,<sup>44</sup> which shows how sovereign state formation is underwritten by the articulation of ‘sovereign man’, Critical, Feminist, and Queer IR scholars have identified a range of figures through which modern statehood is constituted. Echoing Ashley’s identification of both ‘man’ and ‘his others’ as constitutive of sovereign state formation,<sup>45</sup> IR scholarship on figures has focused both on those that stand in for the modern state, and on the others, outsiders and threats, against which statehood is articulated. Such figures include, for example, soldiers and statesmen,<sup>46</sup> ‘mothers, monsters and whores’,<sup>47</sup> diplomats,<sup>48</sup>

<sup>39</sup>Ali, ‘Seeing and unseeing’.

<sup>40</sup>Neal, ‘University free speech as a space of exception in Prevent?’.

<sup>41</sup>Ali, ‘Seeing and unseeing’.

<sup>42</sup>Neal, ‘University free speech as a space of exception in Prevent?’.

<sup>43</sup>This is illustrated by Neal’s discussion of whether or not Prevent unfairly targets or constrains people of colour in universities. Neal, ‘University free speech as a space of exception in Prevent?’.

<sup>44</sup>Richard Ashley ‘Living on border lines: Man, poststructuralism, and war’, in James Der Derian and Michael Shapiro (eds), *International/Intertextual Relations* (New York, NY: Lexington Books, 1989), pp. 260–313.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Christine Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>47</sup>Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women’s Violence in Global Politics* (London, UK: Zed Books, 2007).

<sup>48</sup>Ann Towns, ‘“Diplomacy is a feminine art”: Feminised figurations of the diplomat’, *Review of International Studies*, 46:5 (2020), pp. 573–93.

and, beyond the discipline of IR, the ‘monster, terrorist [and/or] fag’,<sup>49</sup> and ‘the soldier and the terrorist’.<sup>50</sup> More recently, in a study of figures of ‘the homosexual’, Cynthia Weber labels the process through which figures are articulated in global politics ‘figuration’, setting out a framework for analysing figuration in IR.<sup>51</sup> This section draws on and adapts Weber’s framework, centring Weber’s focus on developmental temporality. It draws on Black Studies scholarship to add an emphasis on the racialisation of ‘the human’ (or humanisation and dehumanisation). The article subsequently locates the enemies of free speech among the many figures identified by IR scholars as sites of global politics.

Weber describes how figures come to be seen as extant and stable through the process of figuration, which occurs in practices, policies, ideas, and rhetoric.<sup>52</sup> Figures do not correspond to the groups they are claimed to represent, but are instead mobilised as statecraft to underwrite policies and/or global hierarchies. For example, Weber shows how the figure of the ‘normal LGBT rights holder’<sup>53</sup> marks Western states as developed nations, legitimises their dominance in the international sphere, and obscures inaction on issues affecting queer populations not represented as normal (for example, on queer migration or homelessness). In contrast, the figure of the ‘perverse’ homosexual immigrant or terrorist justifies border and deportation policies aimed at securing Western states against a ‘racially darkened’ dangerous threat, as well as international intervention in the name of ‘development’.<sup>54</sup>

Weber’s analysis provides a framework for analysing free speech advocates’ focus on the developmental status of their enemies. Weber argues that figuration relies on and reproduces a developmental temporality, which subsequently underpins the policies and hierarchies enacted by figuration.<sup>55</sup> In doing so, Weber echoes Critical IR scholarship on temporality, which shows that a developmental temporality is constitutive of liberal statehood and modern colonial global order.<sup>56</sup> Weber’s analysis shows that the relationship of figures to this temporality is complex, eschewing binaries of ‘developed’ vs ‘underdeveloped’ or ‘past’ vs ‘present’. For example, the ‘normal’ LGBT rights holder is located as both advanced in comparison with the underdeveloped ‘perverse’ homosexual, and temporally universal in contrast to the provincial ‘perverse’ homosexual.<sup>57</sup> At the same time, some ‘perverse’ homosexuals are located as less developed within linear-progressive time (as ‘underdeveloped’), or as stuck in the past or prior-to developmental time (as ‘undevelopable’).<sup>58</sup> In the case of Weber’s homosexual, it is this developmental temporality that informs, for example, the interventionist or anti-immigration policies and other statecraft justified by these figures.

Given free speech advocates’ emphasis on the humanity (or lack thereof) of the enemies of free speech, it is worth noting how ‘the human’ is situated within Weber’s developmental temporality. Weber argues that ‘the human’ of human rights is situated within the universal, which is equated

<sup>49</sup>Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai, ‘Monster, terrorist, fag: The war on terrorism and the production of docile patriots’, *Social Text*, 20:3 (2002) pp. 117–48.

<sup>50</sup>Adi Kuntsman, ‘The soldier and the terrorist: Sexy nationalism, queer violence’, *Sexualities*, 11:1–2 (2008), pp. 142–70.

<sup>51</sup>Weber, *Queer International Relations*; Weber borrows this term and concept from Haraway, *Modest Witness@Second Millennium.FemaleMan Meets OncoMouse*

<sup>52</sup>Weber’s use of the term ‘figuration’ as both a verb and a noun emphasises the ongoing-ness of any figure that appears as stable. Here, however, I use both ‘figure’ and ‘figuration’ for ease of reading: the term ‘figure’ should be read as expressing the same unfolding process as ‘figuration’. Weber, *Queer International Relations*.

