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Masculinity in 2016 Presidential American Election: *The Purge: Election Year (2016)* as a Case Study

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ABSTRACT. *The Purge: Election Year* (2016) is an American action horror film released on July 1, 2016, written and directed by James DeMonaco. It portrays Senator Charlie Roan, candidate to the presidential election, and her struggle to win the NFFA, led by Minister Edwidge Owens. It is set in the near future, specifically in 2040. Its date of release coincides with the real presidential election celebrated in the United States, in which the candidate Donald Trump became the new President of the country. Thus, this remarkable event and the production of the film are not a coincidence, since a variety of horror movies were created as a consequence of the disputed 2016 US presidential election, as well as due to Trump's ideology, which highlights the legitimisation of a hegemonic masculinity and traditional gender roles. Trump's Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton, played an important role in this election, as far as she was a female candidate, which could be considered an outstanding circumstance, and a tough adversary to win. Therefore, it is essential that masculinity be taken into account in order to understand the election's results. Even though *The Purge: Election Year* has been examined from different perspectives, previous research has never centred its investigation in the similarities between Owens' and Roan's masculinity and the real candidates' performative acts. Thus, the present work will focus on examining these two relevant politicians, both in the film and in reality, in order to prove the continuing existence of a hegemonic discourse of masculinity in the 21st century and onwards.

Key words: hegemonic masculinity, toxic masculinity, white masculinity, femininity, female masculinity.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Portrayal of American Horror through Minister Owens’ Performative Acts.....	3
3. Displaced Gender Performativity in Senator Charlie Roan.....	9
4. Senator Roan Fights a Double-bind.....	11
5. Conclusion.....	13
6. Works Cited.....	15

1. Introduction

The Purge: Election Year (2016) is the third instalment in *The Purge* franchise and the sequel to *The Purge: Anarchy*. In this film, the representation of different masculinities, especially those performed by the two presidential candidates, is crucial to highlight the hegemonic discourse and its transgression. The hegemonic masculinity is based on a dominant discourse and cultural practices which are legitimised by state apparatuses (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 831). This term is used to justify the dominant position of men over women in society. Hence, gender influences one's position in society, especially in the labour market (834).

Recognised scholars have studied the connection between gender and Elections, specifically the 2016 American presidential election. Kelly Wilz explores the unfairness of the attacks directed to female politicians and their tendency to be diminished by a process of objectification. Moreover, she examines Clinton's sexist accusations against Trump (2016). However, she asserts that criticism is not always rooted in gender prejudice (2016, 559). On the contrary, Dustin Harp confirms Trump's and anti-Clinton voters' misogynistic behaviour against the female politician and analyses their ideological struggle in the public sphere (2018). Michael M. Albrecht also focuses on gendered violence and the legitimisation of a neutral political discourse which allows misogyny (2017). The factors that may have affected voting behaviour in the US 2016 presidential election have also been examined. They result to have their root not only in political ideology, but also in gender performativity (Ratliff et.al, 2019; Simirnova, 2018). *The Purge: Election Year* has been studied mainly from the economic and racial perspectives in the neoliberal US (Armstrong, 2019; Mann 2018, 188-189) and from dystopianism (Neagu, 2017). However, the two main politicians, Minister Edwidge Owens and Senator Charlie Roan, have been identified as representatives of the real candidates, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton (Lauer 2016, 46). Despite the fact that gender identity in the 2016 US presidential election has been a controversial and deeply disputed subject within the field of cultural studies, any approach has examined Senator Roan's and Minister Owens' performance of masculinity in *The Purge: Election Year* and its correspondence with the real politicians' performative acts. Therefore, how are Owens' and Roan's masculinity portrayed in this film? Although there is a representation of a remaining Trump's traditional ideology, emphasised by horror fiction, hegemonic, toxic, and white masculinity, this movie also promotes a transgression of these notions and presents other types of masculinities through the triumphant female candidate.

