

Woke as victimization ideology

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Introduction

In ordinary parlance, to be a victim combines being harmed or wronged by something or somebody, and that the one who is harmed is neither causally nor morally responsible for what has happened. This is, or rather was until recently, undesirable, partly because of the harm inflicted upon somebody, and partly because it makes agency impossible. To be a victim is to be both powerless and blameless, that is, one does not act but is acted upon. However, with the rise of leftist identity politics from the 1970s onwards, and especially woke trends today, victimhood comes to play an ideological role in framing political orientation and justification. There is political and moral status in being a victim and those speaking on behalf of victims (political parties, businesses, so-called social movements, do-gooders, media, etc.) rejoice in virtue signalling and the moral pay-off it provides. The situation today is, says Green (2006: 1; see also Bruckner 2020), "to be classified as a victim is to be given a special political status, which has no necessary connection with real hardship or actual oppression. Victimhood as a political status is best understood as the outcome of a political strategy by some groups aimed at gaining preferential treatment."

With the rise of victimization ideology follows preferential treatment and privileges, and the politicking that goes with it, selective emotionalised good-will combined with censorship and the self-censorship caused by being afraid of giving offence or fear of getting a bad reputation, which might lead to being

stigmatised or losing one's job. In contrast to a bygone age, what we get today is power *and* blamelessness, which is attractive since the fetishized victims and specifically those speaking on their behalf, who typically also lay claim to be victims, cannot be legitimately criticised and held responsible as this would be victim-blaming, which is wicked. Something or somebody else must be blamed, typically the system (systemic or structural racism) or the no less racist far Right. Political critique of victimisation ideology – that it curtails free speech and violates equality before the law – becomes morally wrong, and this moralisation of politics intensifies and polarises conflicts since political adversaries tend to become moral and political enemies. This is moreover closely associated with double standards and cynicism.

Is victimization or victimhood as an ideology of sorts – that is, systematic patterns of orientation and justification concerning the governing of common concerns, in a word, politics – able to throw light on the identitarian turn of political discourses, especially leftist ones? I think it can because this type of ideology – irrespective of its degree of systematic articulation (strategy or sentiment) does play a significant role in characterising the nature and function of leftist identitarian trends in the wake of postmodernism. To clarify this argument, I begin by looking at what victimization implies, how it operates and changes the terms of political discourse, as well as how it relates to democracy. The overarching aim is to provide a basic outline of the logic of this type of discourse. This should make it possible to assess its ideological function of playing a role in governing political orientation and justification. In this respect it is interesting to note that the politics of victimhood is related to a dystopian, backwards oriented, and catastrophising *Zeitgeist* in which danger, fear, vulnerability, and hence calls for protection and safety, set the agenda.¹

I will argue that the victimization aspects of leftist identitarianism operate by way of a postmodern essentialism of sorts (Rectenwald 2020: 28), which I will look at in the following section. Whilst this might look like a contradiction of terms, its *raison d'être* is to foster and govern political and moral resentment against everything systemic, which the postmodernism of the 1980s and 90s could not do and did not want to do as its protagonists were obsessed by everything being 'undecidable', which made it impossible to come up with clear-cut answers except

¹ Furedi 2018: Ch. 4 is particular interesting in this respect. In addition, it might be added that the seeds of dystopia were sowed in the euphoria of 1960s utopianism and optimism. Obsessions with the authenticity of identity were formulated in terms of liberation from the conformity of the majority and the system, but in contrast to interest politics these are all malleable categories, which cannot frame political engagement.

that everything was at the end of the day construed in non-deterministic ways that defied logic, rationality, reason, and truth.

In partial contrast to this scenario, today's post New Left retreats to the holistic anti-system mentality prior to the second post wave taking off in the late 1970s:² as in the second post-wave, everything is constructed but the construction of power and 'the system' are unequivocally negative, which translates into a clean-cut distinction between oppressor and oppressed. This goes hand in hand with a radicalisation of postmodern themes: reason, rationality, truth, etc. are not merely undecidable as they were 20-40 years ago. Rather, they are, if we speak in racial terms, instruments of the systemic oppression associated with white supremacy, white privilege, and whiteness ideology. For today's post New Left this means that the constructed nature of oppression is a rock-bottom fact of the lived experience of victims on the condition that these 'experiences' are in line with leftist identitarian social justice maxims.³

In contrast to old-fashioned leftism (roughly defined as the Left prior to the first post-wave), these facts are not about interests but are organised around existential categories defining what people are *qua* their group belonging. The most predominant and politically potent identity markers relate to race, gender, sexuality, and religion, which have been conducive for understanding the systemic nature of power and for political radicalisation vis-à-vis friend/enemy groupings. The type of political orientation and justification we see here is explicit in its aversion against democratic politics. This is so because it continues the New Left sensibility of what Marcuse called "the great refusal" by turning against the system with its political parties and interest groups negotiating and finding solutions. The 'greatness' of this refusal consists in its all-encompassing antagonism between system and opposition, which implies that any involvement in the affairs of the system with its "totalitarian organization" of democracy betrays the revolutionary course. The aversion against democratic politics is also visible in the loathing of ordinary people or the majority who are satisfied with the "pleasant repression" of consumer society with its materialism and ideological

² The rise of the New Left in the 1960s is part of the first post-wave. Academically speaking, this wave was mainly a phenomenon in mainstream social sciences, which dates from the late 1950s to the late 1960s. This trend counts amongst others John Kenneth Galbraith's post-scarcity society, Seymour Martin Lipset's post-politics, and Daniel Bell's post-ideology.

³ As always in Marxist types of discourse, if the supposed victims do not experience the world in the way they ought to, non-falsifiable auxiliary hypotheses are brought in to explain discrepancies. This is where we find variations of false consciousness ways of arguing, which characterise Critique of Ideology. What Critical Race Theory terms "internalised racist oppression" is an obvious example of this understanding of ideology of something cognitively false and politically oppressive.

indoctrination. It is this orientation which lives on in leftist identitarianism, which is also based on elitist and anti-liberal principles. This includes amongst other things hostility to equality before the law and endorsement of preferential treatment for selected groups attaining victimhood status. Hostility to individualism and individual responsibility (and of course liberalism) is also prevalent as individuals are seen as replica of their group.

The paper is about the nature of politicised victimhood and my aim is to see how it structures leftist identitarianism today. Occasionally I speak of woke, leftist identity politics, and post New Left, but the choice of 'leftist identitarianism' accentuates that identity is primary, and that leftist is secondary. However, it is Left in at least three elementary senses relating to enmity, self-description, and lineage. (1) It antagonises Right to the point of equating it with fascism, although it adopts positions traditionally associated with Right. (2) Although the Right/Left terminology is not prevalent in its self-description, because it is the kernel of modern democracy, which it loathes, it would go for Left if it had to choose between Right and Left. And (3) it places itself in the lineage of neo/cultural Marxism and the New Left of the 1960s and 70s. This goes for both its constituency, its political sentiments as well as for its status as an identity soothing hobby.