<sup>53</sup>Weber, *Queer International Relations*, p. 29.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 31–5.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 29–31; drawing on Donna Haraway, *Modest Witness@Second Millennium.FemaleMan Meets OncoMouse*.

<sup>56</sup>See, for example, Kimberly Hutchings, ‘Happy Anniversary! Time and critique in International Relations theory’, *Review of International Studies*, 33:S1 (2007), pp. 71–89; Anna Agathangelou and Kyle Killian (eds), *Time, Temporality and Violence in International Relations: (De)Fatalizing the Present, Forging Radical Alternatives* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>57</sup>Weber, *Queer International Relations*, quotations from p. 32, argument made throughout book.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*

with progress and development.<sup>59</sup> This is underscored by poststructuralist,<sup>60</sup> posthuman,<sup>61</sup> and decolonial IR<sup>62</sup> scholars, who show that ‘the human’ more broadly is often articulated as a white, non-disabled, heterosexual, Christian and male citizen-subject. This scholarship shows that the figuration of this human – standing in for progress, citizenship, security, and sovereign statehood – is integral to developmental and colonising global politics.

The racialisation of ‘the human’ – and the implications of this figuration for global politics – is underscored in Black Studies scholarship on the dehumanisation of blackened figures.<sup>63</sup> This scholarship shows that blackness is often figured as animal, object, and/or otherwise sub-human.<sup>64</sup> As Zakiyyah Iman Jackson describes, blackness has been repeatedly dehumanised, bestialised, or objectified, with a lack of (perceived) development or civilisation cited as evidence of a lack of full humanity.<sup>65</sup> This blackened subhumanity has legitimised and informed anti-Black state formation, not least the transatlantic slave trade and imperialism. Especially relevant to figurations of the enemy of free speech – who is often viewed as lacking the capacity for rationality – Jackson draws attention to the ways that lack of development or humanity is articulated through an assessment of Black minds and rationality as lacking self-conscious rationality, or ‘the clarity of self-knowledge’.<sup>66</sup> Both blackness and irrationality have also, Jackson argues, been feminised and/or articulated in relation to deviant or ‘uncivilised’ femininity. As I describe below, this blackened dehumanisation is especially, but not exclusively, resonant with right-wing free speech advocates’ narratives surrounding the ‘uncivilised’ ‘threat’ posed by anti-racist or Black activism.

Methodologically, then, the current article follows an adapted version of Weber’s approach to figuration. It analyses books, articles, and speeches by right-wing free speech advocates – specifically elected politicians and lobbyists – as sites of the figuration of free speech’s enemies. The selection of these texts is not comprehensive, but each captures or circulates a particularly central or influential narrative among free speech advocates (e.g., they coined a term, informed a political response and/or are by high ranking politicians). The article does not treat ‘snowflakes’, ‘the mob’, or ‘cultural Marxists’ as existent subjects, but rather investigates how their figuration in free speech advocacy informs policy and hierarchies. Like Weber, the article emphasises temporality, situating free speech advocates’ own emphasis on temporality within the developmental temporality of state formation and international relations. Finally, following Jackson, the article considers the degrees of humanity attributed to the enemies of free speech, especially when these are racialised and/or signalled by a perceived lack of rationality.

<sup>59</sup>Weber, *Queer International Relations*.

<sup>60</sup>See, for example, Ashley, ‘Living on border lines’.

<sup>61</sup>Audra Mitchell, ‘Only human? A worldly approach to security’, *Security Dialogue*, 45:1 (2014), pp. 5–22; Erika Cudworth, Stephen Hobden, and Emilian Kavalski (eds), *Posthuman Dialogues in International Relations* (London, UK: Routledge, 2018); Erika Cudworth, and Stephen Hobden, *Posthuman International Relations: Complexity, Ecologism and Global Politics* (London, UK: Zed, 2011).

<sup>62</sup>Vicki Squire, ‘Migration and the politics of “the human”’: Confronting the privileged subjects of IR’, *International Relations*, 34:3 (2020), pp. 290–308; Louisa Odysseos, ‘Prolegomena to any future decolonial ethics: Coloniality, poetics and “being human as praxis”’, *Millennium*, 45:3 (2017), pp. 447–72; Audra Mitchell, *International Intervention in a Secular Age: Re-Enchanting Humanity?* (London, UK: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>63</sup>Sylvia Wynter, ‘Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after man, its over-representation – an argument’, *The New Centennial Review*, 3:3 (2003), pp. 257–337; Bénédicte Boisseron, *Afro-Dog: Blackness and the Animal Question* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2018); Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiracist World* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2020).

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup>Jackson’s discussion dehumanisation takes place in the introduction to *Becoming Human*, which subsequently seeks to displace this analysis as the sole register in which blackness and humanity are analysed together. Jackson, *Becoming Human*, p. 7.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5.