Although this film is set in a future dystopic context, separating women and men in different spheres is still culturally acceptable. In other words, it decodes this gender discourse by legitimising the same gender roles that were established a century ago. Therefore, a patriarchal system controls society not only in the past and present, but also in the future. Trump's Republican ideas, as well as Owens' ideology as a New Founding Father of America (DeMonaco 2016, 0:03:02), are closely connected to the legitimisation of this type of society. It is believed that "[t]he Right . . . fears toxic masculinity because *they*¹ are the representatives of toxically masculine values and practices" (Sculos 2017, 2), which would include: a "parochial patriarchal sense of male role as breadwinner and autocrat of the family[,] a tendency towards or glorification of violence . . ., chauvinism . . ., misogyny . . ., rigid conceptions of sexual/gender identity and roles, heteronormativity . . . [and] objectification of women" (1). It is important that the notion of "toxic straight white masculinity" (Salter and Blodgett 2017, 5) be taken into consideration, as it is represented by the real President of the US and by Minister Owens in the film. It seems to be the praised masculinity in the film, which encourages people to think that white men are the real victims and the oppressed minority in society. Moreover, this type of masculinity blames women's progression in gaining rights for men's supposed demasculinisation (Ferber 2000, 41-46). Consequently, white toxic masculinity could be referred to as all types of beliefs or behaviours which would be harmful not only to men, but also to women, children, and society in broader terms (Connell 2001, 26). However, the aftermath of the real 2016 Election is challenged by this horror film. It approaches not only aspects related to "symbolic violence" and "war on terror" (Faludi 2007, 5), but also to "hegemonic masculinity" (Messerschmidt 2018, 39) and its transgression, "toxic masculinity" (Connell 2001, 26), "white masculinity" (Robinson 2000, 36), and "female masculinity" (Halberstam 2018, 16).

The appearance of an opponent as Hillary Clinton, in the real Election, or Roan, in the film, provokes a shift of these ancient roles. Although femininity in these female politicians is clearly performed and contributes to the hegemonic discourse concerning women's behaviour, they also enact female masculinity. Both female politicians portray a new overview of masculine identities and behaviours, which are linked to their "performativity" (Butler 2004, 198). In this case, their identity may "not reduce down to the male body" (Halberstam 2018, 16). However, "[f]emale masculinities are framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing" (16). Therefore,

¹ My emphasis

Donald Trump's ideology and construction of masculinity became a pivotal element. He influenced the production of movies devoted to the possible consequences of his political, social, and philosophical views, causing the subsequent merging of the so called "Trumpism" (Kellner 2017, 65). This notion may relate *The Purge: Election Year* to the military campaign of "War on Terror" launched by the US government after the 9/11 terrorist attack (Faludi, 2007, 14). What is more, this bears a connection with governments which used this campaign in order to encode and legitimise symbolic and structural power in society, which is clearly represented in this dystopic film.

Hence, the aim of this paper is to prove that, since Roan represents Clinton and Owens represents Trump, these characters perform different types of masculinity which depend on the hegemonic discourse and the cultural practices associated to it. The main reason for this scope is that the analysis of their masculinities is unique, taking into account the different masculinities created during the 2016 election campaign, directly associated to these two major public figures. Thus, this essay has been organised in different sections concerning Roan's and Owens' masculinity. The first one will be devoted to the context of American horror movies and Trump's influence in the creation of *The Purge: Election Year*. Moreover, it will examine Owens' characterisation, including the portrayal of hegemonic and white toxic masculinity in this candidate. Then, the next part will present Senator Roan as the Hillary Clinton of the future, together with her feminine traits. Finally, the last section of the paper will analyse her performance of female masculinity, as she is perceived to perform cultural practices associated to women, but also to men. What is more, this essay does not only analyse all these aspects related to the two candidates, but it also provides examples and evidences extracted from *The Purge: Election Year*.

2. Portrayal of American Horror through Minister Owens' Performative Acts

"For over a decade, contemporary horror cinema has been awash with images of poverty and desperation [in] the aftermath of the financial crisis and the Great Recession" (Mann 2018, 188). These horror productions usually follow the tradition of the dystopian world originated after 9/11, in which cultural fears and anxieties are globally used to portray what society understands about the neighbouring world (Neagu 2017, 240). This is clearly represented in "*The Purge: Election Year* (2016), . . . by far the most disquieting, unnerving and traumatizing expression of global dystopianism in its most 'flamboyant' psychotic form" (244). The film also "read[s] against the Americans' morbid obsession with gun power, the mass shootings,

social injustice warrior phenomenon and the extremes of the ongoing presidential elections” (245). This systematic oppression provoked an increase in cinematographic productions encoding discourses of capitalist apocalypse –caused by self-consumption, immigration, and the war on terror– (Mann 2018, 188). *The Purge: Election Year* belongs to the “home invasion” (Patts and Clasen 2017, 13) genre because it “use[s] horror to draw attention to social and fiscal inequality in the years after financial catastrophe” (Mann 2018, 194). Thus, the film may be understood as an urge for recognising social problems and for tackling them. It is a “reminder that behind the seemingly idyllic surface, [what is mostly found is] paranoia, fear, and aggression” (Sederholm 2017, 4). This results in a racialised American “imagined community” (Anderson 1991, 7) justified and legitimised in the film by the NFFA (The New Founding Fathers of America). Hence, this dystopic film makes use of horror to make the audience aware of the social evils America is facing today.

