Towards the End of the White Guilt Era? The Rise of Nostalgic Whiteness and Magical Populism

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Abstract: *This essay probes into the rise and deterioration of multiculturalism in the West, paired with the notion of white guilt. It further explores the shift of the Western discourse to inform of the present-day conflation of populism and white nostalgia, which, this essay claims, may be the result of the end of the white guilt era and the subsequent rise to what I refer to as magical populism: a racial desire of the West to rewind globalisation in an effort to restore the lost sense of home and security of whites. The essay engages in a review of literature on critical post-theories, moving from the Frankfurt School to, among others, postcolonialism and postmodernism. It provides a trajectory of intellectual thinking as well as of the cultural dynamics from the end of WWII to date. It then explores how this trajectory fits into the current white political and cultural turn to scepticism over the multicultural paradigm with which to build Western societies in a globalised world. As such, this essay contributes to the study of whiteness in assessing the concept of white guilt in the West as advanced by Shelby Steele almost two decades ago.*

Keywords: whiteness, hispanic whiteness, white guilt, populism, critical theory

> "El sueño de la razón produce monstruos"
> (The sleep of reason produces monsters)
> - Francisco de Goya, etching n. 43, *Diario de Madrid*, 1797.

The Rise of Multiculturalism and the Post-theories

In the aftermath of World War II, Europe was devastated. European nations needed to rebuild their societies not only materially but also morally due to the atrocities of Nazism and fascism. As these two ideologies overtly propagated white supremacist principles and were predicated on racial hatred, notions of

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race produced deep-rooted feelings of shame and guilt in the West. Carl Jung's reflections in "After the Catastrophe" were testament to those collective European sentiments. Referring to Adolf Hitler, Jung declared that "as a German, he has betrayed European civilization and all its values; he has brought shame and disgrace on his European family, so that one must blush to hear oneself called a European" (Jung 1946, 62). Of course, Jung understood Hitler's prowess beyond his *persona* as the catalyst who freed the German *Volksgeist*'s dormant, repressed desires. As a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, Jung's accusation built on the tradition of nineteenth century *Völkerpsychologie* seeking to examine the Germanic national self and their collective psychology with the goal of explaining the catastrophe of WWII. Jung concluded that

> Hitler's significance lay, that he symbolized something in every individual. He was the most prodigious personification of all human inferiorities [...] he represented the shadow, the inferior part of everybody's personality, in an overwhelming degree [...] In Hitler, every German should have seen his own shadow, his own worst danger. (Jung 1946, 7)

The projection of the shadow of vast numbers of Germans was in fact a shadow shared by masses of uncountable Europeans who freed their repressed impulses in the name of a superior white race. As a consequence, racial rhetoric of any kind became stigmatized forcing Europe to shape a new model for the post-war society.

The European need to find a model for their post-war society coincided across the Atlantic with the call to action of the Civil Rights Movement (1950s-1960s), where non-white minorities – primarily African Americans, many of whom had just returned home from the war – pushed for the implementation of policies of equality under the law, thus abolishing legal racial discrimination in the United States. By 1968, the Civil Rights Movement had been successful in bringing about legislation to end Jim Crow's laws of segregation and revoking black voter suppression as well as discriminatory practices regarding housing and employment. Additionally, material devastation and moral shame in Europe, and domestic social contestation in America paralleled the post-WWII rise of the communist bloc worldwide.[1] In contrast to Europe and America's void, the Soviet Union and satellite nations claimed to assure the establishment of a new socioeconomic order, a more egalitarian and classless society.

The threat of communism forced Western nations to rethink themselves. Socially, they had to content their masses aiming to stop the spread of the communist predicament in capitalist societies; and geo-politically, they were urged to prevent the Soviet Union from becoming the hegemonical superpower. Europe responded by establishing welfare systems decisively aided by the Marshall Plan, while America dug in to the ideal of multiculturalism and diversity amid domestic social contestation. Europe was quick to embrace the

multicultural ethos, too, as a solution to redeem the atrocities of WWII in the promise of a more inclusive, tolerant and unprejudiced raceless society. This ideology indeed planted the seeds for what in the subsequent decades would become the core principle of democratic nations for America as well as for the construction of the European Union, seeking a peaceful, united and prosperous Europe. Subsequently, between the 1970s and 1980s, multiculturalism was not only becoming the ideal or new model for Western societies, but also a dominant mode of thinking in the West.