## John Stuart Mill's civilisational free speech and its 'savage' other

Working in the East India Company for thirty years, Mill was a colonial official in the mid-1800s whose work shaped European empire and state-formation.<sup>67</sup> Today, Mill is widely recognised as 'the most influential liberal thinker'<sup>68</sup> on free speech. His well-known defence of free speech in *On Liberty* posits free speech as *the* most important principle in liberal states, with free expression driving societal progress.<sup>69</sup> This section shows how Mill's theory of free speech operates through the developmental temporality described by Weber, as well as the (connected) whitened version of the human and rationality described by Jackson. I argue that Mill's 'savage' other to free speech, while not always viewed as a 'threat' as such, is nonetheless a proto-enemy of contemporary figurations of free speech's enemies. While Mill is not the only nor even the original free speech theorist (John Locke before him advocated for greater 'toleration'),<sup>70</sup> he is exceptionally influential. The analysis of his work offered here is deployed later in the article to illuminate the civilisational logics that continue to underpin – or are otherwise taken up and rearticulated by – contemporary right-wing free speech advocacy.

That a colonial framework underpins Mill's work *in general* is well established.<sup>71</sup> Yet the relationship between this civilisational framework and Mill's account of free speech – not least as expressed in Mill's figure of 'the savage' – remains largely unexamined. One exception is my own work on the settler colonial dimension of the genealogy of free speech, where I detail how Mill articulates free speech through his colonising civilisational framework and vice versa, making the two inseparable.<sup>72</sup> In my reading of *On Liberty*, Mill makes the following set of (somewhat circular) arguments: because statehood is the most rational and civilised form of governance, state formation indicates that a society is civilised and rational, while the absence of state formation indicates an absence of civilisation or rationality; because sovereign statehood is the most civilised and rational form of governance, and free speech drives towards rationalism and progressive civilisation, free speech should lead organically to state formation; only those societies that are civilised and rational already (again, signalled by the occurrence of state formation), should be granted free speech, and with it other citizenship rights and sovereign statehood.<sup>73</sup> These are not abstract arguments, nor accounts of why colonial subjects did not speak (freely or otherwise). Rather, these arguments legitimised 'despotism'<sup>74</sup> over colonial subjects, including exclusion from participation in colonial states, and repression of Indigenous and Black cultures, languages, and political systems. They also authorised colonial expansion and governance in the 1800s more broadly.<sup>75</sup>

Departing from this analysis, I deploy Weber's framework of figuration here to situate Mill's 'savage' as central to his account of civilisational free speech. Mill's 'savage' or 'barbarian' is figured as living in '... those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its [infancy].'<sup>76</sup> Mill describes the 'savage' as 'wandering or thinly scattered over a vast tract of country'), lacking 'commerce', 'manufactures', 'agriculture', 'law', 'administration of justice', 'property', or 'intelligence'.<sup>77</sup> For Mill, these forms of life define savagery as well as constituting

<sup>67</sup>Lynn Zastoupil, *John Stuart Mill and India* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

<sup>68</sup>van Mill, 'Freedom of speech'.

<sup>69</sup>Mill, *On Liberty*; Barendt, *Freedom of Speech*.

<sup>70</sup>John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Toleration* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1685); for a reading of Locke's work on free speech in relation to Mill's, see Leigh, *The Settler Coloniality of Free Speech*.

<sup>71</sup>Jahn, 'Barbarian thoughts'; Zastoupil, *John Stuart Mill and India*; Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*.

<sup>72</sup>Leigh, 'The settler coloniality of free speech', pp. 8–11.

<sup>73</sup>This reading of the first chapter of Mill, *On Liberty*, is given in Leigh, 'The settler coloniality of free speech', pp. 8–11.

<sup>74</sup>Mill, *On Liberty*, pp. 9–10.

<sup>75</sup>Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Zastoupil, *John Stuart Mill and India*.

<sup>76</sup>Mill, *On Liberty*, pp. 9–10.

<sup>77</sup>John Stuart Mill, *On Civilization* (1836), p. 120.

a failure to form states or capitalist agricultural arrangements. Mill also figures the ‘savage’ with direct reference to their unreadiness for free expression, as living in a ‘... state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion.’<sup>78</sup> To reiterate, ‘being improved by free and equal discussion’ would, for Mill, mean state-formation. Here we see how the figure of the ‘savage’ embodies Mill’s civilisational colonial framework of free speech described above.

We also see both Weber’s developmental temporality and Jackson’s dehumanisation. The terms ‘infancy’ and ‘anterior to’ signal the developmental temporal relations between the ‘savage’ or ‘barbarian’ and what Mill describes as ‘human beings in the maturity of their faculties’.<sup>79</sup> The emphasis on ‘the maturity of their faculties’ ties (what Mill sees as) the development of the human mind to both the practice of and right to sovereign state formation.<sup>80</sup> Significantly for today’s free speech advocates, this infantilisation places ‘the savage’ outside the realm of legitimate political participation. The circularity of the argument means that colonised peoples are only entitled to ‘freedom’ of speech so long as that freedom is not expressed outside or against European state formation or colonial governance. Otherwise, in the name of rationality and civilisation, they are figured as unready for such freedom.