State and bureaucracy exert their power and control through what is known as “symbolic violence” (Thapar-Björkert, Samelius, and Sanghera 2016, 148). The representation of the state in American horror movies perpetuates this idea. Its identity is resisted or produced and motivated by “forms of violence, domination, denigration, and exclusion in everyday affairs that go unnoticed” (Topper 2001, 42). These unconscious patterns of domination are enhanced by a “collective misrecognition” (37), which persistently creates, perpetuates, and legitimises hegemonic discourses. Thus, state apparatuses determine human understanding and perceptions (Diamond and Allcorn 2006, 60) and make people exert both symbolic and physical violence as something natural or acceptable. For instance, “*The Purge* franchise could be understood as a . . . theorisation of neoliberalism and the structural violence of inequality in the United States that presents a dystopic view of governance and the possibilities for resistance therein” (Armstrong 2019, 5). However, in the film, both symbolic and physical violence are enacted by the state, including the two presidential candidates. This is easily perceived in the image of Lincoln’s memorial surrounded by dead bodies and blood (DeMonaco 2016, 0:24:21), maybe a metaphoric destruction of what Lincoln symbolises. Additionally, Senator Roan desires to destroy the System through it, without exercising violence (1:11:37), but, ironically, she exerts symbolic and physical violence to achieve such change (0:50:09). Consequently, American horror films portray how social anxieties and fears are legitimised by coercion by state apparatuses.

When Donald Trump became victorious in the US 2016 presidential election, certain fears and worries and their manipulation could have been decisive to gain political profits. This misuse of power may put justice, democracy, civility, and morality at stake. Thus, for many

Americans, “[t]he election of Donald J. Trump was an American Nightmare and stunning shock to the political system and body politic unparalleled in recent history” (Kellner 2017, 171). A sense of panic and anxiety spread all over the country and served as a source of inspiration for filmic scenes of catastrophic incidents. For instance, the first television series which concentrates on the aftermath of Trump’s victory is *American Horror Story: Cult* (2017), the seventh season of the television series *American Horror Story*. In *The Purge: Election Year*, this sense of “conscious and unconscious needs for containment of members’ anxieties of uncertainty, division, and conflict” (Diamond and Allcorn 2006, 60–61) is also perceived. Therefore, this dystopic film might have foreseen the results Trump’s election as the new President of the US may have brought to the country.

In 2016, “the first [presidential] election between a man and a woman in the United States history” (Ratliff et.al 2019, 589) took place. The outcome of this election reflects a reconstruction of social markers of masculinity. The main exponent of the legitimised masculinity in the US at the time is Trump, featured by a hegemonic white toxic masculinity. Besides, in *The Purge: Election Year*, Minister Owens portrays almost everything concerned with Trump’s ideology, as well as his social and political attitudes, although taken even more to the extreme. They treat “masculinity as a vehicle for power [that] justifies patriarchy, chauvinism, misogyny, homophobia, and racism as legitimation tools to justify [their] current or aspirational power” (Smirnova 2018, 14). Thus, hegemonic masculinity could be perceived as the set of discursive practices which would lead to criminal behaviour.

White supremacists promote a hierarchical distribution in society based on race and the naturalisation of difference. Both Trump’s and Owens’ “angry white men” (Kimmel 2013, 36) discourse reflect this idea. They fight for their political representation, rejecting others and understanding gender and race in terms of binary oppositions. They encourage the victimisation of the white race and justify their behaviours against immigrants and other non-whites, as the latter are perceived by these supremacists as a threat to national integrity. In addition, this sense of otherness is emphasised by their conviction that non-whites are the source of the country’s weakness and precarity (DeMonaco 2016, 0:03:02; 0:06:17). In the film, the NFFA believes in this victimisation and takes radical measures to transform the supposed marginalisation. This radicality is emphasised by the corruption of the political system (0:28:57; 0:34:47). The appearance of a group of neo-Nazi mercenaries sent by the NFFA to kill Roan (0:34:45) may be considered an attempt against democracy and, at the same time, it could represent the idea of racial purity claimed by both the NFFA and Trump. Hence, this military force stands for the masculinity and heterogeneity of the nation. This statement is highlighted by the fact that the