I will touch upon three sets of issues, which leftist identitarians see as means of politicisation, which is essentially good because it shakes the oppressive system. (1) The explicit glorification of enmity as anti-system: It situates leftist identitarianism as a politicised outcome of postmodern trends in which everything is constructed, but the 'undecidability' of the post era is replaced by clear-cut borderlines between oppressor (enemy) and oppressed (friend). Political enmity trumps in other words everything else. The modus operandi of this politicisation revolves around notions of the "lived experience" of oppressed segments, which bind cognition to political power strategies. (2) The implicit praise of vanguardism as obtaining the moral high ground, which gives immunity: It focuses on the paradoxical double role of the victim, which it inherits from the vanguardist tradition of Marxism, of being infantilised as it is deprived of agency and responsibility whilst also being cognitively and politically privileged in the grander scheme of things, that is, universal emancipation. This places the vanguard in a unique position. It aims to exercise power in the name of the powerless based on the sublimation of knowledge and morality. In the leftist canon, this is the mythology of oppressive power to end oppressive power, which has always served as the ultimate way to legitimise oppression. (3) The denunciation of 'solutionism' as complicity with systemic evil (typically white supremacy and whiteness ideology): Here the focus is on what victimisation

ideology does to the Left. It mythologises the system as the site of evil which it is impossible to change. This implies both attack on political reasoning and judgement, and the cynical attitude that goes with it, and an attack on solutionism and hence politics. In addition, it glorifies victim mentality by ruling out the possibility of solving problems, by equipping the victim with a power that defies responsibility, and by placing itself beyond reproach – and hence accountability and responsibility.

Ideology critique reformulated: essentialist turns of postmodern constructivism

Kimberle Crenshaw's articles on critical race theory, notably 'Mapping the Margins' from 1991, are interesting for getting at the articulation of victimization ideology, postmodern constructivism, and the rise of identity politics. Her conception of intersectionality emphasises the multifaceted nature of identity formation vis-à-vis various forms of especially racist and sexist oppression. Leftist identity politics focuses not only on the proliferation of identities among all kinds of groups. It is particularly concerned with the differentiation of identities based on various modes of oppression, that is, oppressed identities. This implies a prior distinction between oppressed and oppressor, which means that there is a common denominator for oppressed identities, namely the oppressor as enemy. In Critical Race Theory, the enemy is the trinity of White (white supremacy, white privilege, and whiteness), which unifies – or is supposed to unify – everybody who is not White, that is, People of Colour. According to this logic, the greater the internal differentiations among the oppressed, the clearer is the experience of the common enemy. Thus Crenshaw (1991: 1242) holds that "the social power in delineating difference ... can ... be the source of social empowerment and reconstruction." It follows that her problem with identity politics back in the 1980s and early 90s is that "it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences."

The type of identity politics Crenshaw criticises seems out of date today where "intergroup differences" or the splitting up of identity groups set the agenda. This seems to be an inbuilt drive in the notion of intersectionality, which is closely bound up with victimization ideology: to create new identities by means of inventing new forms of oppression, which calls for public attention, recognition,

and protection.⁴ Yet, there is something awkward about the argument that differentiation breeds unity. How does that work? That is, how do differentiated collective identities manage to form part of a global hierarchy of power, which comes down to a top/bottom bifurcation of power: oppressors and oppressed. This is especially the case when the latter consists of a hotchpotch of 'anti-system' elements, which leftists – desperately seeking a new constituency after they turned their back to the working class and the majority – have labelled the marginalised, the heterogenous, the subaltern, the outcasts, and so forth, which play a similar role as “the revolutionary subject” did for Marcuse.⁵

Yet, this issue might not, in fact, be awkward because the problem leftist identitarians address is not oppression and hardship as it is a drive to proliferate identities, that is, to differentiate themselves from each other and what passes as normal. It is this respect it could make sense to speak of the hobby Left. For today's leftist identitarian ideology the organising nexus for the revolutionary subject to come differs from how Marcuse and revolutionary theorists before him conceived of it. For Marxists the nexus was social class position and the alliances this made possible; neo/cultural Marxists à la Marcuse did not give up on the objective status of the nexus, but they emphasised the subjective factors such as “the new sensibility”; and for identitarians' focus on “lived experience”, subjectivism and emotionalised outbursts against rationality, reason, etc. prevail. The widespread use of “lived experience” refers to the subjective perceptions and feelings of individuals vis-à-vis their group-belonging. In terms of politics of

⁴ Rectenwald 2020: 39, 92-3. It would also be interesting to look at the intersectionality hypothesis empirically, but it does not fall within the remit of this article. Ungar-Sargon 2021: 154-6 refers to research that points out that the theory is factually wrong: “black women earn slightly more than comparably endowed white women. Black women are also more likely to go to college than white men from similar backgrounds.” She also mentions the conclusions from a study at Michigan State University. They set out with an intersectional premise but conclude that “black African migrant women experience no racial disadvantage in their earnings.”

⁵ The revolutionary subject is a new historical vanguard heading universal liberation and, of course, the power elite to come. It consists of an alliance between three types of agents in charge of the liberation of humanity. These are “revolutionary students, the illiterate peasantry of economically backward countries, and the lumpenproletariat of the U.S.A.” Kolakowski 1978: 1120, see also 1116; see also Dyrberg 2020: 100-1. For Marcuse the stakes of this fictitious subject could not be higher as it signalled the construction of a new subjectivity, a new sensibility, a new science, all summed up in the liberation of humanity. To face up to this task the revolutionary subject would have to excavate what Marcuse called “the normative essences” of everything, assess whether they were liberating or enslaving, and act accordingly. To his credit, Marcuse, in contrast to his woke epigones today, was explicit that this would call for unrestrained political control and repression. The red thread in this line of argument was moral accounting, which had two aspects: (1) it was pay-back for centuries of right-wing/reactionary oppression and (2) leftist repression and violence were means to finally eliminate class-based oppression.

identity, the group as an entity that defines membership makes good sense as long as it can function as an interest-group, but it is far from obvious that it is operational as a vehicle for channelling the sensibilities of people who are sympathetic to this or that lifestyle. In fact, the opposite seems more likely given the marked tendency that groups split up exactly because they cannot frame or give voice to these feelings.⁶ This matches postmodern celebrations of 'politics of difference', which the New Left onwards has seen as a virtue of authenticity, that is, of being true to oneself. Yet, the truth of oneself might not fit the group identity vis-à-vis oppression.⁷ In addition, and apart from the differences between interests and sensibilities, the issue of group-belonging vis-à-vis oppression of identities suffers from the fact that it is bizarre to claim that people are more repressed now with regard to, say, gender and race, than they were years ago.