However, in the same way that today’s free speech advocates imagine a varied set of enemies of free speech, so too Mill differentiated free speech’s others within a civilisational hierarchy. Different colonial subjects were, for Mill, located at different points within the temporality of development, with correlate rationales for varied regimes of British colonial governance in the name of development and civilisation.<sup>81</sup> In some cases, Mill deemed figures as more capable of or susceptible to assimilation into rationality, civilisation, and statehood (this made Mill’s work ‘progressive’ – and Mill a ‘radical’ – in contrast to his predecessors in colonial governance). For example, Mill argued that Indian religious elites should be recruited by colonial officials to assist in governing or civilising other Indians.<sup>82</sup> In contrast, Indigenous peoples in Europe’s settler colonies were figured as more lacking in modern human individuality, rationality, and civilised political organisation, justifying violent tactics of colonial occupation.

In these ways, Mill establishes the tradition of free speech advocacy within a developmental temporality and in relation to racialised degrees of humanity. He figures the ‘savage’ as the ‘other’ to free speech and is concerned with the savage’s lack of rationality and/or inability to self-govern (and thus exclusion from the realm of the political). The following section turns to the contemporary figuration of free speech’s enemies and shows how each is figured within, extends or departs from a Millian hierarchy of civilisation. Contemporary right-wing free speech advocates, it argues, follow Mill in promoting or enacting (often racialised) state policies based on the civilisational status assigned to its enemies. The civilisational status accorded speech’s enemies today not only echoes and repeats, but also refigures and reworks Mill’s framework, not least by extending it through the hyper- or extra- human ‘cultural Marxist’.

### **Contemporary figurations of free speech’s enemies: The lesser-human infantile ‘snowflake’, subhuman animalistic ‘mob’, and extra-human puppeteer ‘cultural Marxist’**

This section argues that today the enemies of free speech are figured as infantile (‘the snowflake’), subhuman and animalistic (‘the mob’), and extra-human (‘the cultural Marxist’) in relation to Mill’s civilisational hierarchy. Overall, the section argues that the enemies of free speech function to inform policies and politics that ‘defend’ a whitened state against a racially darkened ‘enemy’ –

<sup>78</sup> Mill, *On Liberty*, pp. 9–10.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*.

<sup>82</sup> Zastoupil, *John Stuart Mill and India*, pp. 28–50.

not least by placing anti-racist and other activism outside the realm of legitimate participation in state politics. Mill's 'savage' or civilisational framework are not uniformly reproduced in later iterations of free speech advocacy – these latter iterations not only reproduce and extend, but also – especially through the figure of the 'cultural Marxist' – rearticulate the racialised rationality of free speech in new ways.

### **Infantile generation snowflake**

The trope of 'generation snowflake' – now in wide public circulation – centres on the figure of the young as weak, infantile, overly emotional, irrational, feminised, racialised, and/or deindividuated.<sup>83</sup> Generation snowflake is figured as a censorious threat to free speech but also a victim of infantilisation by policymakers, educators, and parents (and, in turn, as a threat to and/or marker of threatened national character).<sup>84</sup> In this way, the snowflake is a lesser and undeveloped human, but not always inhuman, and sometimes recoverable or developable.

In 2016, Claire Fox, a peer in the UK House of Lords and former Member of European Parliament, as well as director of the think tank Academy of Ideas, offered an early public articulation of 'generation snowflake'. Fox says younger generations are weaker than previous generations (here she introduces the temporality of decline) and lacking in the robustness required for free debate. Fox describes 'generation snowflake' as 'thin-skinned',<sup>85</sup> 'febrile',<sup>86</sup> 'fragile',<sup>87</sup> and 'too mollycoddled and infantilised for the rough and tumble of real life'.<sup>88</sup> According to Fox, weakness is joined with emotionality to cloud the judgement of generation snowflake and makes it unable to confront ideas or arguments as such (or as 'just words'). Instead, as Fox argues elsewhere, when faced with ideas and arguments they disagree with, generation snowflake becomes 'hysterical' and 'can't cope'.<sup>89</sup> Describing the reaction of some school students who objected to her views on sexual violence, Fox says, 'Some of the girls were sobbing and hugging each other ... while others shrieked'.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, describing a group of Muslim girls approaching her after another speech to express their disagreement with her views on Islam, Fox says that their emotional reactions prevented them from receiving her rational argument rationally.<sup>91</sup>

Here, Weber's developmental temporality is visible in the figuration of generation snowflake. Fox argues that members of 'generation snowflake' are underdeveloped, or wrongly developed, at the level of their individual life experiences. At the same time, by articulating this as generational and a departure from the trajectory of previous generations, Fox suggests this is a societal or national developmental problem. Concerns with 'the human' embodied in an individual rational mind are also present. Figuring the threat to free speech as generational deindividuates members of generation snowflake. When a younger person objects to Fox's speech, this objection is framed as part of a generational 'trend', rather than political expression by an individual with the capacity for thought or political agency.

Fox also racialises and genders the irrational 'snowflake' enemy of free speech by repeatedly associating it with Islam. Even when talking about non-Muslims, Fox uses the term 'offense

<sup>83</sup> As in Fox, *I Find That Offensive!*

<sup>84</sup> As in Lukianoff and Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind*; Marano, *A Nation of Wimps*.