US government just seeks for the powerful, rich, and white people, especially men (0:42:11; Kimmel 2013, 203). Nevertheless, at the end of the film, the leader of this white militia is killed (DeMonaco 2016, 1:41:01), symbolising the triumph of Roan's ideals. From this point on, it seems that the majority of the population abandons violence for reason and votes for Roan to become the President. Yet, the remaining "NFFA supporters [reach] violently to this defeat. They [burn] cars, [break] windows, [loot], and [attack] police officers" (1:43:50). Therefore, a feminised political apparatus is preferred in the film, which implicates the challenge and transgression of patriarchal values and discourses. Indeed, it could be considered a suggestion directed to the real Americans to eradicate social anxieties, which may be primarily caused by Trump's policies.

Trump, as well as Minister Owens, articulate aspects of both hegemonic and white toxic masculinity. In *The Purge: Election Year* it is Owens who legitimises the contemporary "white supremacist discourse" (Kimmel 2013, 264), as the representative of the NFFA. It is an organisation directed by white men, in which responsibilities are rigidly separated by gender (DeMonaco 2016, 0:05:37; 1:28:31). Hence, gender, even in 2040, is still a factor that influences voters. The NFFA depicts men's protection of women as necessary, becoming the paternal protectors of the community they belong to, in which gender relations are at the centre of the discourse (1:28:19). Therefore, this supremacist discourse could be considered a response to the second-wave feminism –with Clinton as her main representative–, due to the objections it has claimed against traditional gender identities (Ferber 2017, 36). Moreover, conservatives consider this counterdiscourse a threat to men's masculinity (46). In this way, Trump's and Owens' use of vulgar remarks and female criticism might rely on their desire to reinforce and emphasise their masculinity and gender stereotypes (Harp 2018, 200). In fact, "Trump refers to women as "them", "pussy", and "bitch", linguistic strategies that dehumanize, sexualize and objectify women" (Smirnova 2018, 12). Consequently, white supremacists try to exhibit their masculinity by legitimising a masculine dominant control, charisma, and superego and by emphasising their role in protecting the white race, especially white women.

To some extent, the members of the NFFA also address women with such vocabulary, specifically when referring to Senator Roan. In fact, Caleb Warren (DeMonaco 2016, 0:04:01), the current President of the US, typifies the idea that "[m]asculine codes are still deeply embedded within political discourse" (Wilz 2016, 359). Although he would be the main representative of this style of communication, both Owens and the NFFA legitimise it. This is easily perceived at the beginning of the film, when the leaders of the NFFA meet to balance the political situation of the country (DeMonaco 2016, 0:04:05). Here, Warren refers to Roan as

“the cunt” several times (0:04:24;0:05:27) and her party as a group of “idealistic pigs” (4:04:58) and “cocksuckers” (0:05:23). This language objectifies her as a woman and, at the same time, he emphasises his “hypermasculinity” (Messerschmidt 2018, 73), seeing women as inferior beings who are not able to apply for the same positions as men. In addition, in the first debate in which Roan and Owens discuss why they should become elected, Owens’ gestures and discourses already seemed familiar to the public. He reproduces the communicative strategies Donald Trump adopts in his speeches. Both candidates use “the discursive construction of whiteness and hegemonic masculinity . . . in contexts where blackness and femininity . . . are overtly mentioned” (Bucholtz 1999, 447; 0:06:26). Thus, it is suitable “to identify toxic masculinity as central to Trump’s appeal . . . [and] to label him as a demagogue” (Johnson 2017, 1), a characteristic Owens shares with him. Demagogues motivate the public to recognise themselves as victims on account of precarity, enhancing the privileged members of society to assume victimhood at the price of those in the lower positions (2). This conception is portrayed in the film by Owens, who refers to *The Purge* as “the night that saved [the] country from economic ruin” (DeMonaco 2016, 0:06:17). Hence, they propagate “masculinist fantasies” (Johnson 2017, 6) which go against democracy, as they exclude minorities and women from the political, economic, and social equation. Thus, “the values and practices of capitalism [which] reproduce sexism and misogyny in all its various forms” (Sculos 2017, 5), “emblematic of some statements made by Trump . . . , enhance these effects, accentuating hiring bias against agentic female job candidates” (Ratliff et.al 2019, 579). Thus, gender is still an important factor that influences American society. Indeed, this statement is highlighted by Trump’s and the New Founding Fathers’ distinctive misogynistic rhetoric.