Crenshaw argues that postmodern social constructivism is important because it shows the constructed and contestable nature of every categorisation; that every knowledge claim is caught up in power relations; and that identity categories are political through and through. This is the postmodern taxonomy, the power of categorisation, but it fails to cover the lived experience of this power, that is, "the power to cause that categorization to have social and material consequences". The problem with "vulgar constructionism" is that it conflates the construction of identity with "the system of subordination based on that identity" (both quotes, Crenshaw 1991: 1297). In the words of Lindsay (2022: 139), the postmodern take on social constructivism "fails to fully appreciate the role of systemic power in

⁶ See Dunt 2020: 316. His discussion of the Combahee River Collective in the late 1970s in the USA (323-6) illustrates the ambitions of rejecting the binaries of established identity politics (anti-sexism and antiracism) in which the black lesbian members of the collective did not fit in. This is in accord with Crenshaw's Intersectionalism. The issue is the classical one between Individual or specific sentiments and group membership/belonging. "The authority of the group", says Dunt 2020: 326, "was all there was to work with, so instead, the group category splintered into smaller and smaller units to ensure consistent internal characteristics. And that was the moment identity politics properly took form."

⁷ Fukuyama draws attention to the difference between experience and lived experience, which refers to the distinction in German between 'Erfahrung' and 'Erlebnis'. The former denotes experiences that can be shared whereas the latter is a "subjective perception of experiences, which might not necessarily be shareable". Ultimately, it goes back to Rousseau "whose emphasis on the 'sentiment of existence' valorized subjective inner feeling over the shared norms and understandings of the surrounding society." In this inner/outer orientation it is also worth noting that for Rousseau authenticity as this inner feeling or inner identity is the ultimate good. This is grounded in the axiom that human beings are good and that the only stumbling-block for human perfection is "artificial social constraint". Fukuyama 2018: 109-10 and 97-8, respectively. It is in this light the group is an awkward category. On the one hand, it brings the inner qualities of its members to fruition in its confrontation with societal norms, but on the other hand, it belongs by its very nature to the outer sphere, which is the reason it splinters in what Freud in *Civilisation and Its Discontent* called the narcissism of small differences. See also Rectenwald 2020: 100-1.

shaping the meaning of categories of identity". Her aim is to politicise postmodernism – to make it politically operational – by turning it into a means of revolutionary identity politics that can serve as a common denominator for the multifaceted forms of lived experiences. The basic way to do this is via the notion of power, which is a shorthand for all types of oppression upholding the system. This is also essential for every form of victimization ideology.

As in Marxism, power and truth are antithetical, power is a property of the system, and morality is based on power. Although references to truth as representations of objectivity are gone, truth is now reformulated as constructions of anti-systemic lived experiences on the condition that they are in line with Critical Race Theory's social justice maxims. A crude rendition of Foucault's discussions of power and knowledge serves as an inspiration for this take on truth. Power and knowledge are two sides of the same coin: the rationale of systemic knowledge is simply to find new ways of exercising power over others (inmates, pupils, the sick, workers, etc.).

The axioms that power is the property of the system or establishment, and hence exercised by ruling/hegemonic elites, and that every claim to knowledge and morality is a function of power, are defining traits of Marxism and classical elitism. These axioms perform at least four functions, which are of critical importance for getting at leftist identitarianism in general and victimization ideology in particular.

However, before outlining these functions, it will be relevant to briefly mention how leftist identitarian social justice activism sees ideology. It is basically an updated or postmodernised version of Ideology Critique centred on revealing and condemning every form of bigotry in cultural products (social media, books, film, theatre, sport, exhibitions, fashion, etc.), as conceived by social justice activists. In line with Ideology Critique, the axiom is that the system is oppressive and that it operates by way of hiding bigotry and oppression beneath a surface of normality, inclusivity, rationality, objectivity, impartiality (e.g., colour blindness), and so forth. The oppressed (and everybody else for that matter) are discouraged from detecting how the system really operates, notably by way of what Critical Race Theory terms "internalised racist oppression", which is equivalent to false consciousness in Ideology Critique.⁸ They suffer, accordingly, from systemic

⁸ In speaking of Internalised Racist Oppression, Critical Race Theory pioneer Delgado (1982: 136) mentions that hate-speech is an act of violence on ethnic minorities' dignity and self-respect: "Not only does the listener learn and internalize the messages contained in racial insults, these messages color our society's institutions and are transmitted to succeeding generations." Then follows a list of numerous psycho-somatic diseases, which is a recipe for today's activists rejoicing their vulnerabilities and traumas.

ideology, which is repressive as opposed to liberating, and manipulative as opposed to truthful, although these terms are out of date and misleading in a postmodern scenario – yet they are functional for portraying the system as repressive and the oppressed as victims of this system.

The axioms and functions mentioned above concerning power and knowledge, are, first, that systemic power shapes the identity categories and imposes them on the oppressed, which makes them real and meaningful for the latter. This implies that every knowledge claim is, by its very nature, political because it is part of systemic power, which also implies that knowledge cannot be neutral: it is by its very nature politicised and serves vested interests. The only type of knowledge that can escape systemic power is the one that is (1) ingrained in the lived experience of the oppressed and (2) excluded from the system's production of knowledge. These two claims rest on the assumption that there is something in society that somehow escapes systemic power/knowledge.⁹ Without this 'something', which is a theoretical or rather a phantasmatic political construct, there cannot be any hope of universal emancipation. Although systemic power/knowledge permeates the lived experience of the oppressed, the Marxist postulate is that the latter retains an emancipatory potential because they possess a first-hand and unique insight of oppression (Lindsay 2022: 20, 44, 72-4). This postulate of unique insight is the core of authenticity, a vitalistic drive of sorts, which in turn, given the proper training in the right kind of pedagogy, can become the site of critical reflection and resistance (Paulo Freire liberation theology is of critical importance here).

Second, it requires thorough pedagogical skills and work to draw out these excluded but latent knowledges and emotions, as the oppressive system does everything it can to prevent the undermining of its hegemony. The task of revolutionary education and activism is to make explicit and systematise this latent and unique knowledge for the oppressed so they will be able to understand that they are oppressed, emotionally resent being oppressed *and* to resist this fact, that is, to rebel against being unjustly disempowered. This is the double task of critique and resistance – that the former paves the way for the latter (Dyrberg 2020: 101, 104-7) – and that this requires the revolutionary vanguard, who are, in contrast to ordinary people, endowed with the ability to see through how the

⁹ It should be noted that Foucault explicitly argues against this type of argument, which he terms "the repressive hypothesis". It also needs mentioning that he was highly critical of the crude interpretation of power/knowledge, which guides much of Critical Race Theory. See e.g. Foucault 1981.

system constructs meaning and reality for the oppressed with the intent to manipulate them and keep them in a state of oppression.