<sup>85</sup> Fox, *I Find That Offensive!*, p. 7.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>89</sup> Claire Fox, 'Why today's young women are just so FEEBLE', *Mail Online* (9 June 2016), available at: {<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3632119/Why-today-s-young-women-just-FEEBLE-t-cope-ideas-challenge-right-view-world-says-academic.html>} accessed 20 February 2021.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Fox, *I Find That Offensive!*, pp. 6–7.

fatwas' to associate what she sees as over-emotional irrationality with Islam more broadly.<sup>92</sup> In the story above, Fox also draws on misogynist tropes of shrieking and hysteria. She combines these with racialisation and deindividualisation into the ultimate 'snowflakes': a group of emotional and irrational Muslim girls.

The figuration of 'generation snowflake' informs a particular political response, as illustrated by Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt's influential *The Coddling of the American Mind*. Drawing on a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy based psychological approach, Lukianoff and Haidt not only analyse generation snowflake, but set out a programme to address the threat posed by 'snowflakes' to free speech. The programme draws on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy techniques, along with metaphors of free debate as a 'mental gymnasium' or boxing ring.<sup>93</sup> They argue that young people need to participate in debate as they would a gym or sparring session, in order to develop their strength for debate and disagreement, and to stop seeing themselves as weak. In the spirit of this argument, Haidt founded and now codirects the impactful US free speech organisation Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, which supports legal action against US universities for perceived free speech violations (among other activities).

In contrast to Fox, Lukianoff and Haidt reindividualise generation snowflake. Yet the effects are equally depoliticising. By suggesting the maldevelopment of generation snowflake can be corrected through individual psychological redevelopment, Lukianoff and Haidt further deny the rational thought and political agency of generation snowflake: they do not see collective youth organising as political expression, instead figuring it as an individualised psychological problem. They thus legitimise an interventionist, individualised, and pathologised response to opposition to right-wing politics.<sup>94</sup>

In all these ways, the figuration of 'generation snowflake' echoes Mill's account of the 'savage' and those who 'lack the maturity of their faculties'.<sup>95</sup> Unlike Mill's savage, however, 'generation snowflake' is also sometimes a victim of indoctrination. Yet like Mill's 'savage', 'snowflakes' are often seen as developable. This may be because 'the snowflake' is associated with universities, which are, in turn, associated with whiteness, proximity to the state and access to institutions. Overall, however, in the absence of such development or assimilation, 'generation snowflake' is infantilised and depoliticised.

### ***The criminal, animalistic, and subhuman 'mob'***

The trope of 'the mob' figures the enemies of free speech as animalistic, criminal, and often blackened. Here, I discuss the blackened animality, criminality, and threat to security of 'the mob', before showing how, as with the snowflake, opponents of right-wing free speech advocates are articulated as irrational, deindividualised, depoliticised. Unlike the snowflake, however, I suggest that the mob appears as entirely subhuman, threatening and unassimilable within the terms of free speech. I begin by discussing the blackened BLM 'mob', then consider the more generic 'social justice mob'.

As illustrated by the Trump speech with which this article opened, 'the mob' is often associated with anti-racist protesters, especially BLM and the removal or destruction of statues. When BLM protests and statue removal took place in mid-2020, UK and US governments framed their responses not as related to the politics of racism or antiracism, but with the rhetoric of free speech. BLM protestors were figured as a censorious 'mob'. The 'mob' figured by UK and US governments in response to BLM was dehumanised and depoliticised through two key figurative moves.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>93</sup>As in Lukianoff and Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind*, p. 18.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Mill, *On Liberty*, pp. 9–10.

First, ‘the mob’ was repeatedly articulated as animalistic and irrational. For example, then UK Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Robert Jenrick, called protestors ‘a baying mob’,<sup>96</sup> equating BLM protestors with animals (‘baying’ is a noise made by a pack of dogs). This directly echoes the white supremacist articulation of blackness as animalistic described by Jackson. Jenrick’s bestialisation of BLM also figures the political expression of opposition to racism – including the toppling of statues – as a noise unintelligible to humans. Dehumanisation and animalisation were further expressed through claims that BLM protestors were unable or unwilling to express their dissent through rational and civilised state channels. For example, Jenrick argued that ‘what has stood for generations should be *considered thoughtfully*, not removed on a whim’,<sup>97</sup> as if BLM protestors had not ‘thought’ or ‘considered’ their actions but instead acted on some animalistic urge.

Second, the mob was repeatedly figured as criminal. UK Secretary of State Priti Patel and Trump both reduced the protests to criminal acts, rarely mentioning BLM by name or even using the words ‘race’ or ‘protest’. Trump (2020) variously called BLM protestors a ‘mob’, ‘vandals’, ‘violent extremists’, and arsonists, advocating ‘the full force of the law’ in response.<sup>98</sup> Patel similarly called the BLM protests ‘hooliganism and thuggery’.<sup>99</sup> Criminalising the protests in this way not only evoked stereotypes of working class and Black criminality, but also places interactions between the state and BLM within the realms of criminal justice or exceptional security, rather than politics.

