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The reconciled condition would not be the philosophical imperialism of annexing the alien. Instead, its happiness would lie in the fact that the alien, in the proximity it is granted, remains what is distant and different, beyond the heterogeneous and beyond that which is one's own.

Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*

Identity politics has become ever more prominent in the past decade or so.* Articles appear routinely in the press either praising or decrying it. A recent Holberg Prize awarded to Cornel West, Glen Greenwald and Judith Butler was followed by a debate on the topic.¹ Identity politics has been also pilloried, of course, by the conservative press. Identity-inflected struggles for social justice, moreover, have constituted both a kind of crisis for a hitherto universalist

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orientation of the Left and have provoked what has now become a global right-populist backlash, successfully portraying identity politics as an elite discourse that, at best, elides and at worst justifies growing socioeconomic inequality.²

There can be little doubt, however, that since the 1960s and 1970s identity politics has played a consequential role within excluded, marginalized and oppressed groups struggling for equal recognition, articulating a vision of genuine liberation. In my home country, Canada, the Indian residential school system dating back to the mid-nineteenth century, whose last vestiges survived as late as 1996, was part and parcel of a brutal plan to assimilate Indigenous children (“To kill the Indian in the child”) not simply out of an explicitly racist civilizing mission but also, more importantly, with the clear aim of eventually extinguishing Indigenous claims to the land. The integrity and vitality of the identities of Indigenous communities in North America as elsewhere under the United National Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was and remains key to maintaining their claims to the land. Such claims are both intrinsically valid and also vital to the struggles to resist the extractivist industries, in which billions of dollars are invested, which are accelerating global climate change. Identity here is the very basis for resistance to the logic of the value form.

Identity politics, moreover, has clear roots in the struggles of Africans, perhaps dating back to the very moment of their

forced enslavement and transport to North America through the transatlantic slave trade, in resisting dehumanizing domination. These politics reached a certain crescendo in the 1960s with the rise of Black nationalism and its attempt to reverse centuries of humiliation and violence. This was no better expressed than by James Brown in his 1968 track 'I'm Black and I'm Proud'. The Black Panther Party, formed in Oakland California's Merritt College two years before, put into practice Brown's aesthetics of blackness, which they fused with Critical Theory, Black armed self-defence and community-building projects such as sickle-cell-anaemia testing and school lunch programmes for Black youngsters.⁵ Before he was assassinated by the FBI under the aegis of COINTELPRO at the age of 21, Chicago-based Panther leader Fred Hampton had devoted himself to uniting in the original Rainbow Coalition poor blacks, whites and Latinos. It is therefore hardly surprising that J. Edgar Hoover, FBI director from 1924 to 1972, said that 'the Black Panther Party, without question, represents the greatest threat to internal security of the country.'

Between the 1960s and today there is something of a gulf, a generational shift perhaps best symbolized by the current vice president of the United States – the zealously carceral former district attorney of the city of San Francisco and Attorney General of the State of California, whose parents used to rub shoulders with the Panthers in reading groups at UC Berkeley. I am of course referring to Kamala Harris, who could be said to be emblematic of the failed revolution of

the 1960s. She is, as it were, the uncanny double of a certain student of Herbert Marcuse and Theodor W. Adorno, Angela Davis, who came perilously close to being executed by the State of California in 1970.

In philosophical terms, identity politics was at the root of the recent 'Decolonising Our Minds' campaign at SOAS, University of London, central to which was the claim that 'If white philosophers are required, then teach their work from a critical viewpoint.' This conveniently missed the fact that the very idea of critique was initially introduced systematically by Immanuel Kant after he was aroused from his dogmatic slumber by David Hume, and could be said to be an important if not defining element of the history of modern Western philosophy. This history is less a gentlemanly 'conversation of mankind' (Rorty) than a history of often vicious disputes, debates and conflicts. The key question that crystallized during the SOAS campaign was whether philosophers should be included or excluded on the basis of their race (and also therefore their apparent experience of oppression) or on the cogency of their arguments. This remains a question at the core of identity politics in the university.

Identity politics has become something of an academic and journalistic cottage industry – to which, I suppose, I am myself also contributing with this lecture – that has provoked assessments and critiques from the right (Douglas Murray), centre (Mark Lilla, Francis Fukuyama, Anthony Appiah, Yascha Mounk) and left (Asad Haider, Adolph Reed Jr and Walter Benn Michaels, Olúfémi O. Táíwò and Kevin Ochieng

Okoth).⁴ That it has become the focus of so much sustained, critical attention is perhaps testimony to its contemporary importance. The central question it poses is the following: is it possible to abstract ideas and concepts from concrete experiences? This is one of the most consequential questions of our times and culminates, I would suggest, in contemporary 'Afropessimism'.

The Right and the Centre approach identity politics from the standpoint of transcendent critique, which is to say they approach it from the outside with competing and opposed perspectives grounded in ethno-national particularism – that is, White supremacy or unabashed Eurocentrism – or abstractly universalist, difference-blind accounts of civic identity in either liberal or republican forms, which tend to elide the very experiences of the exclusion and domination of difference that identity politics wants, *justifiably*, to bring to the fore.⁵

A *left* critique of identity politics, in contrast – which I am interested in articulating here – would approach the subject *immanently*, which is to say by assessing identity politics not by a standard external to it, but according to own normative aspirations. I take the key normative aspiration of identity politics to be that of *emancipation*. The question I would like to pose then, as signalled by the title of this lecture, is the following: is identity politics a *dialectics of liberation* or is it what Gillian Rose has felicitously called a *paradox of empowerment*? In *Mourning Becomes the Law*, Rose argues:

‘Empowerment’ legitimizes the potential tyranny of the local or particular community in its relations with its members and at the boundary with competing interests. It is the abused who become the abusers; no one and no community is exempt from the paradoxes of ‘empowerment’.⁶

This is the idea that while foregrounding the differences between marginalized and dominant groups, identity politics sacrifices difference within such groups and, in the process, risks *enacting the very violence of erasure it seeks to undo*. Before we are in a position to answer this question, however, it is first necessary to get clear what identity politics is.

WHAT IS IDENTITY POLITICS?