By the time the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, symbolizing the failure of the communist Soviet model, capitalist post-WWII societies and national identities in the West had found shelter in the rising ideology of multiculturalism to reinvent themselves triumphally. In fact, multiculturalism soon became the symbol of capitalism's success to peacefully incorporate diverse populations into modern, democratic societies. In turn, this rise of multicultural societies in the West contributed to the restoration of the moral authority of historically white-centred institutions which had hitherto been lost because of the Holocaust and WWII. Thanks to multiculturalism, only Western nations could claim to be unique at promoting a civilisation of free, equal individuals regardless of race, creed, colour or national origin in democratic nations, thus recentring again the cultural, moral superiority of the West as the bastion of the free world yet to be paired by non-Western and non-white societies. With the triumph of rhetorical multiculturalism, globalisation has become the only vehicle for exporting the supposedly "democratic values" of capitalism. Yet, in the guise of exporting democratic values, the world has been witnessing what I will be referring to as magical populism: a racial desire of the West to rewind globalisation in efforts to restore the now lost sense of home and security of whites. Arguably, the rise political figureheads such as Donald J. Trump, Steve Bannon, Nigel Farage, Boris Johnson, Marine Lepen, Santiago Abascal, Javier Ortega Smith, Richard Spencer, Sebastian Kurz, Jörg Meuthen, Björn Höcke can be seen as an integral part of the magical populist discourse.

Multiculturalism and Post-Theories in Retrospect

Viewed in retrospect, the tremendously positive reception in Europe and America of Subaltern Studies (a term taken from Marxist, communist Antonio Gramsci) was neither coincidental nor surprising, but rather the perfect opportunity to shore up multiculturalism theoretically, while manifesting the West's good will towards the inclusion of Otherness and tolerance toward difference in society. The prime goal of the pioneering Subaltern Studies Group was to inquire into the postcolonial experience and post-imperial society in India, as Vivek Chibber explains, seeking to locate the failure of "the universalizing drive of capital in the ability of a particular agent – namely, the bourgeoisie, the capitalist class – to overthrow the feudal order and construct a coalition of classes that includes not only capitalists and merchants, but also

workers and peasants" (Chibber in Birch 2013, n.p.). However, due to the Western misuse and diffusion of subaltern theory, most members of the original group became critical with the emerging corpus of ideas of postcolonial studies: the original goal of postcolonial theory was thought for "the parts of the globe where the universalization of capital has failed need to generate their own local categories" (sic.), therefore, "theories like Marxism, which try to utilize the categories of political economy, are not only wrong, but they're Eurocentric, and not only Eurocentric, but they're part of the colonial and imperial drive of the West. And so they're implicated in imperialism" (Chibber in Birch 2013, n. p.). David Ludden elucidated on this Western appropriation of post-theories, or post-project, originally characterized by a critique of the failures of modernity's Eurocentric reason. In his Introduction to *Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical History, Contested Meaning and the Globalization of South Asia*, Ludden further laments how

> academic work on subaltern themes quickly detached subalternity from its various inventors [...] Migrations of reading dispersed research on subaltern themes connected by circulating terminologies, arguments, and texts. Outsiders have built outer walls for Subaltern Studies and landscaped its environment to dramatize its distinctiveness. Respondents, interlocutors, interpreters and translators have worked with Subaltern Studies material and redefined it by writing about it differently. Insiders have become outsiders. Outsiders have become insiders. Outsiders doing independent work on subaltern themes have embraced Subaltern Studies as a kindred project. (Ludden 2002, 3)

Between the 1990s and the early 2000s, the kindred project consolidated a drastic theoretical transformation transitioning from the originally anti-essentialising 'History from below' inspired by Edward Palmer Thompson and Eric J. Hobsbawm, to Michel Foucault's conception of historical oppression and power-knowledge in addition to, among others, the re-examinations of the Frankfurt School's cultural Marxism.[2]

Having certified the death of the proletariat as a revolutionary subject since WWI (1914-1918), the Frankfurt School already developed Critical Theory to examine the apparent failure of revolutionary, Marxist social change. Max Horkheimer – German philosopher and sociologist who was appointed Director of the *Institut für Sozialforschung* (Institute of Social Research) – embarked on the mission of reformulating Karl Marx's theory in cultural terms.[3] As late as 1969, in an interview, Horkheimer was discussing Marx's theoretical errors as well as clarifying the main purpose of Critical Theory:

> Marx had the ideal of a society of free human beings. He believed that this capitalist society would necessarily have to be overcome by the solidarity, by the increasing immiseration of the working class. This idea is wrong. This society in which we live does not immiserate the workers but helps them to

build a better life. And apart from that, Marx did not see that freedom and justice are dialectical concepts. The more freedom, the less justice, and the more justice, the less freedom. The critical theory which I conceived later is based on the idea that we cannot determine what is good, what is bad, a free society would look like from within the society which we now live in. We lack the means. But in our work we can bring up the negative aspects of this society, which we want to change. (Horkheimer 2011, 0:25-1:53)