The enemy of free speech is not figured as ‘the mob’ solely in response to BLM protests. The term is also applied to left-wing activists or ‘social justice warriors’ more broadly.<sup>100</sup> For example, students protesting right-wing free speech advocates visiting campuses across the UK and US are often figured as ‘mobs’ threatening free speech.<sup>101</sup> Here, the racialisation of the enemy of free speech by free speech activists functions in complex ways. While these mobs may not be blackened or otherwise racialised in the same way as BLM protestors, they may be implicitly racialised via their articulation as animalistic, irrational, and uncivilised. At the same time, the naming of these ‘social justice mobs’ as such avoids naming the politics of the groups the figure of ‘the mob’ is claimed to represent, which are often anti-racist or Black politics. In this way, race is evoked to further criminalise the mob, or goes unnamed in order to depoliticise opposition to racism. However, this does not mean the joining of blackness and animality in the trope of ‘the mob’ affects all those targeted by free speech activists equally. For example, while a majority white student anti-racist group may be described as an animalistic mob by free speech activists, they may also be figured as ‘snowflakes’, and it is unlikely that they will be responded to with the same state violence as, for example, the majority black participants in a BLM protest. Images of the white ‘mob’ – from KKK lynching to the ‘storming’ of the US Capitol building in 2021 – further complicate and extend this picture. Perhaps the ‘mob’ must be blackened to be fully criminalised and securitised. It is also possible that applying the language of the ‘mob’ to white supremacist violent risks naming animality or incivility rather than white supremacy as ‘the problem’.

<sup>96</sup>Cited in ‘Statues to get protection from “baying mobs”’, *BBC News* (17 January 2021), available at: {<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-55693020>} accessed 20 March 2021.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

<sup>98</sup>Trump, ‘Speech at Mount Rushmore’.

<sup>99</sup>Speech to UK Conservative Party Conference 2020, cited in Patrick Daly, ‘Priti Patel slams XR and BLM activists for “hooliganism and thuggery” during protests’, *The Scotsman* (4 October 2020), available at: {<https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/priti-patel-slams-xr-and-blm-activists-hooliganism-and-thuggery-during-protests-2992424>} accessed 20 April 2021.

<sup>100</sup>See, for example, by Stella Morabito, ‘What to learn from the social justice warrior who was eaten by his own mob’, *The Federalist* (18 July 2018), available at: {<https://thefederalist.com/2018/07/18/learn-social-justice-warrior-eaten-mob/>} accessed 20 April 2021.

<sup>101</sup>See, for example, by Mathew Goodwin, ‘Mob rule is crushing free speech on campus’, *The Times* (30 June 2019), available at: {<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/mob-rule-is-crushing-free-speech-on-campus-30269p6q9>} accessed 20 March 2021.

Finally, the figuration of the ‘social justice mob’ as emerging in universities illustrates the overlapping of different figurations of free speech’s enemies – in this case ‘the mob’ and ‘the snowflake’. Often both tropes are mobilised simultaneously and in interconnected ways. Both deindividualise and depoliticise the political opponents of right-wing free speech activists. Both deny some degree of humanity, civilisation, and development among those opponents, with a focus on their lack of capacity for rational thought, rational discussion, or political subjecthood. However, while generation snowflake is brought into the realm of psychology (articulated as over-emotional), the mob is situated in the realm of criminality and security (articulated as violent and threatening). While the snowflake is articulated as vulnerable, the mob is articulated as threatening. In these ways, while both the snowflake and the mob can be understood in relation to Mill’s civilisational hierarchy, they are located differently within this hierarchy. Generation snowflake is articulated as a lesser human threat to national character or progress and in need of rescue or development (in need of CBT); the mob is articulated as subhuman and undevelopable threats to the rule of law (in need of incarceration or a military response).

### **The extra-human ‘cultural Marxist’**

The trope of ‘cultural Marxism’ articulates a behind-the-scenes international conspiracy of Jewish intellectuals who are taking over liberal institutions and replacing free speech with indoctrination.<sup>102</sup> This section shows how figurations of the enemy of free speech as a ‘cultural Marxist’ rely on pre-existing antisemitic tropes of Jews as scheming, rich, and power-hungry. I argue that the ‘cultural Marxist’ is figured as extra-human and hyper-modern in its organisation and power, and as such as a threat to national sovereignty and state institutions.

To understand the figuration of ‘cultural Marxism’ it is necessary to understand how this figure is deployed across ‘fringe’ neo-Nazi and alt-right groups (e.g., it formed part of Norwegian mass shooter Anders Breivik’s manifesto),<sup>103</sup> as well as ‘mainstream’ party politics (described below). The term originates with an explicit naming of cultural Marxists as Jews, and builds on an antisemitic tradition that paints Jews as dangerous intellectuals or Bolsheviks, wandering and thus disloyal to states, and/or controlling or taking over world politics.<sup>104</sup> Elected officials and lobbyists, however, tend to omit mentioning this heritage of the term or explicitly naming Jews, even while all other elements of the far right conspiracy theory remain intact. In this way, ‘cultural Marxism’ functions as a ‘dog whistle’ through which antisemitism is expressed in state politics in a plausibly deniable way.<sup>105</sup>

A 2019 speech by Member of the UK Parliament and free speech advocate Suella Braverman captures the way that ‘cultural Marxists’ are figured as enemies of free speech.<sup>106</sup> Braverman argues that, as a result of the overwhelming aims and power of ‘cultural Marxists’, ‘banning things is becoming de rigueur’, ‘freedom of speech is becoming a taboo’ and ‘our universities ... are being shrouded in censorship and a culture of no-platforming’.<sup>107</sup> This cultural Marxist takeover

<sup>102</sup>Tanner Mirrlees, ‘The Alt-Right’s discourse on “cultural Marxism”, *Atlantis*, 39:1 (2018), pp. 49–69.