Third, when systemic power/knowledge forms the reality of the oppressed vis-à-vis identity categories, the oppressed, marginalised or disempowered cannot engage in deconstructing these categories as they “understand themselves and society in terms of them” (Lindsay 2022: 139). This type of argument is a rerun of the Marxist critique of ideology, which operates with the distinction between true and false consciousness, and hence between pursuing one’s objective interests vs. being caught up in one’s subjective interests, which are false as they are generated by the system. Whether it is coined in terms of a New Left kind of Marxism or postmodern social constructivism, it is a showcase of revolutionary vanguardism. This take on political activism suggests a close functional parallel between these two recent trends in what passes as progressive leftist theory and politics, just as it shows the elitist inclination of both: the ‘masses’ are victims of how the system constructs the world, and the only way to break out of its imposed reality and ways of understanding the world requires the ‘knowledgeable’ outsider’s intervention, which is a classic role of the intellectual. It is on this basis of revelation that the revolutionary vanguard will be able to forge political alliances among the oppressed and pursue hegemonic strategies against systemic power. This political activism takes form by polarising political fields and in so doing constructing friend/enemy constellations, which thrive on mobilising the excluded knowledges of oppressed minorities and arouse their emotions and hence their willingness to engage in critique and resistance, which involves moving their limits as to what they find acceptable, for example, about using or condoning violence in political actions.

Fourth, to approach power/knowledge in this way results in a curious mixture of Ideology Critique and postmodern social constructivism. References to objective and universal knowledge are gone, and everything is politically constructed. The choice is between knowledge either sustaining or undermining the system. The latter is the latent knowledge of the oppressed, which provides the basis for clear-cut distinctions between (1) acceptable and non-acceptable forms of knowledge, that is, knowledge based on the lived experience of the oppressed and systemic knowledge sustaining oppression; and (2) the power of the oppressive system vs. the powerlessness of the oppressed, which is, nonetheless, a form of power that is blameless – typically referred to as “resistance” to stress that the root-cause of this power is the system. It seems that the postmodern sophistry of the 1980s of the never-ending deferrals of hard limits and last instances by way of playful differentiations, contingency, and relativism, found a hardboiled ‘political’

solution in dogmatic and abstract axioms of oppressors and victims as in, for example, whites vs. people of colour.

Victimhood and group belonging: authenticity and infantilisation

Victimhood entails lack of agency and responsibility, which is the most explicit indication of the manifest distinction between powerful and powerless. In identity politics, the basic category is the group. There are three things about groups, which are important. In the first place, group belonging is thoroughly defined by moralising political ideologies, which assume inherent links between the nature of the group – typically prescribed norms relating to race, gender, or sexuality – and personal character. This is, for instance, clear in the distinction between two claims, which come in different versions. Here Crenshaw: “I am Black” as opposed to “I am a person who happens to be black.” In terms of political strategy and tactics Crenshaw argues that “the most critical resistance strategy for disempowered groups is to occupy and defend a politics of social location rather than to vacate and destroy it” (Crenshaw 1991: 1297; see also Lindsay 2022: 51, 58; McWhorter 2021: 167-8). This implies that she goes for the first option (“I am Black”), which occupies and defends black identity as primary as opposed to the other option that vacates and destroys this social location or category by stressing that I am a person first and that my particular identity (in this case being black) is secondary. To put it differently, to launch a robust leftist identity politics that is able to critique and resist oppression, identity must come first as a category (knowledge), because it is enforced upon the oppressed by the system (power). Resistance mirrors power, or rather, it must mirror power to be effective, which means that identity is a politically privileged category (power/knowledge). This implies that identity cannot be subjected to postmodern deconstruction as it is an inescapable feature of the lived experience of the oppressed, which means that it is incontestable and fundamental. In other words, identity terms “*just are, and they are unquestionable matters of lived experience no one has standing to challenge*” (Lindsay 2022: 137).

To be a person before identity suggests a dislocation between racial fact and political fact, whilst the opposite means that the two come together as they ought to do from an identity politics point of view defending the oppressed. To be black – or gay or woman or any other oppressed group for that matter – entails specific political and moral commitments (Murray 2019: 154). This means that to belong to an oppressed category, one must conform to certain norms defining

this category (Murray 2019: 154-7). In the case of blacks, lack of conformity will lead to accusations of being called “coconut” or “Uncle Tom”. Kaveh Shahrooz (2020) gives an example of Congress woman Ayanna Pressley (D-Mass.): “We don’t need any more brown faces that don’t want to be a brown voice ... We don’t need any more black faces that don’t want to be a black voice.” In other words, “face” and “voice” – racial features and political stance – must be identical. This identity is determined by what Ramaswamy (2021: 223) calls “The Church of Diversity”¹⁰ In any case, to speak of identity between racial features and personal character is old-fashioned racism (cf. Martin Luther King Jr.).

The second dimension of group identity in victimization ideology could for lack of better terminology be termed positive/negative indicators combined with position of enunciation. In her characterisation of what ‘white’ means DiAngelo lists several characteristics all of which are, not surprisingly, derogatory, but they are positive in the sense that this is what it means to be white, for instance being racist and arrogant. But when it comes to ‘black’ this logic is inverted. Blackness is defined as antithetical to whiteness, but it does not stand for specific qualities. It is solely defined as being in the receiving end of white oppression: “blackness becomes what you *aren’t* – i.e., seen fully by whites – as opposed to what you *are*. It is what someone does to you, rather than what you *like to do*”.¹¹ Thus blackness connotes victimhood, which is staged in narrations of suffering, and provides the narrator with authenticity and the white listener with self-hate and guilt. This is the woke version of blackness as ‘that’ which is antagonised by whiteness and hence, by definition, good no matter what ‘it’ does.¹²

¹⁰ This indicates the religious connotations of leftist identitarianism, which is discussed by several writers, for example, McWhorter 2021 and Murray 2022: Ch. 3. Regarding the face/voice theme, there are numerous examples of this way of arguing. In the 2020 US election Joseph Biden mentioned that blacks voting for Trump were not black. He later had to backtrack. Woke newspaper par excellence, *New York Times*, was not apologetic but went further, stating that Latinos and blacks voting for Trump was a proof of the “power of the white patriarchy” and that a Stockholm syndrome was at work here. The proof was that “Some people who have been historically oppressed will stand with their oppressors”.

