

# **Foundations of Authoritarianism**



## CHAPTER 5

# From Modernity to Bigotry

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Karl Marx once quipped that ‘violence is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one’ (Marx 1967, 751). Just as surely, however, prejudice is the midwife of violence. The bigot embraced this view from the start. Hatred of the Jews goes back to Egypt and Babylonia. Contempt for what the Greeks considered the ‘barbarian’ – whoever was not of Greece – existed even at the height of the classical period. And Homer already understood the struggles of the outcast and the stranger. What today might be termed ethnic or racial conflicts between empires, religions, tribes, and clans have always shaped the historical landscape.

But there is a sense in which modernity created the bigot. Prior to the democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century, perfectly decent people simply accepted prevailing prejudices as a matter of course. They suffered no opprobrium. Even in early twentieth-century America, few people (other than the targets of prejudice) were especially bothered that major-league baseball admitted only whites, that the armed forces were segregated, that rape and incest were barely mentioned, and that the white male was the standard by which intelligence was judged. The bigot of today, in recalling the jokes and everyday humiliations that these groups endured, seeks to recreate the normality of prejudice. That subaltern groups have proven so successful in resisting his project only intensifies his frustration.

Modernity, with its roots in the European Enlightenment and the democratic revolutions that extended from 1688 to 1789, runs counter to the institutions

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and beliefs that the bigot holds dear. Its new capitalist production process substitutes exploitation for his hatred. It has little use for established prejudices, revealed truths, or sacred traditions. And its commitment to principles like the liberal rule of law and toleration, Republican institutions, and universal rights would inspire attempts by women, people of colour, religious minorities, and gays to constrict the arbitrary exercise of authority by church and state.

Modernity liberated the powers of humanity; it generated the idea that people could shape their own fates. This is very different from the bigot's assumption that biology or anatomy is destiny. Modernity relies on the growth of science, technology, and instrumental rationality. What was once taken on faith is now subject to criticism and what was once shrouded in myth and darkness now potentially becomes open to light. The urban and secular character of modernity, its fostering of pluralism and individualism, further militate against the bigot's sensibility. He detests the modern notion of progress that is so intimately connected with what Max Weber termed 'the disenchantment of the world.'

But the bigot deals with modernity as best he can, for example, by using the same scientific methods as his critics. Architects of the Nazi genocide used mathematical rationality and scientific techniques not merely to keep meticulous records of the prisoners sent to Auschwitz, or to construct the crematoria, but also to reduce corpses to their parts and to use them to create soap, cloth, and fertilizer. But Nazi science was ultimately used to legitimate irrational and unscientific claims. To engage in their genocide, the Nazis needed to assume that their victims were less than human and, in this vein, Kenan Malik was correct in noting that to suggest the infamous 'Final Solution' was a product of 'reason' is to 'elevate the prejudices of the Third Reich to the status of scientific knowledge' (Malik 1997, 127).

That being said, the bigot has never felt entirely comfortable in employing science to support his prejudices. For example, although Mussolini and Hitler may have employed scientists who used the same physics and chemistry for producing military weapons as their counterparts elsewhere, in public, the dictators insisted on the existence of 'Italian mathematics' and (in opposition to Einstein and his Jewish colleagues) 'German physics.' The bigot dislikes universal concepts and objective criteria for making scientific judgements. He prefers giving his prejudices a scientific gloss by making reference to phrenology or by insisting on the primary importance of certain physical attributes, inherited traits, eugenics, and anthropological hierarchies. Genetics has a particular attraction for the bigot seeking to explain intelligence or creativity – though no evidence exists to justify any causal connection between biology and social accomplishment.<sup>1</sup>

The bigot has always felt queasy about transforming the invisible into the visible, the ineffable into the discursive, and the unknown into the known. Observation and evidence, hypothesis and inference, confirmation and validation are thus selectively employed by him to justify what Cornel West has termed 'the discursive exclusion' of those who are different and what they have to offer.<sup>2</sup> Science requires an open society, and a liberal culture that allows the

questioning of authority. But the bigot has no use for what the young Marx called 'the ruthless critique of everything existing.'<sup>3</sup> He is always primarily concerned with proving what he already thinks he knows. He insists that the answers to the problems of life have been given and he resents everything that challenges inherited wisdom, parochial prejudices, and what he considers the natural order of things. Thus, he is uncertain what to make of capitalism.

Not so deep in his heart, the bigot is an opportunist. Other than his prejudices, he [or she] has no core beliefs. The bigot likes it when his [or her] interests are being served, when people of colour are exploited, but he dislikes it when he feels disadvantaged. In principle he endorses inequality and the idea of competition. But only when he is on top or, better, believes he is on top. The problem arises when he finds himself on the bottom. Competition is good when it works *for him*. When it doesn't, the bigot will insist that his competitors are cheating – and that they cheat because it is a trait of their ethnicity, nationality, race, etc. Jews conspire against him in ruling Wall Street, immigrants take away his jobs, affirmative action undermines his prospects, and unions and welfare programs have made his country soft.