<sup>103</sup>Andrew Berwick, *A European Declaration of Independence* (2011). This is searchable online but, following Sarah Ahmed’s politics of citation, I decline to link to it here. See Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017). A survey of white supremacist texts deploying the trope of ‘cultural Marxism’, including Berwick’s manifesto, can be found in Mirrlees, ‘The Alt-Right’s discourse on “cultural Marxism”’.

<sup>104</sup>Bill Berkowitz, ‘Cultural Marxism Catching On’, Southern Poverty Law Centre (15 August 2003), available at: {<https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2003/cultural-marxism-catching>} accessed 20 April 2021.

<sup>105</sup>For an analysis of this process, illustrated by a case study of the Australian far right, see Rachel Busbridge, Benjamin Moffitt, and Joshua Thorburn, ‘Cultural Marxism: Far-right conspiracy theory in Australia’s culture wars’, *Social Identities*, 26:6 (2020), pp. 722–38.

<sup>106</sup>Cited in Peter Walker, ‘Tory MP criticised for using antisemitic term “cultural Marxism”’, *The Guardian* (26 March 2019), available at: {<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2019/mar/26/tory-mp-criticised-for-using-antisemitic-term-cultural-marxism>} accessed 20 March 2021.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid.

was, for Braverman, ‘absolutely damaging for our spirit as British people, and our genius, whether it’s for innovation and science, or culture and civilisation ... for statecraft’.<sup>108</sup> As such, Braverman argues, ‘Conservatives are engaged in a battle’ against these enemies.<sup>109</sup> A similar enemy of free speech was also figured by Trump at Mount Rushmore, as taking over ‘our schools, our news-rooms, even our corporate boardrooms’.

Here, ‘cultural Marxists’ are viewed not simply as the political opponents of right-wing free speech advocates, but rather – via their imagined threat to free speech – as the enemies of the British nation and civilisation. In addition to being seen as disloyal threats to nationhood, and as power-hungry or scheming, they are attributed the power and coordination necessary to take over state institutions (rather than, for example, being seen as relatively limited and disempowered student, left wing, or Jewish groups).<sup>110</sup>

Once again, the relationships between different figurations of free speech’s enemies are blurry. Is the cultural Marxist preying on vulnerable ‘snowflake’ youth, or creating them through a censorious orthodoxy? Are the same ‘coddled’ university students also predatory ‘cultural Marxists’? For example, Braverman accused cultural Marxists of ‘putting everyone in cotton wool’, arguing that ‘a risk-averse mentality is now taking over’.<sup>111</sup> ‘Cotton wool’ is often, as it is for Fox, a signifier of ‘generation snowflake’.<sup>112</sup> There is no one specific manifestation of the relationship of ‘cultural Marxism’ to other enemies of free speech: a range of narratives attendant to each circulate between and are combined multiply by right-wing free speech advocates. This echoes Weber’s account of the complex interrelated developmental temporalities of figuration.

In all these ways, like the ‘snowflake’ and ‘mob’, the ‘Cultural Marxist’ is deindividualised, figured not as a human individual but a mass conspiracy. However, unlike the ‘snowflake’ and ‘mob’, the ‘Cultural Marxist’ is represented as hyper-rational and over-intelligent, rather than irrational or incapable of thought. The cultural Marxist is not a ‘normal’ rational human citizen-subject, but nor is this enemy a vulnerable infant or subhuman (despite sometimes overlapping or connecting with vulnerable youth and ‘snowflakes’). Instead, this enemy of free speech is figured as extra-human, hyper-strategic, and hyper-influential. The location of the ‘cultural Marxist’ does not appear within Weber’s analysis of developmental temporality or Jackson’s analysis of the human. Nor is it discussed by Mill in relation to civilisation. Instead, contemporary figurations of ‘cultural Marxism’ extend the developmental temporality with which racialised degrees of humanity are articulated into a distorted and threatening futurity.

## Conclusion

This article has shown that Mill’s civilisational framework for free speech – embodied in his figuration of ‘the savage’ – is reproduced and rearticulated in contemporary free speech advocates’ articulation of their enemies. The ‘snowflake’, ‘mob’, and ‘cultural Marxist’ are all figured through and/or extend this framework. The article has further argued that the figuration of the enemies of free speech as ‘generation snowflake’, ‘the mob’, and ‘cultural Marxism’ authorise right-wing free speech advocates’ policymaking, depoliticise their opponents, and/or underwrite racialised hierarchies. Before closing, I now consider some possible implications of this analysis. First, for the populations which figured enemies are claimed to represent. Second, for researching free speech advocacy beyond right-wing electoral expressions in the UK and US.

As Weber (2016) describes, figures do not correspond to the lived experience of subjects. In fact, this article has observed how right-wing free speech advocates often apply ‘generation

<sup>108</sup>Ibid.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid.