¹¹ McWhorter 2021: 113. He also mentions, “if noble victimhood founds your sense of self, talking of the racism you have encountered is proactive self-presentation” (2021: 86). Berman’s (2010: 269, see also 274) comments on the noble savage are relevant here: “People in exotic parts of the world were deemed to be spiritually loftier than people near at hand ... Materially poor, but morally wealthy.” Paradoxically, these images (1) replicate the prejudices of European colonialists and imperialists and (2) form part of Third Worldism as escapism of the New Left and its epigones. On neo-orientalism and victimhood, see Swift 2022: 184-9.

¹² This is also the logic of recognition. One is not recognised for what one does but for being part of an historically oppressed group, which the woke establishment finds worthy of giving victim status. This in turn makes it irrelevant to speak of power relations within victim groups unless the

The third aspect of group belonging, which is important here, is that every group is axiomatically assumed to be equal by nature, that is, everybody can be what they want to be, and if they cannot, the only possible explanation is oppression, which, of course, refers to white supremacy: non-whites have been forced into relations of domination and the social conventions these relationships gave rise to, which are structured around the usual suspects, that is, the binary oppositions of white/non-white, West/Rest, Christianity/Islam, and so forth (Fukuyama 2019: 30-33; Murray 2019: 172; Powers 2015: 59-65). It follows that inequality is oppression and that the oppressed group is victimized, because inequality is caused solely by the oppressor's interests in maintaining their privileges by oppressing others – thereby creating 'the other'. This holds true regardless of whether we speak of the relationship between slave owner and slave or the 'achievement gap' in STEM education in the USA between Whites and Asians, on the one side, and Blacks and Hispanics, on the other. These as well as other examples of victimization follow a political logic of friend/enemy, which goes hand in hand with mono-causality, as every societal pathology is caused by white supremacy.

Victimization ideology inherits the axiom from Marxism that it is only the class that possesses nothing and, accordingly, has no special interests, which has the possibility of carrying through the historical mission of emancipation. For Marx, the social class possessing these characteristics was, of course, the proletariat, and the universality of emancipation underlines that the revolution led by the proletariat would not be yet another shift of power, which would install a new class dominance, but one that would herald the end of class dominance altogether, and hence every form of dominance. So, the proletariat was a specific class with specific class-interests, but as it only had its chains to lose, it was also the bearer of a universal mission: the liberation of all. We find the same logic in Paulo Freire for whom the oppressed by virtue of being at the bottom possess a unique although latent insight of oppression, which makes them the privileged makers of history.

As victims of oppression the oppressed enjoy the privilege that struggling for their own interests, they take upon themselves the universal mission of emancipating everybody. This is not merely a double task; it assigns the oppressed with an absolute knowledge and a unique moral mission, which is the legacy of Marxist vanguardism. It poses a paradoxical moral puzzle concerning responsibility of agency, which is relevant in dealing with leftist identitarianism. The victim is by

new victims of the victims can be traced back to forms of oppression from the 'outside'. If this is possible (and theoretically it is always possible) it is in accord with intersectionalism.

virtue of being victim, on the one hand, powerless and in this sense deprived of responsibility, but on the other hand, it is this status of blamelessness that assigns the victim its universal mission of emancipation. In quasi-Christian terms, the victims must take upon themselves the task of freeing everybody, even those who are guilty of oppressing others, who will, accordingly, be relieved of their guilt on judgement day. In racial terms, the liberation of people of colour is also the liberation of whites. However, as the absolute knowledge of victims is latent, they need the educated vanguard to fulfil their historical mission, which in turn means to confer power and responsibility to those who know and who can speak on behalf of the victims. The nature of responsibility is the bond between the vanguard and the masses – in Schmittian terms, the identity between ruler and ruled, which is how Schmitt defines democracy (Dyrberg 2020: 137, 145).

What we get here is elitism, which is antithetic to democratic politics in two ways. First, it is the invention of and convenient set-up for the educated middle-class woke vanguard who claims to be the guardians of decency and correctness by protecting the vulnerable because they are incapacitated to defend themselves. To demand protection and emotional safety and to be given preferential treatment is the opposite of struggling for equality and to be treated as equals (Adams 2019: 94). Second, since woke activists' guardianship relies on the victim status of those they claim to represent, it is essential for the victims, and especially for their guardians, that they maintain victimhood status and that this is matched by white guilt (McWhorter 2021: 147-8). This in turn implies strict opposition to solutionism – to defeat the causes of victimization – which must be considered vital for democratic politics (Williams 2022: 232-4).

Leftists from the 1960s onwards could not with any credibility appeal to the proletarian masses, and made, in fact, a virtue of emphasising that the majority had been co-opted by the system by materialist consumer culture and ideological media industry. Marcuse would still cling on to the old dogma that the proletariat, objectively speaking, was the revolutionary subject, but new segments had taken over: the trinity of the ghetto population, young people especially students, and the masses of the third world. Yet, the Marxist axiom that it is only those at the bottom who can carry out the revolution and eventually make "the liberation of humanity" possible were still the guiding logic, but the constituency had changed from the majority to the victims of everything normal who would rejoice in everything the system disliked.

Like their New Left predecessors, postmodern leftists identitarians – primarily middle-class young people based in higher education – also loathed ordinary or normal people. Given their fascination with politics of difference they would

continue the search for new groups who could play the role of the oppressed other. These would be carefully selected and fetishized victims adorned as outcasts, marginalised, subaltern, disempowered and vulnerable minorities who could make up or revitalise the epochal mission of the revolutionary subject. In this effort they found themselves by seeing themselves as injured and suffering from the violence they experienced by being confronted with people disagreeing with them or reading something that triggered their traumas. Words can wound, as Delgado says, thus indicating that there might not be any difference between disagreement and violence. Emotional stress can be caused by harmful opinions or the mere presence of speakers with whom one disagrees. This goes hand in hand with portraying universities as hotbeds of racism and sexism, and all other forms of stigmatisation of minorities.

A double operation is at work here: repressing non-minorities and elevating minorities. (1) 'Check your privileges' is a policing of non-minorities, that is, a demand that they become aware of their privileges: "They must", says Roche (2021: 5), "always be thinking about diversity and inclusion. And these people must make great efforts to ensure they are not subtly offending minorities." (2) The minorities must come out clean by staging rituals of so-called 'privilege laundering' in which those who look privileged turn out to be repressed minorities. This includes setting up safe spaces in which suffering can be cultivated and made explicit, and, of course, made to conform to woke maxims. This double operation forms part of the logic of intersectionality of constantly detecting new modes of oppression, which gives way for new modes of identity. Both Rectenwald (2020: 101) and Roche (2021: 5) refer to this phenomenon as "Oppression Olympics": who is the most oppressed, who is victimised the most?