The origin of Identity politics is commonly attributed to the Black lesbian socialist-feminist Combahee River Collective (CRC) in the early 1970s,⁷ but it can, in fact, be traced back to anti-colonial struggles decades earlier, in so far as anti-colonial struggles were often about reclaiming a sense of identity for the colonized from colonial projects that sought to deface and destroy the identity of the colonized.⁸ This was perhaps made clearest in the idea of *Négritude* developed in the 1930s by Suzanne and Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor. The aim of *Négritude* was to ‘capture the beauty and vitality of African bodies, culture and history, and throw them back in the faces of the French’.⁹ The very possibility of anti-colonial resistance and liberation entails, then, the reversal of the logic of dehumanization by way of a robust

reassertion of identity. C.L.R. James, for example, states that he wrote his history of the Haitian Revolution to reclaim for the colonized a sense of humanity, such that ‘instead of being constantly the object of other peoples’ exploitation and ferocity, [they] would themselves be taking action on a grand scale and shaping other people to their own needs.’¹⁰

It is possible, therefore, to define left identity politics in the following way. Identity politics is the idea that the interests of persons are tightly indexed to: (a) collective historical experiences of suffering, exclusion and marginalization; (b) the epistemic claims these experiences generate; and (c) the notion that the articulation of such claims transforms objects of historical processes into subjects, with the agency to make history rather than to be made by it, if not fully under the conditions of their own choosing.

On the face of it, the term ‘identity politics’ seems to be a strange and redundant formulation or a pleonasm, in so far as all politics could be said, at least in part, to pertain to identity if the conditions of political agency are tied to some form of group membership, as they must be. So, from the outset there is an irreducible ethnological dimension of politics, meaning that all politics is in some sense ‘identity politics’. Simply put: identity signifies membership in, or exclusion from, a given political community or association.

As Aristotle suggested in the *Politics*, humans are *Zoon politikon* or political animals, who are meant, by nature, to live in association with one another. Only beasts or gods could live beyond the walls of the city.¹¹ Aristotle was, in

part, referring to the epic heroes like Odysseus and Achilles who were both beasts *and* gods and therefore represented a profound danger to *human all-too human* associations. With specific reference to the highest form of association, the polis, the identity of those who are included in ruling and being ruled in turn were called citizens. Greek citizenship notably, of course, excluded women, slaves, young men and foreigners. And it is this question of *exclusion*, as I have previously suggested, that plays a key role in the constitution of left identity politics. Or, rather, we could say that identity politics was constituted by a certain claim by those excluded, marginalized and oppressed by a dominant identity. Identity politics is necessarily a politics of anti-identity or, better, a politics of the *non-identical*. I shall come back to this below.

It was, in fact, precisely because of the narrow, restrictive definition of the identity of the citizen in the Greek polis that Hegel argued in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* that in the ancient world the few – citizens – were ‘free’. With the rise of the Roman Empire, the ‘many’ were recognized as free by Rome’s granting of citizenship to denizens of its colonies. Finally, in the post-revolutionary period following the storming of the Bastille, ‘all’ rational beings came to be recognized as, in principle, free. The realization of such freedom or autonomy was a result of struggles for universal ‘recognition’.¹²

In so far as his conception of recognition was at its core juridical, and therefore recognition was ultimately grounded in property ownership, Hegel himself understood

that there was a growing proportion of the population of a rapidly industrializing modern society that was propertyless and poor, which he called the rabble (*die Pöbel*). The counterpart of abject poverty was, of course, excessive wealth. Perhaps anticipating our own late form of capitalism, the rabble suffered from immense poverty in the face of obscene wealth. This strained to breaking point the harmonious and ordered framework of what Hegel called the *Sittlichkeit* or the ‘ethical life’ of the modern state.

The very existence of the rabble, as Frank Ruda has shown, belied Hegel’s claim that the modern state had reconciled, in its institutional fabric, the particular, universal and individual.¹³ Hegel’s thoughts on the rabble can be read as his own candid admission of the historically unreconciled form of society grounded in antagonism, not least between intellectual and manual labour.¹⁴ In other words, Hegel’s admission anticipates Karl Marx’s transformative critique.¹⁵

Marx understood the contradiction at the heart of the politics of recognition. For the working class to truly claim the right of inclusion, in a society premised upon their exclusion via the workers’ separation from the means of production, society would have to be radically transformed through the appropriation of private property and the consequent abolition of classes as such. The working class’s *identity* (what Jacques Rancière calls the ‘part that has no part’) could only be properly realized, paradoxically, in the form of its non-identity with itself brought about by the dissolution of class society as such.

Yet, with the advent of post-liberal capitalism, such non-identity was subsumed by the logic of what Horkheimer and Adorno call the ‘totally administered world’.¹⁶ As suggested above, with the proletariat’s subordinate inclusion as the working class of advanced capitalist societies, after what Adorno described in the opening of *Negative Dialectics* as the ‘moment to realize philosophy that was missed’,¹⁷ theory must reflect on sources of non-identity that the proletariat had historically embodied prior to its integration in, and through, the administrative logic of state and capital.

If identity politics of the Left can be understood as struggles for inclusion in the liberal-democratic order, then an argument could be made that its first modern or post-1789 form was the working-class politics of the nineteenth century. This was explicitly stated by Georg Lukács approximately a century later in his understanding of the proletariat, set forth in his 1923 book *History and Class Consciousness*, as the ‘identical subject-object of history’.¹⁸

On the Left, identity politics can be understood, therefore, as a series of revisions to a more differentiated and capacious understanding of the proper revolutionary subject, particularly after the proletariat experienced tragic defeat during the European revolutions in the aftermath of 1917. The proletariat thereby became increasingly incorporated – via counter-revolutionary mobilization – into capitalist society. The negativity the proletariat once embodied itself comes to be negated.

The crucial question then becomes: what kind of subject can inherit the proletariat's negativity and therefore transformative power? What is especially important here is that, as the self-conscious commodity, the proletariat assumes its revolutionary role by virtue of its *ontological and epistemological standpoint*. As Marx puts it in his 1859 Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.' The working class's historical being – that is, its transformative relation to nature – provides it with the potential for achieving self-consciousness, as the 'identical subject-object of history' and therefore a subject capable of a revolutionary, which is to say total, transformation of society. It is important to note, however, that Lukács admits such self-consciousness is 'imputed' to it from the outside, organizationally by the party form.