The approach of Horkheimer became integral to the Frankfurt School's Critical Theory. They were very effective in calling the attention to the negative aspects of society in order to foster change. Weaving their cultural neo-Marxist values into every institution, the Frankfurt School aimed to reach the individual's false consciousness, forcing a change of the working class' economic base; that is to say, the material and historical forces of economic change. To this regard, Horkheimer, together with Theodor Adorno – one of the most important philosophers and social critics in Germany after World War II –, published *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1944) where they elucidated on the notion of a culture as an industry put into service by the superstructure to falsify the working class' consciousness through mass media, while transforming it into capitalist values in the bourgeois interest:

> The consumers are workers and employees, the farmers and lower middle class. Capitalist production so confines them, body and soul, they fall victims to what is offered to them. As naturally as the ruled always took the morality imposed upon them more seriously than did the rulers themselves, the deceived masses are today captivated by the myth of success even more than the successful are. Immovably, they insist on the very ideology which enslaves them. (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972, 134)

Nonetheless, despite their conceptual transformation from the material to the cultural field, seeking a new revolutionary subject, Horkheimer and Adorno kept theorising in Marxian terms and replaced the proletariat with the working class as their main critical category. Herbert Marcuse – along other metropolitan neo-Marxists who were inspired by Antonio Gramsci's *Quaderni del Carcere*'s concepts of subalternity, hegemony and unification of workers after a long march – found in minority and minoritised voices (colonised peoples, non-whites, women, non-heterosexuals, have nots, marginal, displaced and minority identities) the new revolutionary subjects to address when theorising about class struggle, class formation and class exploitation against capitalism. As a result, a myriad of post-theories emerged.

Critical theory and post-theories' fierce critiques had the downside effect of drowning the West in cultural pessimism. For these thinkers, history was an inherently ideological and hierarchical discipline, capitalism was an oppressive system, anthropological thinking was limited and biased, literature's aesthetic value was debatable, and culture was the battlefield for hegemony to attain

power. The incorporation of these metropolitan neo-Marxist premises spilled over society through Subaltern Studies, and the post-theories of history, anthropology and literature booming in parallel to Stuart Hall's proposition of cultural studies in the humanities between the late 1980s and early 1990s, all coinciding with the rise of multiculturalism in the West. Due to such an amalgamation of premises, and because of the postmodern disruption of the Western canon, Harold Bloom notably referred to these scholars as the "School of Resentment".[4] Bloom's criticism condemned neo-Marxist's cultural materialism, Foucauldian new historicism and feminist deconstructivism, "whose political concerns and social activism replaced aesthetic values [...]destroying aesthetic standards in the Humanities and Social Sciences, in the name of social justice;" thus Bloom accused said school of being "compelled by its dogmas to regard aesthetic value" in their pseudo quest to eradicate hierarchies of race, class and gender (Bloom 1994, 35; 53). With all that said, the rapid interest in Subaltern Studies and post-theories in Western nations should be understood effectively as pieces of the ideological jigsaw of multiculturalism, because – be it purposefully or unintentionally – they provided the 'political West' with the much needed intellectual turn toward Otherness as the object of scrutiny and enabled them to hide that of whiteness as focus.

The ideal of a multicultural society cemented after WWII reached its peak when Barack Obama became President of the United States. Not only was he the country's first African American President, but also the first black person to occupy the highest office in the West. The dream was delivered, as Martin Luther King had put it in 1963, ending the long night and leading to the day when the nation rose up to live out the true meaning of its creed that all men are created equal (King 1963, 1:56-2:12). That evening of January 20, 2008, CBS News Anchor Katie Couric, together with commentators Bob Schieffer and Jeff Greenfield, captured the essence of history in the making:

> No matter who you voted for, you have to agree this is an incredible milestone in the History of this country, a century and a half after the constitution abolished slavery, and guaranteed blacks the right to vote, four decades after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, voters have chosen our first African American President [...]this is more than an election night in America, this is a momentous night in the History of our country [...]I went to a segregated school in the segregated south, when I graduated from high school no black student had ever attended any school that I attended, now that was in my lifetime, look where we have come in just less than my lifetime. (Couric et al. 2008, 0:29-0:47; 1:08-1:18; 1:54-2:11)

That winter evening in 2008, the post-WWII promise of a more inclusive, tolerant and unprejudiced raceless society seemed to indeed have been delivered. The multicultural ideal would live on not only in America, but also as a beacon for the West. When President Obama addressed British Parliament

at Westminster three years after his election in 2011, he reaffirmed the alliance between the United States and the United Kingdom claiming that their special relationship was based on shared values and ideals, which he condensed as being the longing for freedom and human dignity as universal principles under the veil of multiculturalism:

> Unlike most countries in the world, we do not define citizenship based on race or ethnicity [...] it's about believing in a certain set of ideals – the rights of individuals, the rule of law. That is why we hold incredible diversity within our borders [...] Yes, our diversity can lead to tension. And throughout our history there have been heated debates about immigration and assimilation in both of our countries. But even as these debates can be difficult, we fundamentally recognize that our patchwork heritage is an enormous strength [...] the example of our two nations says it is possible for people to be united by their ideals, instead of divided by their differences; that it's possible for hearts to change and old hatreds to pass; that it's possible for the sons and daughters of former colonies to sit here as members of this great Parliament, and for the grandson of a Kenyan who served as a cook in the British Army to stand before you as President of the United States. That is what defined us. (The Obama White House 2011, 32:26-34:48)

Unexpectedly, while multiculturalism equipped Western nations with a discourse on Otherness – which President Obama's speech exemplifies allegedly characterising the West in the exchange as a unique model regarding tolerance and diversity –, the white guilt of WWII did not vanish. Far from multiculturalism granting the West a total redemption of the past, white guilt only mutated. In what follows, my analysis probes into the deterioration of multiculturalism as an ideal in the West paired with the notion of white guilt. Henceforth, the essay explores the shift of Western discourse to inform of the present-day conflation of populism and white nostalgia, which I claim may be the result of the end of the white guilt era and the subsequent rise to magical populism: a racial desire of the West to rewind globalisation in efforts to restore the now lost sense of home and security of whites.

Towards the End of the White Guilt Era?

As we shall see in this section, though multiculturalism to some degree aided to the reconciliation of Western nations with themselves, the sentiments of shame and guilt resulting from the atrocities of WWII did not vanish. In fact, white guilt and shame became the basis for the new paradigm replacing white supremacy in the multicultural society. The combination of white guilt and shame established a new social morality which rejected racial prejudice and made discrimination illegal. Consequently, traditional biologically based ideas regarding race and race relations grew into taboos, conservative political discourses concerning immigration and cultural difference were stigmatised as

bigoted views, and their divergent cultural propositions were often ridiculed. Such white guilt morality as a new source of authority became a new social imperative, aided for example by political correctness: a term that first appeared in Marxist-Leninist vocabulary following the Russian Revolution of 1917 and which was now adopted as a Western token for progressiveness, respect, inclusiveness and tolerance in a multicultural society. Conclusively, the Western social morality of white guilt established white pride as a taboo, white guilt as the driving force for progress, and white shame as the stigmatising label for those individuals daring transgression of the new moral code adopted by democratic societies.

Shelby Steele rightly envisioned this new morality as a social imperative over a decade ago. Back then, Steele explained how "white guilt leaves no room for moral choice; it does not depend on the goodwill or the genuine decency of people. It depends on their fear of stigmatisation, their fear of being called a racist. Thus, white guilt is nothing less than a social imperative [...] even those who harbour racist views must conform to a code of decency that defines those views as shameful" (Steele 2007, 27; 28). Such a hegemonic mode of thinking and sanctioning of behaviour is precisely, as we shall see, what could be shifting the present day to prove how "guilt plays a significant role in the stimulation of morally acceptable behaviour" (Klandermans et al. 2008, 333). Ultimately, aided by the harness of political correctness, the postmodern moral and cultural relativism, metropolitan cultural marxism continued to make white Westerners – men and women alike – carry the very same heavy, Eurocentric burden of whiteness they had intended to eradicate and had felt shame and guilt for in view of the outcomes of WWII.

Under the new social imperative, postmodern relativist thinking and some of the so-called School of Resentment's premises regarding history and culture merged with a multicultural ideal that made them indispensable and indistinguishable from each other. Under the new predicament of white guilt as a source of authority, the West dealt with their past in Foucauldian and Marxist oppressive-oppressed terms: conceived as the systemic and institutional abuse of power by the white West at the expense of the Rest and the legitimisation of the use of force for the maintenance of an ideology of white hetero-patriarchal superiority over inferior others – white guilt permeated every pore of society. Patrick J. Buchanan – special consultant to U.S. Presidents Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford and Ronald Reagan – exacerbated this point in the following manner:

> Using Critical Theory, for example, the cultural Marxist repeats and repeats the charge that the West is guilty of genocidal crimes against every civilization and culture it has encountered. Under Critical Theory, one repeats and repeats that Western societies are history's greatest repositories of racism, sexism, nativism, xenophobia, homophobia, anti-Semitism, fascism, and