These two male candidates are also characterised by their sense of grandiosity. In connection to pastor Owens, Trump has also been depicted as a master of ceremonies, epitomizing “twenty-first century visual excess and hyperbole” (Hall, Goldstein, and Ingram 2016, 76). They make “hand movements such as beats or points that do not depict the social world but rather accentuate or illustrate the rhetorical structure of [their] speech” (74; DeMonaco 2016, 0:07:53; 1:22:04). For this reason, Trump is considered a “paragon of grandiosity” (Ahmadian, Azarshahi, and Paulhus 2017, 49), as his style has influenced not only the show business, but the whole economic world (49). His populist style, featured by grandiosity, dynamism, and informality, “may have ‘trumped’ a carefully-reasoned platform” (52). In addition, his pitch dynamics, together with his gesticulation, make him “deviat[e] from the gestural prescriptivism that has dominated the American political arena” (Hall, Goldstein, and Ingram 2016, 74). Trump’s exaggerated gesticulation, laugh, and mockery could be easily

recognised in Owens' speech. He portrays a psychotic identity (DeMonaco 2016, 1:24:00; 1:25:36) which could threaten his masculinity, as madness has been traditionally associated to women (Garde 2003, 8). In fact, purgers are referred as "crazies" (DeMonaco 2016, 0:35:02). Hence, the power of rationale dominates over "violently psychotic individuals" (Patts and Clasen 2017, 9; DeMonaco 2016, 1:42:18) who represent a "predatory capitalism where profit-making is the essence of democracy" (0:15:24). Consequently, an aggressive behaviour is spread over the country, mainly motivated by Owens' discourses and practices.

Trump and Owens own an entertainment value which makes them worth for their spectacle, against political correctness. Owens may possess this unconventionality in his speeches (1:39:22), whereas Roan, who "has threatened to dismantle everything . . . the New Founding Fathers have done" (1:28:01), might represent this traditional correctness (1:36:02). Both male candidates "[allow] misogyny and hegemonic masculinity to continue to operate unchallenged" (Albrecht 2017, 509), attracting even those who did not share their ideas. In the film, back people legitimise purging (DeMonaco 2016, 0:03:13; 0:43:50; 1:11:40), although *The Purge* was originally created to "sin, scour, sanitize and sterilize [the] souls until [whites] [were] free" (1:21:52) of those who hampered their supremacy. Moreover, the NFFA ritualises this practice with "instruments of destruction" (1:24:42), guns and knives, which emphasise the Founding Fathers' toxic masculinity. Thus, *The Purge: Election Year* reverses Trump's apparently comedic discourse of the pistol hand (Hall, Goldstein, and Ingram 2016, 80), projecting it as a reality. Owens tries to kill a real opponent (DeMonaco 2016, 1:29:40), holding a real gun (1:31:36). Hence, both male candidates adopt a set of norms and behaviours in their speech and cultural practices which encode toxicity. Nevertheless, they attract the public.

It is striking that the last words mentioned in the announcement of the Annual Purge commencement refer to America as a "nation reborn" (0:19:59). Their connection to the tag-line for this film, "Keep America Great", is considered a response to Trump's election as the President of the US under the slogan "Make America Great Again" (Johnson 2017, 13). This association between the NFFA and Trump's ideology is reinforced by the intention of the current President of the US to use the film's tag-line as his slogan for the 2020 US presidential election (Barnes 2018). It highlights "[e]conomic privilege and exclusion, with its intimate connection to racialised privilege and exclusion, determin[ing] the boundaries between full citizens and marginalised Others" (Armstrong 2019, 2). This also relates to Trump and Owens' voters, who may encode voting them as a masculine act, provoking the marginalisation of the other masculinities from the American community. Thus, the capitalist discourse is not only connected to gender identity, but also to racial identity.