As I have suggested, while all progressive politics entails, in a certain sense, struggles for inclusion of hitherto excluded identities through recognition, the actual term *identity politics* was nonetheless first used by the Combahee River Collective (CRC), an explicitly radical Black socialist-feminist lesbian organization formed in Boston in the 1970s. The collective was named after abolitionist Harriet Tubman's 1853 raid on the Combahee River in South Carolina that freed some 750 enslaved Africans.¹⁹ Identity politics in this distinctive rather than generic sense could be said to be implicit in the anti-colonial struggles that gathered force in

the aftermath of the Second World War and that predated the CRC by several decades. The reason for this is that the CRC's definition of identity politics entailed a certain understanding of autonomous self-organization:

This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression. In the case of Black women this is a particularly repugnant, dangerous, threatening, and therefore revolutionary concept because it is obvious from looking at all the political movements that have preceded us that anyone is more worthy of liberation than ourselves. We reject pedestals, queenhood, and walking ten paces behind. To be recognized as human, levelly human, is enough.²⁰

Here we see precisely the way in which, early on, identity politics was not understood as antithetical to the universal claim of the proletarian standpoint but was rather a way of addressing the narrowness, particularism and incompleteness of a historically particular universal. Universalism properly understood, as Todd McGowan has suggested, is always incomplete; it is always already constituted by what he calls, following Lacan, 'lack'.²¹ Adorno showed, in a quasi-Kantian manner, a certain material, physical excess always already eludes the labour of the concept. In more concrete terms, the emancipation of the (White, predominantly male and European) proletariat, or what Lenin following Engels referred to as the 'labour

aristocracy',²² was not necessarily up to the task of ensuring the emancipation of humanity as such, not least black and brown women. But the CRC's horizon remained nonetheless one of a genuine, *universal* and human emancipation from false universals. As Ato Sekyi-Otu puts it in his book *Left Universalism: Africacentric Essays*, theirs was

Not, as the counter-revolution's caricature would have it, that to each and all belong their own incommensurable and incommunicable idioms of the true, the good and the beautiful. An unimpeachable revolt against counterfeit universals, what the movement wanted to say, rather, is that the true, the good and the beautiful are human universals achieved and made manifest in variegated shapes and forms.²³

Anticipating legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw's now influential notion of 'intersectionality', the CRC also emphasized sexual orientation to this particular understanding of combined and overlapping forms of oppression. Identity politics thus entailed a recognition of the specificity of the location, 'standpoint' or 'positionality' of particularly excluded or marginalized groups who were subjected to mutually reinforcing structures of domination. Identity politics entailed struggles to make the liberal-democratic state's claim to embody universal recognition live up to that promise by resisting and challenging these structures of domination. And this would entail, in turn, nothing less than such a state's radical transformation in a *dialectic of liberation*.

The CRC's key idea was that Black lesbians must be the *subjects of their own liberation* in so far as its members' historical experience had been that the inclusion of their specific aspirations for emancipation within larger movements could not be taken for granted or assumed. Far from it. Identity politics in this specific register therefore sought to include both experiences and aspirations that had historically been excluded by male Black nationalists, White bourgeois feminists and, more broadly, a predominantly middle-class White Left that had presented itself, in the Enlightenment tradition, as the bearer of universal emancipation. Identity politics and genuine universalism were not, at this stage, mutually exclusive. It was, rather, as previously suggested, a matter of enlightening the Enlightenment about its own blind spots, omission and exclusions.²⁴ Indeed, the claim was that in the liberation of the most abject and therefore also the most dangerous and revolutionary group in society, there lay the promise of genuine universal human emancipation. The resonances with Hegel's rabble as signifying the demand for a thoroughly egalitarian society are clear.

The philosophical basis for contemporary identity politics lies in 'standpoint' theory or epistemology. Standpoint theory was a response to sociologist Dorothy Smith's observation that sociology reifies or treats women like objects, and hence there is a need for a distinctive female perspective within the discipline.²⁵ Such a perspective aspired to turn passive objects into active and therefore potentially transformative subjects. As I have already suggested, standpoint theory drew

upon Lukács's argument set forth in the third section of his essay 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat' entitled 'The Standpoint of the Proletariat' in *History and Class Consciousness*.²⁶ Fredric Jameson argues that Lukács's defenders and detractors alike miss his emphasis on collective experience, and this lies very much at the heart of identity politics as such. Jameson writes:

to the point where, today, one has the feeling that the most authentic descendancy of Lukács's thinking is to be found, not among the Marxists, but within a certain feminism, where the unique conceptual move of *History and Class Consciousness* has been appropriated for a whole program, now renamed (after Lukács's own usage) standpoint theory.²⁷

Consequently, 'standpoint theorists' like Nancy C.M. Hartstock have argued that the marginalized were more knowledgeable about the specific conditions of their oppression than those who purported to represent their interests from a position far removed from it. Drawing on Marx and Lukács, Hartstock claims 'because it provides the basis for revealing the perversion of both life and thought, the inhumanity of human relations, a standpoint can be the basis for moving beyond these relations.'²⁸ Patricia Hill Collins suggests in her book *Black Feminist Thought*:

Because U.S. Black women have access to the experiences that accrue to being both Black and female, an alternative epistemology used to rearticulate a Black women's standpoint should reflect the convergence of both sets of experiences.

She goes on to write that

Thus the significance of a Black feminist epistemology may lie in its ability to enrich our understanding of how subordinate groups create knowledge that fosters both their empowerment and social justice.²⁹

The argument was that such knowledge could be grounded in the immediacy of the experience of oppression in much the same way that workers' direct experience of the oppressive nature of wage slavery could, in and of itself, generate specific knowledge about the nature of exploitation and the domination of the value form within capitalist society. Although we need to be clear that this was not exactly faithful to Lukács's more dialectical position. Lukács accepted Lenin's suspicion in *What Is to Be Done?* that, left to its own devices, the working class could only achieve 'trade union consciousness'. In other words, collective experience without mediation demonstrated considerable limitations.

Jameson grounds the politics of a vast range of oppressed groups in Lukács's notion of standpoint or collective experience. Yet he misses the way in which Lukács's standpoint of emancipation has turned into a standpoint of naturalized domination in the emergence of, for example, Afropessimism or what Norman Ajari calls 'Black political ontology', especially in the work of Frank B. Wilderson III.³⁰

According to Wilderson, the very condition of the personhood of what he calls 'the Human' necessitates what he calls, following Orlando Patterson, the 'social death' of Black people, which is expressed most directly in slavery. It is

at this point, as well, that – in marked contrast to the CRC – the idea of *human emancipation* is abandoned. Accordingly, Wilderson infamously disavows Black solidarity with the anti-colonial and emancipatory aspirations of the Palestinian people – which cannot but strike us as particularly poignant today.⁵¹ This critique of reification in standpoint theory remains reified and results from an abandonment of universalism.