Nazism. Under Critical Theory, the crimes of the West flow from character of the West, as shaped by Christianity. (Buchanan 2002, 80)

Where Buchanan understood a menace, Homi K. Bhabha conceived an epistemological turn as a "melancholic revolt" seeking "the 'projective disincorporation' by the marginal of the Master" (Bhabha 1992, 65). Such would be the case in their quest for social justice, offering historically subjugated peoples (colonised peoples, non-whites, women, non-heterosexuals, have nots, marginal, displaced and other minority identities) the opportunity to speak, thus generating a counter-discourse to long-standing hegemonic productions of knowledge and modes of thinking. As a result of this counter-hegemonic revolt, they nonetheless fashioned an ahistorical, abstract monster primarily delimited by whiteness as an oppressive racial category, and by a male, heterosexual toxic condition allegedly substantiated in patriarchal structures in the best interest of white Western elites which, contrary to Buchanan's paleoconservative assessment, Steele assumed to be the consequence of moving away from white supremacy to establishing a white guilt morality by equating whiteness with the capacity for evil:

> The view that the white Western supremacy came not from an innate racial superiority but from an innate capacity from evil, that the wealth and power of whites did not prove God's favouritism for them but rather proved their special talent for dehumanizing others on a grand scale – their will to go forth and dominate others; to enslave, to conquer, to convert, to exploit, to exclude, and even to annihilate others. So white supremacy was replaced, in the same proportion, by the idea of white evil [...] The delegitimizing of white supremacy greatly expanded white guilt because it turned an authority asset into an authority deficit by linking white supremacy more to a capacity for evil than to innate racial superiority. (Steele 2007, 100-101; 105)

Having equated white supremacy with the capacity for evil caused in turn the establishment of an ahistorical guilt which decontextualised and distorted history, which by the early 2000s had already been expanded to include not only white supremacist but any sign of whiteness. For example, amid the surge of theories like that of the unconscious (or implicit) bias, all whites became suspicious of potentially, even if unconsciously, perpetuating white supremacy. The hypothesis of unconscious (or implicit) bias is grounded in the following notions:

> Social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness. Everyone holds unconscious beliefs about various social and identity groups, and these biases stem from one's tendency to organize social worlds by categorizing. Unconscious bias is far more prevalent than conscious prejudice and often incompatible with one's conscious values. Certain scenarios can activate unconscious attitudes and

> beliefs. For example, biases may be more prevalent when multi-tasking or working under time pressure. (Navarro n.d.)

These unconscious biases would then represent the deep structures of the psyche which govern the individuals' perception of the world to organise their reality, thus, expressing their true nature. The problem being that, while political correctness constrained the individuals' behaviour in the public sphere within a white guilt mindset penalising those people who dared to enact prejudiced deviations from the new moral imperative, unconscious bias has shown the potential to be turned into a tool for controlling what might be considered as not only proven inappropriate behaviours but also modes of thinking. In practice, the implementation of unconscious bias has drawn a very ambiguous line as it has enabled the move from penalising actions to the possibility of sanctioning thoughts, for example, traditionally aligned with male, white, heterosexual understandings of the world.

However, two major events accelerated the disruption of such a white guilt mindset and exposed the internal contradictions of the conglomerate of multiculturalism: the collapse of the World Trade Center in 2001 corroded both the normalcy of cultural relativism and the hegemony of postmodern relativist thinking; and the Financial Crisis in 2008 that erupted on Wall Street hitting every country in the West and causing a global recession, not only shook the economic stability of Western societies but also dismembered the fabric of multiculturalism, which was questioned because it had turned a blind eye to immigration issues and the effects of globalism. The collusion of both events led to produce the white feeling that they had been left behind, while minority groups and immigrants were believed to have grown in excess and had gained too much power. The underpinning association between minority groups and immigrants with demographic shift and power allegedly resulting in a dysfunctional society is, of course, far from being truly about dysfunctionality. Rather, it is about the disruption of a white-majority mindset ill-rooted in the sentiment of white loss of entitlement and invisibility because the more multicultural a society becomes the more whites must reflect upon their whiteness and justify their place in society. In other words, white Westerners become more uncomfortable with the ideal of multiculturalism as whiteness gradually becomes more visible and racially marked straying away from what it had been the norm in Western societies for centuries. This process of racialisation of the white body has sparked fears producing a disoriented self, which in conjunction with the loss of all economic certainties traditionally associated with whiteness, opened an avenue for nostalgia.