3. Displaced Gender Performativity in Senator Charlie Roan

Men and women have been traditionally separated in different spheres of society, excluding women from the political sphere. Nowadays, the idea of a woman becoming a political candidate, occupying a job which is considered traditionally male, is much more accepted in Western societies than in the past (Gardiner 2012, 610). However, women still face significant impediments (Topić and Gilmer 2017, 2534). For instance, Hillary Clinton had to confront Trump's accusation that she was playing what is called the "woman card" when she accused him of sexism (Wilz 2016, 359). Gender performativity continues to be a key element among voters, as women must negotiate a "double bind of having to be appropriately feminine while still proving themselves competent according to criteria that is culturally coded as masculine" (Smirnova 2018, 10). Identity is thus performed (Butler 1998, 520), in this case, at work, by confirming but also fighting "gender stereotypes" (Dolan and Lynch 2016, 573) because what may be considered appropriate male behaviour for a man might not be considered so for a woman (Smirnova 2018, 10). Thus, male and female leaders are judged with different criteria, as "it is considerably more difficult for women leaders to navigate and perform their identities" (McGinley 2008, 711). Hillary Clinton, "the first career woman to serve as first lady" (716), encountered notable difficulties to perform her gender on the public sphere (Harp 2018, 203). She shows not only similarities, but also differences with Senator Roan. Both women are characterised by their agency, not guided by "others-oriented ways" (McGinley 2008, 714), which might pose a threat to those who had decided to adopt a traditionally established role. Regarding the two female politicians, they encode a "female masculinity" (Gardiner 2012, 607), and, as a consequence, a displaced gender performativity. They do not intend to "imitate an authentic male masculinity" (608). Consequently, the performance of gender becomes an essential factor regarding certain public positions.

As far as Roan is concerned, she is the Senator and leads other male politicians. Her position increases her power, highlighted by her right and duty to command. In fact, her agency is significantly perceived when she convinces Dante Bishop (DeMonaco 2016, 0:03:13), the leader of the black community, not to assassinate Minister Owens, as he wanted to help her win the Election and destroy The Purge (1:32:59). In this scene, she shows the power of persuasion characteristic of a leading politician. She also assumes the role of the breadwinner (0:38:35). She is an orphan, as her mother, father, and brother were killed in a previous Purge (0:01:33) and has neither husband nor children. However, she seems to be in a flirting relationship with Leo Barnes (0:08:01), her head of security (1:41:56). In this case, she also seems to assume the

leading role of the “relationship” (0:45:58), possibly owing to the position they were holding when they knew each other. Hence, although Roan is an independent and agentic woman, she is provided with Barnes’ protection. However, she takes an active role, performing as she desires, without taking into account social class or social judgement.

Her agency is also perceived in her debating skills against Owens (0:06:24) and communication skills with Leo Barnes (0:30:36). Concerning the debates, Roan makes use of irony when she introduces her opponent as “our great NFFA leader” (0:06:29). She also utters bad words which refer to Owens’ claims (0:06:24). This could be striking, as this type of language is perceived as manly oriented and makes her seem more masculine. Besides, although she is aware that the NFFA would make an attempt on her life in the upcoming Purge (0:34:45) and that Owen’s forceful arguments have an impact on the public (0:07:54), she lets her voice be heard. She intensifies her pitch dynamics to show she is not afraid of fighting for what she believes in (0:06:26; 0:07:08). Yet, a feminine gender performativity might be perceived in her speech, as she is able to speak her feelings out (0:38:30). In spite of that, she distances herself from the traditional image associated with women, as far as innocence and submissiveness are concerned. She declares Barnes “[she] [is] not an idiot. [She] know[s] what [he] is capable of. [She’s] the one who hired [him]. But if [she] see[s] something [she] [doesn’t] like, [she’s] not gonna be quiet about it. It is not in [her] nature” (0:38:35). This behaviour might be culturally unacceptable for women in hegemonic terms, since they are perceived as passive social agents with scarce rights and numerous duties. Women have been always thought to be biologically determined individuals (Miller and Costello 2001, 592-598). However, Roan tries to reverse this discourse. She highlights her agency by stressing her power regarding bureaucratic decisions, by expressing her beliefs, and by being convinced of her political potential. Moreover, she is a working and decided woman who aspires to become the next President of the US. Therefore, she changes the gender paradigm through her speeches and epitomises a new role of femininity.