Standpoint theory understood in this sense arguably entails a very dubious relation of ownership, or what we could call, following C.B. Macpherson, a ‘possessive individualist’ relation to experience.⁵² It is possible to argue that it is precisely within neoliberal capitalism, with its conception of subjectivity as the ‘entrepreneur of itself’, that such experience and the identity it solidifies become ever more pronounced and, indeed, commodified. And it is precisely this condition that gives the oppressed a stake not in the transformation but in the maintenance of such conditions, lest it lose its voice and fall silent once again. The oppressed are driven, as it were, *to identify with rather than to resist the aggressor*, which is to say: *to identify with conditions of their own domination*. This might explain what can be regarded as the attachment to the conditions of one’s own victimization and the consequent block this places on social transformation, ultimately subverting the dialectic of liberation.

Of course, this logic is self-reinforcing as in order to be heard the marginalized and excluded are encouraged to

constantly emphasize and even perform their victimization, often in competition with members of other marginalized groups. The assumption here is that the veracity of truth claims articulated by historically oppressed groups is directly proportional to the magnitude of their historical suffering. This is well exemplified by Wilderson in seeking, as it were, to corner the market on the commodity of ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ suffering:

To suffer like a White woman or Native Americans or postcolonial subjects would be heaven for us, because the suffering of the Slave would have Human resonance. And that Human resonance would lend itself to very Human answers to the question, What is to be done? or What does freedom look like? We could launch coherent liberation campaigns. However, that would be disastrous for the Human race. This is why Afropessimism has no prescriptive gesture because the end of our suffering signals the end of the Human, the end of world.³⁵

It is here in Wilderson’s work that identity politics becomes most explicit as a *melancholic attachment to one’s own suffering*.

It is possible now to answer the question that I posed at the outset in the following way: identity politics is *both* a dialectic of liberation and a paradox of empowerment. Identity politics sought to reinstate and repair a sense of dignity to those identities that had been debased and denigrated through centuries of colonization and enslavement and in the process liberate them in the name of genuine freedom and autonomy.

In this sense, it manifested genuine forms of resistance to dominant, often Eurocentric, forms of identity.

Contemporary identity politics has also, however, as I've sought to show, subsequently regressed into a melancholy attachment to victimization, victimhood and absolute as opposed to dialectical negativity, in so far as it takes oppression to be the transcendental condition for the possibility of the articulation of its claims; emancipation from such conditions of oppression would undermine the very possibility of the articulation of such claims. In the case of Afropessimism, this has in part come about through a diminution or indeed outright erasure of what Kevin Ochieng Okoth felicitously calls 'Red Africa', a concept which he uses to

distinguish a revolutionary anti-colonial tradition from the reformist politics of African socialism. ... [It] does not simply refer to those national liberation movements who collaborated closely with China or the Soviet Union. Instead, it points to a tradition whose activism envisioned a different postcolonial future than the one that has come to pass.⁵⁴

As a result, contemporary identity politics loses its early promise of determinate or specific negativity. It therefore fails to register the historical and therefore transitory nature of identity as such and subsequently succumbs, as many of its critics such as Adolph Reed Jr, Walter Benn Michaels and Olúfémi O. Táíwò have suggested, to a logic of capture, integration and incorporation. And given that culture is never simply about culture but about the material structures

of its production and reproduction, such reproduction mirrors the incorporation of local elites into a global structure of financialized neocolonialism.⁵⁵ Betraying its early radical promise, then, identity politics becomes the ideology of the managerial elites embodying a false promise of the liberation of difference, while only tightening the hold of a social order based on the mediation of abstract labour that only deepens the sterile logic of uniformity and sameness.

So, what initially promised a historical *dialectic of liberation* has, however, become a (negative) ontological *paradox of empowerment*, as the resistance of the excluded and marginalized – let's say the non-identical – is integrated into the increasingly totally administered world and serves now only to tighten its hold. With Howard Caygill we could say that, in so far as it eschews plural forms of resistance in favour of *the Resistance* in the singular, identity politics places itself in danger of sacrificing its very capacity to resist.

What could be said to account for this shift? One way of answering the question is to point to the exhaustion of the internationalism inaugurated in the 'Spirit of Bandung'.⁵⁶ But this was not simply exhaustion but a result of the concerted genocidal anti-communism of what Vincent Bevins calls the 'Jakarta Method'. The domestic US version of this method was, of course, the FBI's targeting of Black radicals such as George Jackson, Angela Davis and the Black Panther Party. By failing to root the failures of what it now considers to be an 'outdated' national-liberationist Marxism in this form of radical anti-communism, Afropessimism becomes

perhaps unconsciously complicit in the very colonial project it supposedly seeks to decolonize. But perhaps it is not only a matter of historical concatenations but the ideological and organizational determinations of the politics of national liberation itself that always already place it in too close a proximity to paradoxes of empowerment in the form of claims to identity.³⁷

Perhaps the opposition between a politics of liberation and a paradox of empowerment is a false one. Might it be that, rather than an identity politics, what is necessary is a *(non-) identity politics*. Here Adorno's negative dialectics can be seen as a somewhat provocative model of such a non-identity politics. While Gillian Rose's *The Melancholy Science* is an admirable interpretation of Adorno's negative dialectic, is it true that Adorno is unable to provide a convincing account of politics? As was made clear by his prescient, recently translated, 1967 lecture *Aspects of Far-Right Extremism*, Adorno's political philosophy could be understood as a conceptual anti-fascism, which regains its relevance in an age haunted by global spectres of fascism.³⁸ This, I would suggest, takes the form not of an identity politics, but rather a '(non-)identity politics' or the stubborn, indefatigable resistance of that which refuses incorporation.

NON-IDENTITY POLITICS

Unsurprisingly, Adorno's non-identity politics also arises out of a confrontation with Hegel's teleology of historical struggles for autonomy grounded in universal recognition.

The logic of integration inherent in Hegel's philosophy entailed the negation of the negation in the positivity of a fully realized absolute or total system in which such freedom would be achieved.³⁹ If in the context of the dirempted nature of the ethical life of modernity Hegel's *affirmative* dialectic embodies an 'urge toward totality'⁴⁰ or a logic of integration that seeks to show the ineluctable world historical necessity of reconciliation or the 'identity of identity and non-identity', then Adorno's *negative* dialectic entails what he calls a 'logic of disintegration' (*Logik der Zerfalls*):

such dialectics is no longer reconcilable with Hegel. Its motion does not tend to the identity in the difference between each object and its concept; instead, it is suspicious of all identity. Its logic is one of disintegration: of a disintegration of the prepared and objectified form of the concepts which the cognitive subject faces, primarily and directly. Their identity with the subject is untruth. With this untruth, the subjective pre-formation of the phenomenon moves in front of the nonidentical in the phenomenon, in front of the *individuum ineffabile*.⁴¹

Perhaps invoking the spirit of the rabble, Adorno's philosophical strategy is to trouble the Hegelian logic of integration – the putative achievement of the identity of concept and object – by drawing attention to the tendency in Hegel to subjectively preform the object, while at the same time denying this very operation.⁴² In the process, negativity emerges from the material object in its excess, the *individuum ineffabile*, its stubborn resistance to concepts (*Begriffen*) that claim to 'grasp' (*greifen*) it without remainder.