Two purposes can be detected. First, the proof of systemic racism, sexism, etc. does not consist in bringing evidence of racist or sexist acts or rules. On the contrary, because the only thing that counts is the victim's emotions, normal legal procedures are suspended, and this in turn means that it is the very staging of suffering that counts as proof of the evil they are up against, and this means that the more they suffer the eviller is the enemy, the system (Green 2006: 31, 41, 93; McWhorter 2021: 45). Granted the importance of enmity for their identity construction, and this is the second point, this makes it vitally important that they empower themselves through suffering – which is the construction of victimhood as lived experience *and* ideology – and that they in this venture will be able to see through the normalisation of systemic racism/sexism and thereby grasp the reality of the system.

In doing so, they aim to attain epistemic, moral, and political authority, which will license their social justice mission to represent victims everywhere. Being in the receiving end of repressive power relations is the prerequisite for being an authentic victim whose lived experiences and emotional hypes qualify as authentic reflections on one's life situation of unjustified suffering that sublimate social position, cognition, and morality. All of this presupposes, of course, that the stated truths do not deviate from social justice dogmas. It follows that the lived experience of victimhood is just another word for applied dogmatism, and that it is only in this sense that it is "shareable".

Whilst both Marxism and leftist identitarians fetishize 'the other' as the revolutionary subject and hence as the site and means of authenticity, there are differences between them, which are relevant politically. The identitarian focus on danger illustrates the differences between victimisation ideology and the ideology of working-class parties in industrial society. Agency is the nexus here.

An indicator of the absence of agency on the part of victims is the staging of hysterical tantrums of being exposed to all kinds of danger: that disagreement with woke axioms or the mere presence of critics, harm vulnerable groups and threaten their emotional safety. Universities are sources of this kind of activism, which among other things imply bullying professors, forcing them to resign, disinviting and deplatforming speakers, vandalising monuments, and obstructing meetings. Another institutional sign of victimisation ideology are safe spaces, trigger warnings, and campaigns against hate-speech, as well as the deliberate blurring of the distinctions between speech and violence, and politics and morality.¹³ A third aspect of victimization ideology lies in often inarticulate pressures to conform to woke sentiments, for example, of not questioning what could be questioned. The same type of logic operates in governments' hate-speech legislation, which claim to protect the emotional well-being of vulnerable groups. They might not be leftist identitarians, but they do grasp that moral authority to a considerable extent stems from victimhood status, and that protecting emotional safety is an indicator of being good.¹⁴

When leftist identitarians focus on danger and vulnerability they underscore that certain groups are victims, and that victim status entails the absence of agency. This does not mean that these groups are unable to act, but that they cannot be

¹³ Doyle 2022: 36, see also 59. For similar arguments, see Furedi 2017: Ch. 7; 2021: Ch. 6.

¹⁴ Besides these symbolic reasons, censorship/regulation as to what can and cannot be said comes in handy to avoid or settle conflicts. This goes hand in hand with the employment of DEI and similar types of bureaucratic/policing/counselling aiming at thought control.

held accountable for their actions. For victims, agency and responsibility are disconnected, because the victims are not the root-cause of their actions; and this means that whatever they do they will be exonerated of all charges, because they are blameless. In other words, leftist identitarians are infantilising those they pretend to understand, or they defend them by treating them as infants, that is, as unequals. The *Charlie Hebdo* massacre in Paris in 2015 gives an idea of this way of thinking. The real victims were not the 12 members of the editorial staff who were gunned down by Muslim terrorists, but the system (France, the West) that brought them to the point of desperation where they could not act otherwise. For leftist commentators, the terrorists were never referred to as terrorists but as poor working-class kids who were stigmatised and exposed to deprivation and racism. This includes Islamophobia for the killings could not have anything to do with their religion, which is blameless because it is victimised by the West (Dyrberg 2020: Part I).

The larger context and hence the deeper root-cause for the act for which the terrorists could not be held responsible include the West's millennium long trajectory of colonial and imperialist exploitation and destruction of non-Western societies. Moral accountancy plays an important role in victimization ideology. This is especially clear when repression is so thorough and cruel that it offsets any criticism of what the victims do. Here it is important to keep in mind that the magnitude and cruelty of oppression largely depends upon two things: the lived experience of the victims and those speaking on their behalf, which again is a matter of how this speaking is staged publicly; and the depiction of the enemy, that is, how the enemy is constructed and fit into a more general image of enmity. With all this in place the social justice activists can manage to concoct a recipe for covertly exonerating everything from blatant authoritarianism, rape, terrorism to genocide by claiming that those doing these things are so oppressed that they have no other choice and cannot, then, be held responsible for what they do. In this way, focus has been displaced from judging their actions to assessing the circumstances under which they live, and from taking a stance on political values to slyly endorsing these actions by explaining them away, that is, to pointing out somebody else as the real culprit (Berman 2010: 195-6). Leftist identitarians name Muslim terrorism as resistance, which is a discursive legitimization of mass murder and genocide, and they see it as pay-back for what the West has done since the first crusade. When seen in this light, Muslim terrorism turns out to be nothing but a drop of rectifying resistance in an ocean of global Western exploitation. Leftist identitarians do not usually openly defend this terrorism (Hamas is a partial exception), but they do not criticise it either as this would be victim-blaming.

Politicisation or depolitization: system as mythology

The critique of solutionism is not only a revolutionary leftist critique of those who aim for changing the system by means of reforms and incremental progress; it also shows a mythological view of the nature of the system and of essential group characteristics, both of which have more in common with the revolutionary Right. The *raison d'être* of leftist identitarians' criticism of solutionism is to anchor critique in something that cannot have any solution. What we get, says Ungar-Sargon (2021: 12), is "a moral panic around the very idea of race, one that goes well beyond covering real problems, proposing a culture war rather than real solutions." To speak of "systemic" or "structural" racism fits into this moral panic frame in at least two ways. It portrays the West in general and the USA in particular as essentially racist (white supremacy) and equates being white with being racist and/or enjoying white privilege (Murray 2019: 124). By extension, it confers guilt upon whites for being white, which is "an immutable characteristic that they could do absolutely nothing to change" (Ungar-Sargon (2021: 14). This is not politicisation, but introspection and public confessions of natural born guilt – just as traumas are passed down to future generations, so is the guilt of original sin. Both aspects suggest that the so-called antiracists adopt a racist outlook.

The existentialist tone of North American antiracists should be obvious. When Ibrahim X Kendi (2019: 9-10) asserts that "[d]enial is the heartbeat of racism", the claim is that to assert that one is not a racist, is itself a sign of racism. The real choice is structured around the friend/enemy distinction: you are antiracist or racist, that is, you either confront the system of oppression or you enjoy the power and privileges it gives you. The same type of logic holds for Robin DiAngelo. In denying their white privilege, whites show their fragility, that is, their tormented difficulties in coming to terms with their guilt of being what they claim not to be: racists. The instinct for justice finds expression in fighting this heartbeat and fragility.