Additionally, she continuously breaks the security protocol (DeMonaco 2016, 0:08:01; 0:22:41; 0:49:32) and when more violent measures are needed, she takes a gun (0:49:32). Her character is not portrayed as a lady-in-distress, but as an experienced shooter (0:41:00) who willingly defends her life and the life of others (0:40:51). At the same time, Roan follows the orders of her head of security, although not without irony: “Okay, boss” (1:07:56). Even though she knows she is in command, she is willing to take orders for the common benefit (0:49:50). Thus, she is not showing passivity, but a good command of collaborative skills, normally perceived as a feminine characteristic.

Roan does not perform a passive role when she is captured and brought to the New Founding Fathers' church. They had the intention of assassinating her (1:20:52) and "clean[ing] [their] souls" (1:20:52). She also tries to release herself from the tides (1:31:46), which may represent the NFFA violent and repressive government. In this sense, Roan might resemble Clinton, by enacting her agency and changing gender stereotypes. However, Clinton's ambiguous performative acts have been considered both transgressive and manly (Manziuk 2008, 313-314), a characteristic which Roan does not fully develop. Moreover, it is crucial that the fact that Clinton enacted her agency independently from her husband (Templin 1999, 25) and raised her own family, whereas Charlie is a single mature woman, be taken into account. Clinton encountered heavy criticism for being married to Bill Clinton and creating an image independently of him as a politician, to the point of vying for the presidency in the 2016 US presidential election. Consequently, both women perform their gender in agentic ways.

4. Senator Roan Fights a Double-bind

Women candidates have been stereotypically associated with "education, health, human right, women's rights, animal right, childcare, poverty, arts, environment, and social welfare" (Lee and Lim 2016, 2), whereas men with "economy, military, foreign affairs, technology, science, crime, terrorism, and gun-problems" (2). These conventions are emphasised, encoded, and legitimised by state apparatuses such as the media, which plays a crucial role in political campaigns (Templin 1999, 23). Clinton was considered patronising and arrogant for breaking "the status quo by . . . seeking agentic leadership roles" (Ratliff et.al 2019, 579), to gain respect. However, she gained popularity when the "Clinton-Lewinsky scandal" (Parry-Giles 2000, 209) came into light. What is more, she became a victim. Voters empathised with her because of her husband's infidelity, which gave her not only likability and humanity, but also vulnerability. For female politicians, being vulnerable is an important aspect which encourages society to vote for them. Nevertheless, "she [violates] the regulatory rules for competent performance of 'femininity' within the bounds of heteronormativity" (Mandziuk 2008, 314). Regarding Roan, although she also portrays Clinton's strong image, she is also perceived as a victim since the beginning of *The Purge: Election Year*. Just in the first scene, the Senator and her family are captured by a purger, who kills them all except Roan (DeMonaco 2016, 0:01:33). This victimised emphasis is enhanced by the New Founding Fathers of America, who want to assassinate her the night of The Purge, before the presidential election takes place. This image is also perpetuated by her being surrounded by security men (0:06:35), as though women could

not protect her efficiently. Therefore, politics is full of stereotypical contradictions, especially associated to women who must fight the double bind.

Regarding immigration, it is appreciated from two perspectives. It is considered a masculine concern if it is based on border control and it is a feminine one if it is about the rights of these immigrants (Lee and Lim 2016, 4). A huge percentage of the American public desires “strong leaders or those with experience dealing with foreign policy [who worked] against women seeking the presidency” (Dolan and Lynch 2016, 576). The main purpose of the NFFA is to eradicate poverty by killing those who economically contribute less to society. The great majority of them are black immigrants in the US and, although *The Purge* has become a medium to take revenge on people one hates, it was originally created to kill this poor section of society and improve the economy (DeMonaco 2016, 0:05:37). Showing empathy to this section of society and being against “slaughter innocents” (0:06:04) was much more acceptable to a higher percentage of the American society in the film and stressed Roan’s femininity. Her intention to end *The Purge* through democracy (1:11:37) highlights this idea. Her opponents, on the contrary, encourage and legitimise violence as the only means to eradicate poverty (0:04:49), which attributes them traditional masculine discourses related to aggressivity. In addition to Roan’s femininity, she is especially grateful for the support of the black community (1:04:46) and she tries to peacefully solve this racial conflict (1:05:12) by “winning [the elections] fair and . . . square” (1:11:37). This provokes a radical change of the events, as Dante Bishop’s main objective was to assassinate Owens. However, if “he does this, the Minister becomes a martyr and [she] cannot have [her] presidency built on murder” (1:12:26). Besides, Clinton’s views on counterterrorism and foreign policies (Rubenstein 2015, 49) may have also highlighted her feminine side. Thus, the difference between Senator Roan and Minister Owens regarding immigration and racial identity is easily perceived, confirming the traditional statement that immigration policies might depend on gender.