Adorno makes two main claims against Hegel. The first is that the subsumption of particular material objects beneath abstract concepts, in so far as it entails a process of disciplining the object by polishing off its rough edges or anything that makes the sensuous particular *particular*, involves, as Gillian Rose has shown, a kind of spiritual or conceptual violence or what Nietzsche referred to as ‘making what is unlike like’. In contrast to Nietzsche, however, who roots it in the historical equivalence of transgression and punishment,⁴⁵ Adorno roots such violence in the exchange principle mediated by what Sohn-Rethel called the ‘real abstraction’ of the commodity form.⁴⁴ As Adorno writes in *Negative Dialectics*:

The exchange principle, the reduction of human labor to the abstract universal concept of average working hours, is fundamentally akin to the principle of identification. *Exchange is the social model of the principle, and without the principle there would be no exchange; it is through exchange that nonidentical individuals and performances become commensurable and identical.* The spread of the principle imposes on the whole world an obligation to become identical, to become total.⁴⁵

If Hegel traces the myriad patterns or shapes Spirit assumes on its journey home to itself, Adorno’s aim is to point to the violence necessitated by the exchange principle, which he deciphers with the help of Marx’ *Capital*, or what he calls the ‘phenomenology of the anti-spirit’.⁴⁶

The second claim Adorno makes against Hegel is that the suffering that results from what he calls the ‘extorted

reconciliation' of identity and non-identity cannot be reversed or redeemed by the subsequent moment of the unfolding of Spirit. The *remembrance* of suffering in Hegel is, paradoxically, simultaneously its *forgetting* in so far as it is annulled or turned into a positive moment by the subsequent unfolding of Spirit. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel goes so far as to claim that Spirit overcomes death itself.⁴⁷ And, so it must, in so far as Hegel explicitly understands his philosophy of history as a theodicy or the justification of evil in a divinely created order. In contrast, for Adorno, suffering remains irredeemably *non-identical*. This is an important point for our particular historical moment in so far as, for Adorno, *suffering cannot be legitimately instrumentalized*, indeed, weaponized for various political purposes.

How can Adorno's conceptual critique of the Hegelian concept illuminate identity politics? Given its technical tenor, as I've described it above, Adorno's critique of identity thinking seems rather far removed from the concerns of those asserting politically urgent existential identity claims as claims for recognition as well as resistance to myriad forms of 'effacement', as Judith Butler helpfully puts it.⁴⁸

The intricacies of dialectical logic could hardly seem less relevant to such public claims forwarded by groups who have historically been wronged, oppressed and marginalized and whose suffering seems to have been justified by the racist assumptions and entanglements inherent in so much of the history of Western philosophy up to and, arguably, including Adorno's own philosophy.⁴⁹ What is key, however, is that

Adorno's 'logic of disintegration' points to the way in which non-identity *is the moment of resistance of what is different, resistance to the logic of the same*. He even understands identity thinking as the 'philosophical imperialism of annexing what is different'. In this Adorno has much in common with identity politics. The non-identical, as most clearly expressed in bodily suffering of both human and non-human animals, is a form of *resistance*. As Oshrat Silberbusch contends:

By questioning the most fundamental tenets of rational thought, Adorno's philosophy of the nonidentical not only builds such consciousness, it also adumbrates what a different way of thinking would look like: one that, by giving voice to suffering, by bringing out into the open the erasure of the nonidentical, edges thinking away from complicity with the latter, and turns it into resistance.⁵⁰

Identity politics, I would argue, is to be understood as offering precisely such a 'different way of thinking' as a form of resistance, and one grounded moreover in the historical experiences of marginalization, oppression and suffering. At the same time, however, Adorno's 'non-identity thinking' can prove provocatively helpful in clarifying and pointing to some of the considerable blind spots and weaknesses of contemporary identity politics, which, without a utopic dimension, tends to subvert its own aspirations.

Adorno's thought, I suggest, embodies a form of negativity that perhaps places it rather close to the most melancholic vision of Afropessimism. The 'melancholic

science' articulated in *Minima Moralia* is nothing more than a detailed excavation of a kind of social death or the 'life that has become the ideology of its own absence'. However, Adorno's thinking never relinquishes its utopic moment without which it would slip into incoherence. 'The power of ... negativity holds real sway to this day.' Adorno argues, 'What would be different has not begun as yet.'⁵¹ One can only recognize such power from the standpoint of a world that would be non-identical with itself. This means that rather than seeking recognition as a bearer of experiences of displacement which would constitute the transcendental conditions for the possibility of its truth claims, negative dialectics demands the *end* of these conditions, which in turn, for Adorno, means the negation of a society constituted by the exchange principle. The stasis of the fixed and eternal is transcended by the dynamism of the open and transitory. Such dynamism would also, I might add, make *Negative Dialectics* itself obsolete. Critical Theory has a profound investment in its own negation. The paradoxical liberation from the conditions within which Critical Theory is intelligible is its only normative commitment.

The homeless person, for example, is hardly impelled to seek recognition of her abject suffering and humiliation, but instead demands the abolition of the condition that made her so. Adorno's own *standpoint*, as what we may call a 'homeless' philosopher, is that of the refugee, the scholar in exile, in which he explicitly grounds his notion of 'negative dialectics' in his lectures in 1965/66 at the University of

Frankfurt. The demand for the abolition of homelessness is reflected in an important shift in language: rather than saying ‘homeless people’ we are rightly encouraged now to say ‘the unhoused’. What once, therefore, appeared to be an essentialized identity (perhaps echoing the early Lukács’s *transcendentale Obdachlosigkeit* or transcendental homelessness) now appears as historical contingency. As Adorno writes in *Negative Dialectics*: ‘Weh spricht: vergeh!’ (Woe speaks: Go!).⁵² The parallels with Marx’s depiction of the proletariat’s struggle to abolish class society and eventually its own negative, privative identity ought to be clear. In such a negative ethics, Adorno identifies with Marx’s comrade-in-exile, the Jewish writer and poet Heinrich Heine. As he writes in his beautiful essay ‘The Wound Heine’:

there is no longer any homeland other than a world in which no one would be cast out any more, the world of a genuinely emancipated humanity. The wound that is Heine will heal only in a society that has achieved reconciliation.⁵³

If Hegel’s logic of integration aspires to heal the wounds of a dirempted modernity through internalizing remembrance (*Erinnerung*), then Adorno’s memory (*Gedächtnis*) of Heine’s suffering reopens these wounds by acknowledging them and, in the process, shows historical reconciliation, as both Hegel and the later Lukács understood it, to be false; to have been achieved under conditions of duress.