Caught between fear of capitalists and contempt for workers, admiration for competition and principled dislike of socialism, the bigot vacillates. He imagines how family, neighbourhood, and religious ties, in ostracizing the subaltern, have provided the infrastructure of a productive small-town community. He cannot grasp why the bourgeoisie would strip away the 'sentimental veil' of the family and the ties that bind men to their 'natural superiors.' He is aghast at how religious ecstasy can be drowned in the 'icy waters of egotistical calculation,' a process that leaves no other nexus than 'naked self-interest' and 'cash payment.' The bigot is both amazed and repelled by the cultural and material revolutions that have broken down 'Chinese walls of tradition' so that 'all that is solid melts into air. All that is sacred becomes profane, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions' (Marx and Engels 1848, 76–77).

The logic of capitalist accumulation baffles the bigot. He cannot comprehend how wealth is ever more surely concentrated in great corporate firms and the class divisions that are generated. He is unable to see that workers are dependent on capital because employment is dependent on investment. He also never draws implications from the fact that profit (not prejudice) spurs capitalist development. Today there are banks geared toward women's interests, a black bourgeoisie, a gay consumer culture, and support among many firms for looser immigration policies. Jews, women, blacks, gays, immigrants, and members of other previously excluded groups have expanded the market and provided a pool of talent that can be fruitfully exploited. But solidarity among working people of different races, genders, and ethnicities is precisely what the bigot rejects. As a consequence, his prejudices serve as a drag on the system even while they fragment opposition to it. Thus, he finds himself critical of capital and its liberal impulses but also (perhaps even more) critical of those socialists who contest its power.

Nowhere is this counter-revolutionary undertaking analysed more trenchantly than in the historical works of Marx and Engels (Marx 1848/1969, 1: 138-142; Marx; 1848-50, 186-300; Engels 1848-50, 1:300-388; Marx 1848-50, 1:394-487). Rarely noted is that in those works, for the first time, a general theory of the counter-revolution was articulated. Old symbols and myths are repackaged to confront the two dominant forms of thought associated with the two dominant classes that emerged with the modern production process: the liberalism of the revolutionary bourgeoisie and the socialism of an incipient industrial working class. According to this logic, precapitalist values and ideologies should appeal most to precapitalist classes like the aristocracy (or aristocratic pretenders), the petty bourgeoisie (or, in German, the *Mittelstand*), the peasantry, and even the notorious semi-criminal underclass (*Lumpenproletariat*), who are rooted in a community bolstered by religious and traditional values. And that is, indeed, the case. These classes historically served as the mass base for the Ku Klux Klan, European fascism, and modern fundamentalism. Liberals and socialists – albeit usually with a guilty conscience – have also endorsed various imperialist and chauvinist forms of bigotry. Nevertheless, it is what John Dewey termed a ‘warranted assumption’ to suggest that a special affinity has existed between right-wing movements and the bigot: it is not true in every instance but it is true in the vast majority of instances, and it is certainly true today.

These classes vacillate between big business and the working class. Subordinate to the one, they feel superior to the other. They legitimate themselves by embracing ‘property, family, religion, order’ and claiming that they wish to ‘save’ society from ‘the enemies of society.’ But they usually forget to mention that just as frequently it is ‘the circle of its rulers’ contracts’ that is saved, ‘as a more exclusive interest is maintained against a wider one. Every demand of the simplest bourgeois financial reform, of the most ordinary liberalism, of the most formal republicanism, the most shallow democracy, is simultaneously castigated as an ‘attempt on society’ and stigmatized as ‘socialism.’ The right-wing agenda links the attack on liberalism and socialism. Its supporters intend to constrict pluralism, civil liberties, economic equality, and (literally) disenfranchise the subaltern. The assault on the ‘socialist’ welfare state is thereby coupled with the attack on ‘liberal’ concerns regarding gays, immigrants, people of colour, and women. Supporters of these causes may publicly (and even privately) deny that they are bigots. Nevertheless, they obviously hope to derive power and benefits from policies that foster prejudice.

Prejudice seems to flourish among those groups most marginal to the capitalist accumulation process. The bigot is most often found in non-urban settings and parochial communities among the lower middle class, low-level bureaucrats, small business owners, individual contractors, and farmers – though industrial workers, particularly white men, are among others who can also prove racist and authoritarian.<sup>4</sup> Were such members of such imperilled classes and groups to embrace liberalism or social democracy, or fully identify with capital

or labour, it would mean embracing ideologies and classes that view them as anachronisms, their beliefs as standing in the way of progress, and their parochial way of life as irrevocably doomed.<sup>5</sup>

The bigot lags behind the rapid changes generated by capitalism and so is condemned to resist new forms of social and political life (Reich 1933, 15). He looks for what is rock solid, what is seemingly beyond circumstance, and he needs his trinity: religion, convention, community. Fierce resentment of modernity's advocates and beneficiaries – cosmopolitans, intellectuals, scientists, and secularists – becomes an intrinsic part of his outlook. This resentment stems not merely from (unconscious) envy of the elite, which was the famous argument of Nietzsche<sup>6</sup> and Max Scheler (1994). It also emanates from the bigot's fear that the forces of modernity are destroying his social privileges, his feeling of self-worth, and his world. He is intent on not only resisting them but also reaffirming and taking back what is his, that which he feels has been unjustly taken from him. The bigot has already heard too much about the injustices that he perpetrated in the past. He is uninterested in dialogue with educated outsiders representing the subaltern who know nothing about his community and who are unwilling to take his views seriously. A right-wing poster makes the bigot's point perfectly: 'It doesn't matter what this sign says, you'll call it racism anyway!'