In today's political climate of anti-universalism and anti-whiteness, leftists do not speak of "the liberation of humanity" as Marcuse and the New Left did back in the 1960s and '70s. In the trail of naïve utopianism, a dystopian and mythological take on antiracism has come to prevail. Racism is systemic in the sense of being "integral, permanent and indestructible", and antiracism is a "struggle not to shape the future but to not forget the past" (Coates, quoted in Malik 2023: 290). Well, something that cannot be done away with must at least be remembered. The past must be brought to life, but the aim is not to make the future better, but to rejoice in the permanent trauma of racism with its colonialism, slavery, and

cruel oppression. Cruelty does not trigger resentment as everything depends on who does the cruelty. If slavery triggered resentment, social justice activists would also focus on the Arabic and Ottoman slave trade, which went on for much longer and involved many more people. But this is not what they look at because it is not politically expedient. Their interest in slavery and colonialism is that these phenomena are means to hype their hatred against white supremacy. This is the self-righteous emotional hype that fuels or ought to fuel the resentment and enmity of victims, and the guilt and self-hatred of whites; and it is the justification of social justice activists cancelling everything they associate with white supremacy, white privilege, and whiteness. This happens, for example, by vandalising monuments to avoid being reminded of an ever-present past haunting the present and traumatising its victims hundreds of years later (Furedi 2017: 57-60, 63-4; Roche 2021: 113-15); by denouncing “cultural appropriation”, which one naïvely could have thought was a virtue of multiculturalism, but it is more likely a leftist identitarian policing of essentialised and victimised cultural identities;¹⁵ and by inserting trigger-warnings in, for example, teaching material to warn students that something upsetting is on its way. These features are essential traits of victimisation ideology: repressed minorities are passive, vulnerable, and constantly exposed to danger; social justice activists protect them by treating them as infants who cannot take care of themselves and with whom nobody can legitimately disagree as this would be victim-blaming. Victimhood claims cannot then be unwarranted.¹⁶

Victims need protection, and with leftist identitarianism it comes in the form of patronising morality. This is only natural given that victims cannot be treated as equals. As Doyle (2022: 61) mentions, safety is the key word to cope with “‘ancestral trauma’ and ‘post-traumatic slave syndrome’”. This is depoliticisation

¹⁵ As is always the case with leftist identitarianism, the issue is not if a non-white cultural feature is worth protecting or the opposite. The axiom of the equality of cultures entails that the ‘content’ of a cultural feature is irrelevant. This implies that leftists, who usually claim to be in favour of equality – equality is typically portrayed as a defining characteristic of the Left (Laponce 1981) – nonetheless have no scruples with supporting gross political oppression and violence on a massive scale on the condition, of course, that they have given the culture or group in question victim status. Victimhood is the golden road to recognition by the woke establishment as it positions the group or culture as a friend in the global friend/enemy schematics in which west/white is, by definitional fiat, evil incarnated.

¹⁶ “We are taught”, says McWhorter 2021: 162-3, “that a black person’s claims of victimhood can never be unwarranted, on the basis of some overarching principle that cancels out reasoning. But to accept this is racist.” This overarching principle is ‘lived experience’ combined with infantilising morality, which might find expression in the gut-feeling that something is true irrespective of whether it is the case; and in any case, references to facts have no bearing in this type of discourse. What we get is a combination of racism, elitism, and emotionalism, which is, pace Fukuyama, the non-shareable lived experience which is antithetic to public reasoning and falsification.

in the sense that political opinions, values, interests, or simply social norms that differ from leftist identitarian social justice maxims are excluded as unacceptable. Political dissent with these maxims is a moral offence. Hence opposing opinions are not on equal footing – one is up (right) and the other is down (wrong). Even to point out that judging yesteryears norms by today's standards is anachronistic, is a sign of moral evil because it is, by default, construed as a defence of racist or sexist norms.

In the wake of the fetichised politics of difference, distinctions collapse between past and present, and political and moral concerns. The result is the creation of a moralising and mythological universe of eternal enmity between the evil oppressors who are to be blamed and the good victims who are blameless, together with those who speak in their name. This is the leftist identitarian way to bring about absolute enmity in which the enemy is not only political but also morally evil. In this scenario – marked by struggles between good and evil – there is no room for right/left orientation as political adversaries are not symmetrical opposites. This set-up is inseparable from the antagonistic intensity that pertains to the moralising and emotionalising discourses colonising political orientation and justification. The enemy is not worthy of respect but must be curbed, since it carries the virus of moral depravation, egoism, and evil combined with lack of knowledge. "The bearer of absolute enmity fights a battle for a just cause", says Ruiters (2012: 59), and in so doing, "he makes norms, ideals or a notion of good and evil leading in the recognition of the enemy."

The fusion of politics and morality in absolute enmity against everything systemic is a significant feature of victimization ideology, and it provides it with a certainty and resolve that was deliberately absent in postmodernism. The baseline is, first, vulnerable groups are victims of heinous crimes in the past, which still haunt them, such as ancestral or intergenerational trauma, and second that victims are both blameless and unable to control their own destiny because they are vulnerable. Both assumptions emphasise danger and call for protection, and those doing the calling are the moral authorities, alias leftist identitarians and the woke establishment. It also includes the institutional and political establishments for whom protection is a means, partly, to give them the appearance of caring for those who are vulnerable, which is an added bonus of moral authority, and partly to regulate political interaction via codes of conduct, which for all practical purposes means censorship and behavioural regulation/control.

The schematic of moral accountancy plays a central role when it comes to sorting out dangers and demanding protective measures for defining and defending victims, as well as how to deal with critics of identity politics in general and these

measures in particular. The first thing to note is that the harm done to certain groups of people, which turn them into victims, is so devastating as to forever stigmatising them and their offsprings generations ahead, which implies that vulnerability and victimhood define their identity. This is essentialism, which might come as a surprise given the postmodern roots of leftist identitarianism, but politically it comes in handy to provide an ultimate (and mythological) legitimation for victimhood status. It is here moral accountancy enters the picture. A catastrophe of this magnitude calls for unconditional protection, and unconditionality means that even if the measures taken to protect victims violate constitutional rights, such as free speech, free assembly, and equality before the law, they will still be legitimate in the eyes of those who construe themselves as the guardians of morality, because they are above the law. This mind-set also implies that critics of the ideology of victimhood and the institutional measures designed to deal with all kinds of dangers (trigger warnings, safe-spaces, censorship, etc.) will be hunted down relentlessly and stigmatised as morally evil. There are no limits to the justification of oppression of dissenters because they are, in the eyes of woke activists/establishment, victim-blamers, which is the ultimate moral/political sin.