Adorno’s post-war interventions address historical trauma and could be reconstructed in the following way.

Civilizational lacerations as opposed to individual traumas can be understood as occurring at two related levels. The first we term *first order* trauma, which happens at the level of the event itself, for example riot, uprising, revolution, war, genocide, and so on. *Second order* trauma, in contrast, is what happens at the level of the *hermeneutics* of the event; a crisis of interpretability or narrativizability of first-order historical traumas, which pushes against the limits of existing conceptual knowledge, models or paradigms.

In other words, second-order trauma results from the impossibility of integrating the traumatic event into existing frameworks of intelligibility. The dominant framework of intelligibility of European modernity was that of a historicist philosophy of progress summed up in the idea of universal history articulated by Kant, Hegel and the orthodox Marxism of the Second International (of which Walter Benjamin was intensely critical).⁵⁴ The genius of this philosophy, though, was that it intuited the need to relate two orders of trauma through an affirmative notion of contradiction which, ultimately, was understood to lead, via what Hegel calls ‘the cunning of reason’, to reconciliation or ‘the identity of identity and non-identity’.⁵⁵ This is ultimately an apologia for historical violence and suffering not unlike the historical justification of colonial domination (the so-called ‘White Man’s Burden’) in the form of a secularized theodicy. Adorno’s negative dialectics brings this clearly into view.

A sympathetic reading of identity politics would suggest that, like Adorno’s own post-war writings about the

ethico-political significance of historical traumas such as the Armenian Genocide and, of course, the Holocaust, it registers a second-order trauma produced by the bloody, even terroristic, colonial histories of Western modernity, to which it is related both past and present. It is therefore profoundly sensitive to the damage done to existing universalistic frameworks of intelligibility.

Unlike Adorno, however – who seeks to salvage ideas from the wreckage of enlightenment, such as the rational, democratic autonomy; the memory of damaged, suffering nature; as well as a certain form of universalism that registers the *non-identical lack* at its heart, or what Lacan would call the subversion of the symbolic order by the ‘real’ – identity politics seems to disavow enlightenment *in toto* to the point where the question of whether it is a coherent left-wing project must inevitably arise. It is precisely here that identity politics throws the *critical-rational* baby out with the *colonial* bathwater and, consequently, takes what I consider to be a dangerous authoritarian turn.

Rather than understanding historical traumas as resulting from political-economic imperatives, such as capital as self-valorizing value, contemporary identity politics attributes them to reified, mystical notions of ‘Whiteness’ or ‘Eurocentrism’. In Wilderson’s version of Afropessimism a historical and not in-itself racialized social relation – slavery – becomes exclusively racialized and therefore essentialized in the transcendental opposition between the (African) ‘Slave’ and the (non-African) ‘Human’. In other

words, identity politics represents an abstract negation of Western Enlightenment – not unlike fascism – rather than a constructive confrontation of the worst of Europe with its best, as Cornel West puts it. And indeed what writers like Paul Gilroy, Susan Buck-Morss and more recently Priyamvada Gopal have suggested is that some of what is best in Europe was itself drawn from the dissent and insurgencies oriented by the aspiration for a meaningful conception of freedom of the enslaved and colonized subjects themselves. Call this *an insurgent form of non-identity*.

As I suggested at the outset, such a confrontation could be seen as unfolding in Adorno's negative dialectics, which embodies what he calls a logic of *disintegration*, a logic that seeks to push Hegelian reconciliation to the point where it is possible to imagine the non-identical emancipated precisely from the compulsively subsumptive and violent logic of identity. But Adorno is not offering a qualitatively different form of dialectical logic as such but practising what he calls a 'consistent sense of non-identity',⁵⁶ one that pushes beyond Hegel's temporal and spatial closure within an affirmative conception of universal history. Negative dialectics is better described as the attempt to reanimate – and this is why it is a genuinely *immanent* critique – a dynamic that is always already internal to Hegel's thought itself. The latter's admission of the problem of the rabble, and by extension the proletariat, is a case in point. The object identities in question here are not those which demand recognition and affirmation but their own abolition through the dialectical negation of

the oppressive conditions that give rise to them. If identity politics is *a struggle by what is different for inclusion*, then Adorno's non-identity politics is to be understood as *a struggle by what is different to resist such totalizing inclusion*.

So, to conclude: in its earliest phase, identity politics – both in the anti-colonial liberation struggles and in the form of the transformative socialist–feminist politics of the CRC – sought a liberation of the non-identical from a society in which abstract labour was, and remains, the dominant form of social mediation and, as such, reduced all difference to identity or equivalence. Like the social position of Hegel's rabble, the implication of this was that for Black lesbian workers, for example, to be truly included, racist patriarchal society would have to be transformed in a radically egalitarian direction. As Angela Davis has recently written in her foreword to a book on Herbert Marcuse's notion of the 'Great Refusal': 'Zora Neale Hurston reminded us that the Black woman is the mule of the world. What if the mules of the world become the very height of humanity?'⁵⁷ Such inclusion – fundamentally disavowed by Black political ontology – would also, however, radically transform these very 'intersectional' identities in so far as the oppressive conditions that produced them would themselves have been transcended or overcome. A liberated society, in so far as it would constitute a consummate redistribution of the sensible, would no longer require a fixed and static standpoint epistemology! Here, in this early iteration of

identity, politics is a genuine and universal and *emancipatory* claim to freedom. The liberation of the most abject group would entail the liberation of all.