The first figures to crack down on the post-WWII ideal of a multicultural society and twenty-first century globalism were Donald J. Trump and Steve Bannon, who shattered political correctness to pieces while normalising the fantasy of stopping immigration and rewinding globalisation – for which building a wall in the southern border between the United States and

Mexico and the war trade with China became the main rhetorical assets –
through the dissemination of white nostalgia in the promise to "Make America
Great *Again*". Trump and Bannon's electoral victory had an immediate knock
on effect in Europe, fuelling the growing scepticism that Europeans had been
experiencing, among others, because of the European Union's inadequate
response to the 2008 financial meltdown together with the implementation of
severe policies of austerity. From Sweden in the north to Spain in the south and
Germany in the centre, dissatisfaction with the EU was on the rise. In fact,
Brexit was to a great extent the result of buying into the same racial nostalgia
and economic dissatisfaction which Americans had expressed in their longing
for a better past as Nigel Farage exacerbated the same nostalgia to "Take *Back*
Control" over British sovereignty and immigration fluxes in the Referendum of
2016. In sum, the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States,
Brexit's outcome strengthened by the election of Boris Johnson to make it
irreversible, and the rise of conservative extremism across the West – including
the National Front in France, Alternative für Deutschland in Germany,
Sweden Democrats in Sweden, and Vox in Spain all obtaining their best results
to date – correlate directly as a declaration of war on multicultural globalism.
These results across the West clearly speak of how "political ideology seems to
moderate the influence of feelings of identification [...] when it comes to
collective guilt, political ideology will always be in play" (Klandermans et al.
2008, 348). Be that as it may, today, the West has come to truly exude a
sentiment of staggering nostalgia which has travelled transnationally through
the exacerbation of xenophobia facilitating the liberation of some repressed
desires of the shadow as it occurred between the 1930s and 1940s.
Subsequently, the lessening of the sentiment of white guilt has been replicated
across the West becoming part and parcel of our reality amid a right-wing
populist insurgency that has been turned into a real political force through the
'weaponisation' of nostalgia.

The Rise of Nostalgic Whiteness and Magical Populism

Though 'nostalgia' was rarely used with frequency before the 1880s,[5]
definitions of the term have not changed much over the centuries (except for
having stopped being considered a disease since 1688 when Doctor Johannes
Hofer coined it for his medical dissertation).[6] Etymologically, nostalgia is a
combination of the Greek *nostos* (νόστος, return to home) and *algia* (ἄλγος,
longing, grief). Contemporary definitions like the *Merriam-Webster* repeats the
same notions, firstly, "as the state of being homesick", and secondly, "as a
wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for return to or of some past period
or irrecoverable condition" (2020, n.p.). According to these entry definitions,
the nostalgic subject embarks on a process of painful longing for the return to a
time before the present.

However, a further inquiry into the meaning of nostalgia reveals several nuances between the individual and the social domains beyond a temporal conception. For example, *Collins Dictionary* presents nostalgia as "an affectionate feeling you have for the past, especially for a particularly happy time; a longing to go back to one's home, home town, or homeland; homesickness; and a longing for something far away or long ago or for former happy circumstances" (2020, n.p.) These descriptions of the meaning of nostalgia disclose not only the existence of a temporal relation but rather a physical, territorial materialisation of it in the homeland. In the same vein, the dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy and Association of Academies of the Spanish Language's definitions locate such physical territorialisation of memory and nostalgia in homeland as "*Pena de verse ausente de la patria o de los deudos o amigos*" (sorrow for being absent from homeland or from relatives or friends), and as "*Tristeza melancólica originada por el recuerdo de una dicha Perdida*" (melancholic sadness caused by the memory of a lost bliss). Altogether, the rise of nostalgic whiteness in the West may be said to have produced a romanticisation of a past that diminishes the use of violence in the name of a reshaped nationalism which obliterates difference in its longing to return to a time when the subject found in the nation a sense of home, sentiment of belonging and secure space; a process which seems more likely in whites who find it hard to accept societal changes and a new reality. For these individuals, the past becomes an idealisation which replaces their present discomfort by the emergence of an imagined, territorialised atemporal self.

According to Svetlana Boym, "nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy (2007, 7). Boym identified two types of nostalgia, or rather two forms of romanticisation of one's loss, displacement and own fantasy: reflective and restorative. On the one hand, reflective nostalgia invokes compassion as a result of collective guilt; here, "people may exhibit guilt because of harm done by their group to another group even if they themselves are not responsible for the harm done. Such collective guilt makes people more prepared to engage in compensatory action towards the group that has been disadvantaged" (Klandermans et al. 2008, 332). For Bhabha, who reads nostalgia via Freud, "it is the shadow that guilt casts on the object of identification that is the origin of melancholia" (1992, 65). Such collective guilt was clearly transferred into progressive whiteness after WWII to the beginning of the twenty-first century.