When these activists pick up what they consider problematic in the past and pass judgements on the past by today's standards, the point is, as Murray says (2019: 138; see also McWhorter 2021: 15), to instil "a neurotic fear about what people should or should not be allowed to do or say in the present." This is thought control. They got it wrong back then, but how can we be sure we get it right now? The point is, of course, that we cannot be certain as to what is right and what is wrong, what is true and what is false. Postmodern relativism provides the theoretical background and sentiment as to why this is not possible let alone relevant; and when the truth moreover relies on the lived experience of certified victims filtered through social justice ideology, any talk of public reason and balanced judgement is out of the question. Instead, granted the political import of the post Left sentiment and the sensibility of lived/ideological experience is that everything depends on the whims of the censors, how they view context, who is vulnerable and exposed to danger, and above all, who is the enemy.

It might be worth summing up the discussions in the preceding pages by drawing attention to the type of ideology we encounter here – the social justice type of antiracism in the form of leftist identitarianism – is a particular articulation of orientation and justification which shows affinities between 'Old Right' and the postmodern 'New Left'.

First, as with old-fashioned right-wing conservatism, it is orientated backwards in contrast to forward as in reformist and revolutionary leftist discourses. Yet, in contrast to Old Right it does not glorify the past. The past is evil incarnated, and it haunts the presence, which it has turned into a timeless presence from which the future cannot escape. Here, agency as the will and power to change things makes no sense. This is what Candace Owen calls “victim mentality”, which she contrasts “victor mentality” (quoted in Murray 2019: 152). Williams similarly notes that feminist and civil rights movements did not see themselves as “passive objects, unable to stand up to themselves or to exercise control over their own lives.” In previous eras, she continues, “political change was instigated by people coming together in acts of solidarity and displays of strength” (Williams 2022: 229, 230). What we get now is what Marx called “solidarity of defeat”,¹⁷ which in the words of McWhorter (2021: 86) means, “what energizes people’s sense of themselves as a group is obstacles forced on them from an enemy above.” This is not the case in the present era, which shows an epochal shift in what it means to be Left. Defining features of Left for more than two centuries – struggling for social and economic progress, which link up with the typical features framing agency, notably optimism, hope and courage in the face of danger and uncertainties, as well as trust in public reasoning and judgement, and the values of liberty and equality, political inclusion, and moral autonomy – all of this has vanished from its vocabulary and political outlook. What we get instead are victims in need of protection and an elitist woke vanguard dressed up as moral authorities.

This shift is closely linked to the second point, which is the hatred against enlightenment values and epistemology, which insist, partly, on universal criteria concerning knowledge, and partly on individuality in which moral autonomy plays a key role. Today, leftist identitarians endorse views that used to be the exclusive preserve of the counterrevolutionary mind-set of the far Right (Wolin 2019: 279). What we get today is ‘total critique’ in the form of, for instance, Critical Race Theory and standpoint theory with their situated knowledge and collectivism in which individuals are defined by their group belonging, group membership or identity is defined as conformity with prescribed norms for what it means to be black, gay, trans, etc., and relations between groups are organised in terms of power differentials, which means that equality is a non-issue. This line of thinking

¹⁷ In his inaugural address to the First International Marx (2000 [1864]) mentions the thorough defeat and apathy of the British working classes and that they are in “a state of political nullity. If, then, there had been no solidarity of action between the British and the continental working classes, there was, at all events, a solidarity of defeat.”

goes hand in hand with stereotyping and cynicism both of which are antithetic to the ability to reason and pass judgement.

Third, leftist identitarianism adopts a racist premise against whiteness by assuming that race and character are essentially linked, which can be illustrated in, for example, the distinction between being ethnic black and political black. If ethnic blacks do not endorse social justice activism, they are “white-adjacent” because they enjoy “white privilege” as opposed to be authentic or really black. Racism and authenticity are closely connected. DiAngelo states this clearly when she equates being white with being “oppressive, oblivious, defensive, ignorant and arrogant” (quoted in Murray 2019: 173, see also 124). In short, white people is the problem – a problem which has no solution except a “final solution”. Nehisi Coates implicitly refers to this in his tweet: “There’s nothing wrong with black people that the complete and total elimination of white supremacy would not fix” (quoted in McWhorter 2021: 121).

Fourth, given this hostility to solutionism and hence to politics that matters to the vast majority of people, it also plays along with yesteryears right-wingers in stressing the pointlessness of reforms as the future can only be yet another variation of the old, that is, systemic racism, sexism, etc. Wolin’s comments (2019: 313-4 and 4, respectively) on the convergence between the reactionary Right and leftist identitarianism are telling. “The celebration of difference and rejection of reason were classical gambits of the counterrevolutionary ideologues”, and “a thoroughgoing cynicism about reason and democracy, once the hallmark of reactionary thought, became stock-in-trade of the postmodern left.” This is akin to what Albert Hirschman (1991) termed the rhetoric of reaction, which is also what Wolin (2019: 306) refers to in his comments on Baudrillard as an exemplar of post-leftist anti-Americanism: “His verdict on the impossibility of progressive historical change reiterates one of the commonplaces of reactionary rhetoric: the so-called futility thesis, according to which attempts to transform society are condemned a priori to failure.” What we see here is an articulation of dystopian and sectarian enmity in which absolute enmity prevails; it is both backward-orientated and mythological; and it obfuscates agency as a meaningful political category. In its place we get vanguardist infantilisation of victims as a way of framing critique of and resistance against the system – a framing that is bound up with moralising racism of low expectations, which implicitly refers to a ‘white’ position of enunciation.¹⁸ But then again, this theory built upon self-hatred is

¹⁸ This shows just how far woke critique is from what is often seen as its roots, namely Foucault. “When I say ‘critical’ I don’t mean a demolition job, one of rejection or refusal, but a work of examination that consists of suspending as far as possible the system of values to which one refers when testing and assessing it.” Foucault 1988: 107

largely invented by and for educated middle-class whites so they can feel good about themselves. This is the lineage of New Left Third Worldism from the 1960s. Back then as well as now, the anti-West sentiment of guilt – “the pleasure of self-hatred” as Berman calls it (2020: 270) – is explicit, which adds yet another dimension of power and blamelessness: every terrorist onslaught on the West is condoned by leftist identitarians who are beyond blame not only because they are themselves victims but because they speak on behalf of those whose status as victims is even more entrenched than well-off students in the West. This gives the latter double immunity. This is both a blessing and a curse of ‘the infantile disorder’ of the hobby leftist identitarians.

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