As far as Roan’s and Clinton’s dress code is concerned, their identity has been affected by their appearance. Media does not only legitimise women’s stereotypes in the workplace and in their role in the family structure, but also in “the complex process of image-making” (Parry-Giles 2000, 206). In the case of Clinton, she is considered masculine due to her choice of clothing, “[losing] [her] femininity” (208). Her choice to wear a colourful “pantsuit” (Mandziuk 2008, 313) in every public appearance signals her gendered performance as a woman. It makes her seem masculine, as the hegemonic discourse defends that pantsuits are not appropriate for women. Thus, it “can be read as a transgressive act that violates the public meaning of ‘pants’ as the residual space of masculine phallogocentric power” (314). She is an example of women’s

evolution in society. However, as Roan lives in a 2040 US society, she reflects on these clothing paradigms. Clinton has been hugely criticised by her pantsuits and Roan, as her representative of the future, seems to have taken this criticism into consideration and she only uses jeans the night of *The Purge* (DeMonaco 2016, 0:20:21), when supposedly no one would see her. This would change the public opinion about her and the reaction that she causes in her followers. She maintains the vivid colours worn by Clinton in her appearances, however, she prefers to wear dresses. She stresses her femininity and balances it with her leading masculine performances. She is an attractive, young, blue-eyed woman who accentuates her femininity, sexuality, and intellectuality in her first scene of the film, by wearing a red dress and glasses (0:07:08). Consequently, female candidates' dressing is crucial to their public image.

Moreover, as the presidency has traditionally belonged to white men, women candidates face gender stereotypes, even today. Roan is objectified by the NFFA when they refer to her as “the cunt” (0:04:24) or when the mercenary leader who captures her in the street the night of *The Purge* refers to her as “the package” (1:19:32), as if she was an object. Hillary Clinton also encounters these discourses. She is considered a “second wave feminist” (Topić and Gilmer 2017, 2534) because although she could enjoy the guarantees of education and employment opportunities which the civil rights' laws ensured, she had to fight for equality. Although this fighting does not disappear in the year the film is set, it could be stated that Charlie represents Clinton, but in the form of “new feminism” (2534). She is neither married nor maintained and she is childless. Nonetheless, Clinton broke more boundaries than Charlie regarding clothing. Hence, Roan seems to consider all the aspects for which Clinton has been criticised and tries to soften them in favour of her feminine image. It seems to be effective because she wins the elections. However, although the film is set in 2040, there has not been enough time in between to end with the stereotypes associated to women and politics.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, in order to understand masculinity in *The Purge: Election Year*, it is essential that some aspects regarding the context in which the film is set and the discourses and cultural practices that the two candidates decode and legitimise be taken into consideration. This paper has proved how Donald Trump has influenced Owens' performance of masculinity. This idea is reinforced by his role in the NFFA, as the new candidate to the presidency, and his articulation of hegemonic toxic white masculinity, which is emphasised by his language, policies, and the use of both symbolic and physical violence. In addition, his demagogic power and coercive practices, also swayed by Trump, serve as an opportunity to approach American social,

political, and economic fears. However, Senator Roan counterbalances Owens' discourse, as she performs a female masculinity and fights some gender stereotypes. This provokes her to fight a double-bind, as far as the social expectation of women performing a feminine role is concerned. Hillary Clinton has influenced Roan by her performative acts in the 2016 presidential election. They transgress the patriarchal discourse and values. This idea is highlighted by Roan's speech and cultural practices. The film enhances a feminised government, instead of supporting a hegemonic masculine one, although both share the structural violence associated to the state that affects society in an unconscious manner. Therefore, gender is proved to be a crucial factor which influences and determines public opinion, especially in offices which have been traditionally held by men. Nonetheless, in this film, as a dystopic one, decides to present Roan as the victorious politician, symbolising a new coming era after suffering the aftermath of the real 2016 Election. Moreover, it emphasises the necessity to end with a toxic white masculinity which has become so popular among Americans. Therefore, the notion of the hegemonic masculinity is transgressed by Senator Charlie Roan and she finally accomplishes her objective to hold the presidency.

6. Works Cited

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