In "A Short Story of Liberal Guilt", Julie Ellison argued that "in the throes of liberal guilt, all action becomes gesture, expressive of a desire to effect change or offer help that is never sufficient to the scale of the problem. Actions are carried out in sorrow. One is sorry in advance for the social consequences of one's acts" (1996, 349). Chancellor Angela Merkel's visit to Auschwitz as late as 6 December 2019, amid German alt-right growth in electoral polls, the escalation of anti-Semitism and historical revisionism represents a prime example of Ellison's argument. In Chancellor Merkel's public statement, she

expressed feeling "deep shame in the face of the barbaric crimes committed here by Germans. Crimes that are unfathomable, that defy our imagination, that are inconceivable, filled with horror and shock when confronted with the crimes [...]" (*DW News* 2019, 0:35-0:59). The problem being that these public stances do not seem to have the same imperative weight on whiteness to appeal for guilt and shame as it used to have before Donald Trump became President and Brexit occurred.

Collective guilt seems to result from a condemnation of historical wrongdoing and exploitation, and such guilt can therefore be transferred intergenerationally as social responsibility. In this sense, Ellison contends that "experiences of guilt, one might think, would be inevitable for middle-class persons in industrialized societies: we are knowingly implicated in systems like global markets from whose success we consciously benefit" (1996, 350). Nonetheless, the ever shrinking middle class' purchasing power and general well-being in the West since the 1970s to date may have been a revocable force. What is more, as Bert Klandermans, Merel Werner and Marjoka Van Doorn suggest, when racial guilt varies

> depending on levels of national identification and the nature of the information they received, they displayed stronger or weaker feelings of collective guilt [...] we presume that the social construction of collective guilt involves ideology in addition to identification. Identification is involved because guilt by association presupposes some sense of belonging; ideology, on the other hand, is involved because guilt presupposes adheres to some standards regarding fairness and equal treatment. (Klandermans et al. 2008, 334)

While reflective nostalgia invokes compassion as a result of collective guilt, restorative nostalgia advocates the restoration of origins which is why this sort of nostalgia tends to be imbricated in white conservatism. In his article "The Topography of Nostalgia: Imaginative Geographies and the Rise of Nationalism", Andrew Ridgeway informs us of how "restorative nostalgia is anchored to a static interpretation of national identity. It is inherently populist, obsessed with preserving traditional values, selective in its presentation of the past and does not think of itself as nostalgia but, rather, as a series of historical facts" (2019, 213). However, as the subject imbued with restorative nostalgia becomes aware of the impossibility of a return, sentiments of pain arise and may lead to frustration, sadness or anger. It is important to realise the consequences of the impossibility of a return because, as Ridgeway cautions us, "nostalgia can be weaponized to rewrite the past to achieve the political objectives of the present moment. Nostalgia does not merely conceal inequality. It can also be invoked as a means of political erasure" (2019, 212). Today, we are witness to such political weaponisation of nostalgia to end white guilt as a means of erasure on globalism: one that questions the multiculturalism as a

failed model to organise society amid the sense of loss of home, security and opportunities for whites in the post-industrial West where companies and jobs are shipped overseas. Paul Gilroy foresaw this conflict as early as 2005 in *Postcolonial Melancholia* where he announced the abandonment of multiculturalism as an ideal and warned us that a new form of colonial domination was being instituted:

> Multicultural society seems to have been abandoned at birth. Judged unviable and left to fend for itself, its death by neglect is being loudly proclaimed on all sides. The corpse is now being laid to rest amid the multiple complexities [...]the murderous culprits responsible for its demise are institutional indifference and political resentment. They have been fed by the destruction of welfare states and the evacuation of public good, by privatization and marketization [...]in these circumstances, diversity becomes a dangerous feature of society. It brings only weakness, chaos, and confusion. Because unanimity is the best source of necessary strength and solidarity, it is homogeneity rather than diversity that provides the new rule [...]a new form of colonial domination is being instituted as part of a heavily militarized globalization process. (1-3)

Though it is legitimate to reorganise society as deemed convenient by the citizens of a nation, exploiting racial and ethnic fears as well as anxieties towards difference for political ends is not only dishonest but a dangerous path already explored in the twentieth century. In this regard, President Barack Obama warned the West about the fragility of democracy in the hands of populism: "populism can take dangerous turns – from the extremism of those who would use democracy to deny minority rights, to the nationalism that left so many scars on this continent in the 20th century" (26:44-26:55). From the twentieth century experience of conflating populism with racial rhetoric and nationalism, we should never consent that the legitimisation of a political agenda be anchored in the dissemination of social fears and anxieties because its implementation relies on a populist form of violent coercion which dehumanises the targeted racial and ethnic groups as Manichean abstractions. Such populist use of Manichean abstractions proves essential in the production of simple, magical solutions to complex issues. Once this magical populism establishes the fantasy of imagined others, those individuals are replaced by a social function reordered in predictable units that are easy to monitor, control and manipulate. As scapegoats, they serve society at large to unwarily interiorise the evasion of personal responsibility. All in all, as this paper evidences, the ongoing deterioration of multiculturalism as an ideal, paired with the rise of nostalgic whiteness and the alluring nature of magical populism's simplistic solutions to complex problems, has contributed to destabilising the white guilt mindset as the primary source for moral authority in the West, unleashing a nostalgic racial desire to rewind globalisation in efforts to restore the now lost sense of home and security of whites.