If identity politics promises the liberation and inclusion of oppressed and excluded identities, then non-identity politics entails a *liberation from identity* as such. If for Adorno domination must be understood as comprising a constellation of relations of power of identity over non-identity, the domination of the figure of the human over sensuous, external nature and non-human animals, the domination of the superego over libidinal impulses within the individual as well as class domination, (*non-identity politics*) would entail *pace* Caygill myriad situated forms of resistance (as opposed to a singular *Resistance*) to the reductive logic of identity.⁵⁸

Identity politics is both a dialectics of liberation and a paradox of empowerment. But perhaps each of its dimensions implies the other. The robust reassertion of denigrated and effaced identities must exert an unbearable pressure of conformity on each of its subjects, perhaps in much the same way as the revolutionary party demands iron discipline from each of its members, as Georg Lukács knew only too well.⁵⁹ The dialectic of liberation slides then, perhaps against itself, into a paradox of empowerment. Such negations generate what we could call a certain cunning of reason: the need for a transcendence of this very opposition, to wit: a (non-) identity politics, a politics that aims to liberate the non-identical beyond the heteronomous compulsions of identity as such. To return to the epigraph with which I began:

‘The reconciled condition would not be the philosophical imperialism of annexing the alien. Instead, its happiness would lie in the fact that the alien, in the proximity it is granted, remains what is distant and different, beyond the heterogeneous and beyond that which is one’s own.’

NOTES

1. www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sv-TXOfI7vg.
2. In my view, this crisis of universalism can be traced back to the fatwa issued by Tehran against Salman Rushdie with the publication of his controversial novel *The Satanic Verses* in 1989, combined with an emphasis on the politics of recognition and the view that speech acts and other forms of expression or representation constitute violence in a literal rather than metaphorical way, and indeed that pornography was, itself, rape, as legal scholar Catherine A. MacKinnon argues in *Only Words*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1993.
3. bell hooks criticizes Black radicals such as the Panthers for their supposed unreconstructed, dominating masculinity. However, she fails to recognize Huey Newton’s early and quite courageous defence of gays and lesbians as well as what could be considered the ‘ethics of care’ embedded in their community-building work. See bell hooks, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, Routledge, London, 2003; and for an apposite critique, see Norman Ajari, *Dignity or Death: Ethics and the Politics of Race*, trans. Matthew B. Smith, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2023, pp. 9–10.
4. Douglas Murray, *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam*, Bloomsbury, London, 2017; *The War on the West: How to Prevail in the Age of Unreason*, Harper Collins, New York, 2021, and *The Madness of Crowds: Gender Race and Identity*, Bloomsbury, London, 2019; Mark Lila, *The Once and Future Liberal: After Identity Politics*, Harper, New York, 2017; Francis Fukuyama, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*, Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, New York, 2018; Anthony Appiah, *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity*, Liveright, New York, 2019; Yascha Mounk, *The Identity Trap: A Story of Ideas and Power in Our Time*, Penguin, New York, 2023; Asad Haider, *Mistaken Identity: Mass Movements and Racial Ideology*, Verso, London, 2022; Adolph Reed Jr and Walter Benn Michaels, *No Politics But Class Politics*, Eris Press, London, 2023; Olúfémí O. Táíwò, *Elite Capture: How the Elites Took Over Identity Politics (And Everything Else)*, Haymarket Books, Chicago, 2022; Kevin Ochieng Okoth, *Red Africa: Reclaiming Revolutionary Black Politics*, Verso, London, 2023.

5. The question of Eurocentrism has returned with a vengeance in the aftermath of Habermas's defence of Israel's attacks on Gaza in the aftermath of the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023. See 'Habermas on Israel: A Principle of Solidarity': www.resetdoc.org/story/habermas-israel-principle-solidarity (accessed 20 January 2024). See Hamid Dabashi's rejoinder: 'Thanks to Gaza, European Philosophy Has Been Exposed as Ethically Bankrupt', www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/war-gaza-european-philosophy-ethically-bankrupt-exposed (accessed 20 January 2024).
6. Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 5.
7. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, ed., *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*, Haymarket Books, Chicago, 2017.
8. In the immediate aftermath of the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023, we saw such a form of colonial defacement when the Israeli defence minister Yoav Gallant called Palestinians 'human animals' as he announced what can only be described as a genocidal response to the brutal, morally indefensible Hamas attacks on innocents and hostage-taking on 7 October. In the context of the earlier, Canadian version of settler colonialism, the historic and ongoing logic of denigration and humiliation was enacted systematically thorough the Indian residential schools. Such schools were given the following justification by Bishop Vital Grandin in 1875: 'We instill in [Indians] a pronounced distaste for the native life so that they will be humiliated when reminded of their origin. When they graduate from our institutions, the children have lost everything native except their blood.' In contrast with contemporary approaches to 'decoloniality' associated with the writings of Argentinian Walter Mignolo, which tend to view colonialism in 'culturalist' terms, the key thing in the history of settler colonialism (past and present) is its political economy. See Neil Larsen, 'The Jargon of Decoloniality', *Catalyst*, vol. 6, no. 2, Summer 2022, catalyst-journal.com/2022/09/the-jargon-of-decoloniality. If 'Indians' lose everything except their blood (and many, as has been revealed in the last couple of years, lost their lives), then as a people *they lose their land*. Colonial occupation as a project requires the dehumanization of the other.
9. Okoth, *Red Africa*, p. 52.
10. Quoted in Enzo Traverso, *Left-wing Melancholia: Marxism, History and Memory*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2021, p. 169.
11. Aristotle, *Politics*, in *The Complete Works*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1958, 1253a, para 14.
12. This is what Plato in *The Republic* called *thymos* or spiritedness. See the discussion in Fukuyama, *Identity*.
13. In *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen Wood, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, §244, Hegel claims, 'When a large mass of people sinks below the level of a certain standard of living – which automatically regulates itself at the level necessary for a member of the society in question – that feeling of right, integrity [*Rechtlichkeit*], and honour which comes from supporting oneself by one's own activity and