<sup>110</sup>Berkowitz, ‘Cultural Marxism Catching On’; Mirrlees, ‘The Alt-right’s discourse on “cultural Marxism”’; Moffitt and Thorburn, ‘Cultural Marxism’.

<sup>111</sup>Moffitt and Thorburn, ‘Cultural Marxism’.

<sup>112</sup>Fox, *I Find That Offensive!*, p. 31.

snowflake’, ‘the mob’, and ‘the cultural Marxist’ (or aspects of these figures) to the very same populations. This is clear in free speech advocates’ opposition to BLM protestors, who are imagined both as ‘the mob’ and as a ‘cultural Marxist’ takeover. Similarly, university students are framed as both sensitive ‘snowflake’ victims, and a ‘censorious Marxist mob’ stifling free expression. Given that each figure comes with its own political logic and implications – for example, rescue, development or incarceration/securitisation – it is possible that how and when populations are figured as a particular ‘enemy’ reflects the broader (often racialised) politics of free speech advocates in relation to those populations. This would account for the shifting and multiply applied figurations of free speech’s enemies by free speech advocates depending on the context.

While figurations do not correspond to the lived lives of subjects, the populations that figures are claimed to represent may engage – or be forced to engage – the process of figuration. According to Weber, particular figurations may be inhabited performatively and intentionally or forcibly. For example, Weber suggests that some “‘homosexuals” welcome the opportunity to inhabit the image of the “LGBT rights holder””, while others may find this figure constraining and/or inaccessible. In a very different context, some Black Studies scholars argue that wilfully embracing uncivility, the non-human and animality may be an opportunity for political solidarity, agency, and organising.<sup>113</sup> They note, however, that this comes with risks in a context where the figuration of black people as subhuman is enforced, and might be co-opted, as a core function of white supremacist violence. With regards to the enemies of free speech, it is likely that the location of a figure within a civilisational framework determines, to some degree, the costs and opportunities embracing that figure represents: a Black activist embracing the criminality of ‘the mob’ may find themselves at greater risk than, for example, a white activist embracing that same figure, or of either embracing the (potentially whitened) category of ‘generation snowflake’. At the same time, perhaps the same outsider status of ‘the mob’, which legitimises violence may also make it a politically potent and disruptive category. The question of whether or how the figures of ‘generation snowflake’, ‘the mob’, and/or ‘cultural Marxism’ might be embraced or inhabited remains open.

Finally, what does this article’s analysis of free speech’s enemies mean for how we understand free speech advocacy more broadly? The article has focused on right-wing conservative, libertarian, and populist elected politicians and lobbyists in the UK and US. This focus reflects the increasing dominance and influence of right-wing free speech politics in the Global North today, which has not been accounted for by research in IR that tends to view free speech as solely a public good, human right, and/or matter of international law. This leaves a wide range of contemporary free speech advocacy unexamined. In the US and UK, this includes both those who identify as neo-Nazis or overt white supremacists and as left wing (notable examples of the latter in the US are academics facing university censure for criticism of the state of Israel or use of ‘Critical Race Theory’). In other countries, it includes movements countering state censorship, such as journalists and academics in Turkey, or religious minorities in China. In contrast to the right-wing free speech advocates examined here, who often have disproportionately large public platforms despite their claims to being victims of free speech’s enemies, some of these other free speech advocates face severe, even carceral or lethal, penalties for advocating free speech.

While the specifics of these varied cases put them beyond the scope of this article, and it is absolutely not my intention to homogenise or dismiss all free speech advocacy, the article nonetheless raises questions free speech advocacy beyond its right-wing electoral expression in the US and UK. At the very least, the article calls into question the framework of human rights, international law, and norm diffusion as the de facto sole lens through which all free speech advocacy must be viewed. As I describe above, though such a lens might usefully assess free speech

<sup>113</sup>Jackson, *Becoming Human*; Bénédicte Boisseron, *Afro-Dog*.



advocacy as more or less successful or disingenuous, it fails to capture the potentially productive function of such advocacy within global racial hierarchies. More specifically, without foreclosing the answer, the article raises the question of whether and how free speech advocates beyond UK and US right-wing advocacy figure, racialise and/or (de)humanise their enemies. For those working within Mill's legacy – which includes not only right-wing advocacy but also liberal multiculturalism and 'equality and diversity' agendas<sup>114</sup> – the question is raised as to whether and how Mill's 'savage' and civilisational rationality persist or, perhaps, can be resisted.

In these ways, this article expands and updates the small IR literature on free speech that has focused primarily on human rights diffusion, international law, and/or 'progressive' advocacy for free speech. It does so empirically, by examining recent right-wing free speech advocacy in the US and UK that often explicitly opposes human rights and international law. It does so methodologically, by addressing how free speech advocates figure the enemies of free speech, including how those enemies are racialised as human, subhuman, or extra-human. This shifts the analysis of free speech away from instrumental questions about rights implementation towards discursive and political ones. Free speech becomes visible as integral to a range of core IR concerns, not least (in Mill's account) sovereignty and (in Trump's account) national security. Free speech's enemies become located among the constitutive figures of international politics.

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<sup>114</sup>I explore the question of multicultural policies and note its relevance to safer spaces activism elsewhere. Leigh, 'The settler coloniality of free speech'.