Such Western nostalgic racial desire to rewind globalisation could be dramatically heightened amid the COVID-19 crisis. While mainstream media, world politicians and cultural observers prioritise their analysis of the pandemic in terms of sanitary inefficiencies, economic shutdown and the subsequent social emergency, the unprecedented erosion of core democratic values may well lead to a possible politics of exclusion. This is particularly possible at a time when the vast numbers of the white West has already been naturalising anti-immigrant populism and seeking the implementation of restrictive policies. Such reflection seems even more pressing when some Europeans begin to perceive China as an efficient role model and a benign nation, despite their totalitarian regime, as a direct result of Chinese propaganda disguised as humanitarian help to nations like Italy. While China seems to succeed in the eyes of many passing from villain to saviour, the European Union remains inactive and the United States appear to have abdicated their historical leadership in the West.

Closing Remarks

Though the consolidation of multiculturalism as the hegemonical mode of thinking brought common societal principles, a period of stability and shared purposes unifying the West under the predicament of a white guilt mindset, it also planted the seeds for common problems and shared challenges. While it is indeed too early to assess whether this move away from white guilt will become the new norm or whether this is only a temporary, reactionary push back from within the West against the political establishment and its race relations status quo, one must take seriously the symptoms of exhaustion that the post-WWII multicultural model exhibits by addressing the effects of nostalgic whiteness and its discontents with globalism and the messy complexities of national identities.

To do so, it would seem necessary for progressive thinkers to be able to offer an alternative model beyond nihilistic cultural relativism, *buenismo* (roughly translated as naïvity), shame and guilt, hence understanding that neither tolerance for Otherness nor true acceptance of difference come at all from the fatal replacement of sympathy and compassion by pity and patronage as white liberal discourse and progressive politics often do. Thus, this essay concludes that although the need for racial Otherness as sociological and political categories will remain essential in looking for ways to assist healthy race relations and enhance civil liberties, any future progressive thinking will require a large dose of introspection on the nature of whiteness in general and leftist reflective nostalgia in particular, as much as to find a way to neutralise and dismantle the conservative's political weaponisation of reflective nostalgia. As part of said neutralisation of the weaponisation of nostalgia, it would be imperative to nullify identity politics as a valid political strategy. Despite good intentions, we have experienced how the presence of the trap of identity politics and political correctness – which nowadays is all there is – has evolved to be

poisonous. The ideologues of these discourses have ruled out for way too long the fact that their identity politics game has real consequences in bringing about greater tension and conflict than good and general well-being. Neither essentialising identities in a gross manner by equating individuals with their social group history nor essentialising individuals seeking to erase histories of social oppression should any longer be regarded as viable political options. Such discourses, together with the cultural solidification that is primarily delimited by whiteness as an oppressive racial category, have led to backlashes by the West's 'white, silent majority'. No window should remain open for the atrocities of WWII, Auschwitz and the Gulag to come back from the dead to haunt the twenty-first century. In doing so, the West is compelled to neutralise the weaponisation of white nostalgia and to find a better response to the COVID-19 crisis than that one for the 2008 financial crisis to provide economic certainties for all and avoid paving the way for intolerance, racism and xenophobia. Drawing from the discussion presented in this essay, such would only be the case if the West truly wants to sustain and recover the already perishing ideal of a multicultural society, and not otherwise.

Notes

[1] See the "Final Communiqué of the Asian-African conference of Bandung".

[2] For further discussion on the appropriation of the post-theories by European – eminently French – postmodernism, consider Docherty (1990).

[3] For a review and discussion on the Frankfurt School, consider Therborn (1970).

[4] For further reference about the postmodern reasoning regarding the need for an anti-grand narrative approach and cultural relativism in the arts, consider Lyotard (1979).

[5] For further reference about the recorded usage of the term 'nostalgia' between 1708 and 2008, see the graphic chart provided by *Collins Dictionary*.

[6] For further information about nostalgia conceived as a disease, consider Kiser Anspach (1934).

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