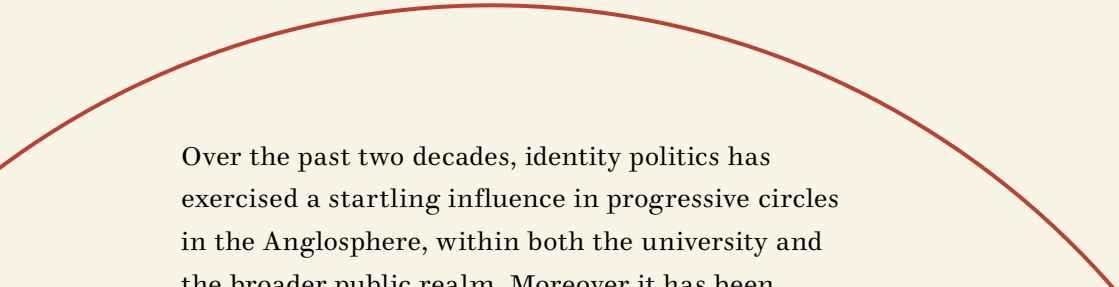
- work is lost. This leads to the creation of a rabble, which in turn makes it much easier for disproportionate wealth to be concentrated in a few hands.' Frank Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble: An Investigation into Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'*, Bloomsbury, London, 2011.
14. See Shlomo Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1974, p. 154; also Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*, Brill, Leiden, 2001.
 15. Here we might refer to Gillian Rose's identification in *Dialectic of Nihilism: Post-Structuralism and the Law*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 1991, of the key opposition forming the speculative core of both Hegel and Marx – that is, between 'free subjects and subjected things'.
 16. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. E. Jephcott, Stanford University Press, Palo Alto CA, 2002.
 17. T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton, Routledge, London, 1990, p. 3.
 18. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. R. Livingstone, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1972, p. 197.
 19. Taylor, ed., *How We Get Free*, p. 5.
 20. Combahee River Collective, 'Black Feminist Statement: This Bridge Called My Back', in Taylor, ed., *How We Get Free*, p. 15.
 21. Todd McGowan, *Universality and Identity Politics*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2020.
 22. V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Progress Press, Moscow, p. 3.
 23. Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Left Universalism: Africentric Essays*, Routledge, London and New York, 2019, p. 61.
 24. In a way, this was confirmation of Lenin's theory of the 'aristocracy of labour'. This can be taken as the implicit argument of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: that the very enlightenment that understood itself as the antithesis of myth repeats myth in so far as it is based on the domination of the colonial other. The finale of such domination is its application to its own *Heimat* and culminates in the Holocaust. In other words, the horrors of colonization constitute the key staging ground for the Shoah.
 25. Dorothy E. Smith, 'Women's Perspective as a Radical Critique of Sociology', in Sandra Harding, ed., *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, Routledge, New York and London, 2004, pp. 21–34.
 26. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, pp. 149–222.
 27. Fredric Jameson, 'History and Class Consciousness as an Unfinished Project', reprinted in *Valences of the Dialectic*, Verso, London and Brooklyn NY, 2009, p. 215.
 28. Nancy C.M. Hartstock, 'The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism', in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader*, p. 39.

29. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, Routledge, New York, 2000, p. 269.
30. Ajari, *Dignity or Death*, pp. 17 and 184–90.
31. See this transcript of a radio interview from 2014: illwilleditions.noblogs.org/files/2015/09/Wilderson-We-Are-Trying-to-Destroy-the-World-read.pdf.
32. *The Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011.
33. Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism*, Liveright Books, New York, 2020, p. 331.
34. Okoth, *Red Africa*, p. 3.
35. This has been an ongoing preoccupation of revolutionary African film. See for example, Ousmane Sembène's 1992 film *Guelwaar*, which centres on the political assignation of a nationalist leader, who bears an unmistakable resemblance to Thomas Sankara, battling Senegal's continuing dependence on food aid.
36. As Okoth, drawing on figures such as Aijaz Ahmad, convincingly does in *Red Africa*, ch. 1.
37. This dynamic is explored rather brilliantly in Sembène's *Borom Sarret* (1963), and *Ceddo* (1977), the latter of which led to conflict between the film-maker and a founding member of *Négritude*, Léopold Sédhogo, who was Senegal's president at the time.
38. See T.W. Adorno, *Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2020 and Samir Gandesha, *Spectres of Fascism: Theoretical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, Pluto, London, 2020. Indeed, as the director of the Adorno Archive, Michael Schwartz, has pointed out, Adorno's contribution to politics is most clearly visible in his often-overlooked public lectures, radio addresses and interviews upon arriving in the Federal Republic in 1949 which focus on how it might be possible to arrange our thoughts and actions in such a way as to avoid the repetition of Auschwitz.
39. Recent Hegel interpretation, which places Hegel in much closer proximity to Kant than say in the 'expressivist' readings of philosophers more critical of the Enlightenment such as Charles Taylor, represents a significant challenge to Adorno's view of Hegel. See inter alia Robert Pippin, *Hegel and the Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989; Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1860*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012; and Douglas Moggach, ed., *Politics, Religion, and Art*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston IL, 2012.
40. Cited in Pippin, *Hegel and the Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*, p. 62.
41. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 145.
42. And other representatives of idealism such as Kierkegaard, Husserl and Heidegger, see Peter Gordon, *Adorno and Existence*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2018.
43. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, New York, 1989, pp. 57–96.

44. Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*, trans. Martin Sohn-Rethel, Brill, Leiden, 2020.
45. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 146, translation altered and emphasis added.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 356.
47. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 19.
48. See the 2021 Holberg debate, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sv-TXOfI7vg.
49. See Fumi Okiji, *Jazz as Critique: Adorno and Black Expression Revisited*, Stanford University Press, Pao Alto CA, 2018.
50. Oshrat C. Silberbusch, *Adorno's Philosophy of the Non-Identical: Thinking as Resistance*, Palgrave, New York, 2018, p. 7.
51. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 145.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
53. T.W. Adorno, 'The Wound Heine', *Notes to Literature*, vol. 1, trans. S.W. Nichol森, Columbia University Press, New York, 1991, p. 85.
54. See Amy Allen, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2017.
55. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, ed. and trans. W. Cerf and H. S. Harris, SUNY Press, Buffalo NY, 1977.
56. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 5.
57. Angela Davis, 'Foreword', in Andrew T. Lamas, Todd Wolfson, Peter N. Funke, eds, *The Great Refusal: Herbert Marcuse and Contemporary Social Movements*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia PA, 2017, p. x.
58. See Howard Caygill, *Resistance: On the Philosophy of Defiance*, Bloomsbury, London, 2013.
59. As alluded to above in n55, here the object lesson is in the authoritarian rule of Senegal's first president and founding member of *Négritude*, Léopold Sédar Senghor, who engaged in a long-standing feud with the Marxist trade unionist, writer and film-maker Ousmane Sembène, who sided with the *ceddo*, the outsiders, the eponymous title of the latter's 1977 film.

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Over the past two decades, identity politics has exercised a startling influence in progressive circles in the Anglosphere, within both the university and the broader public realm. Moreover it has been taken up into the agendas of putatively liberal and nominally social democratic parties. However, the idea of identity politics is still widely misconstrued. This lecture reflects on the origins and conceptual and political meanings of the idea. It poses the question, ‘Is identity politics best viewed as embodying a genuine dialectic of emancipation or as what, in her 1996 collection *Mourning Becomes the Law*, Gillian Rose called an aporetic “paradox of empowerment”?’ Put differently, does identity politics aim at fundamental social transformation or does it more simply represent a shift in what we might call the ‘organic composition’ of elites within capitalist societies?