But then it is not simply what the bigot says but also how he says it: the obsessive-compulsive, often even pathological, style in which he organizes his experiences, articulates his words, and expresses his emotions (Shapiro 1999). His style is not a derivative matter but instead a part of his character. The bigot senses that modernity is undermining his belief system and his ability to make sense of himself. This is the source of his identity deficit and what Sartre once described as an 'objective neurosis' that projects the causes of his failings on the victim of his prejudice. The success of the subaltern in changing her status leaves the bigot with someone to blame for the demise of his world. The bigot is engaged not only in demeaning the target of his prejudice but also in turning himself into a victim. In his eyes, the real victim becomes the imaginary oppressor and the real oppressor becomes the imaginary victim. The bigot thus feels himself persecuted and his response is often tinged by hysteria. His neurotic style is a form of adaptation. Whether it is fostered by conscious instrumental desires to rationalize behaviour, or unconscious desires to deflect guilt, depends on the circumstances (Adorno 1955, 115). Either way, this style works to confirm the mixture of pessimism and resentment that predominates among those who believe they are losers in the march of progress.

The bigot justifies his entitlement by birth or by inherited privileges sanctified by tradition such as gender, skin colour, ethnicity, or lineage. His superiority has nothing to do with work: it has not been earned. The famous line from Pierre Beaumarchais's *The Marriage of Figaro* (1784), which was delivered by a simple barber to his aristocratic nemesis, still packs a punch: 'Other than being born what have you ever done to deserve your privileges?'

The bigot can only answer by referring to God's will, innate traits, or tradition.<sup>7</sup> He is content to claim that his privileges are deserved because they have always existed, and that the subaltern is thereby eternally condemned to his inferior status. This view pits the bigot against the most basic contention of modernity and the general political position of the subaltern, namely that social practices are mutable. This helps explain why the subaltern has tended to embrace liberal and socialist ideologies. Part of the struggle for equality fought by Jews, people of colour, sexual outsiders, intellectuals, and strangers involves a philosophical attack on fixed assumptions about human nature and on frozen social hierarchies.

As many forms of prejudice are available as there are identities. The bigot simply picks one and insists on the superiority of its (authentic, affirming, and self-serving) narrative to the exclusion of other narratives, its (authentic, affirming, and self-serving) customs to the exclusion of other customs, its (authentic, affirming, and self-serving) feeling of belonging to the exclusion of the Other. By heightening the binary opposition between 'us' and 'them,' the paranoid personality gains an elemental sense of superiority. But that division is then refracted by the bigot in different ways to different groups. The bigot thus embraces cosmopolitanism in reverse: instead of feeling at home everywhere, which Kant considered the essence of cosmopolitanism, he is intent on making perceived outsiders not at home in his community, his nation, his house of worship, or his tribe (Kant 1949, 446). The bigot's world is small. There is nothing to learn, little sense of adventure, and less of possibility.

Emerging trends might expand the possibilities for autonomy, tolerance, self-expression, and self-definition.<sup>8</sup> Human rights have been acknowledged in principle even by nations that have abused them in practice. The bigot, a reactionary by inclination and interest, senses the threat posed by progress – liberal education, toleration, and what I once termed the cosmopolitan sensibility.<sup>9</sup> Progress inveighs against lynchings, pogroms, slavery, and witch trials. It fosters the idea of a common humanity beyond inherited traits, religious differences, and national boundaries. Progress makes it possible for the individual to look outside himself and take into account the longings of the weakest, 'the lowly and the insulted.'

Mitigating suffering is an imperative that exists within every religion: Jewish law condemns the torture of animals; the Buddha spoke of 'selflessness'; Confucius saw himself as part of the human race; Hinduism lauds the journey of life; and Jesus identified with the 'lowly and the insulted' in his Sermon on the Mount. What Norbert Elias once termed the 'civilizing process' describes the development of compassion, empathy, and toleration not simply for those like us but for those who are different. All of this rubs the bigot against the grain. So far as he is concerned, modernity has brought him nothing but grief. The lyrics to a song played by the white supremacist band Definite Hate sum up his feelings nicely: 'What has happened to America/That was once so white and free?'

### 5.1. The Other

As modernity unfolds, the bigot's enemies multiply and he is forced to defend himself on many fronts simultaneously. Powerful conspiracies, revisionist histories, rumblings of discontent from below, and cultural threats to his community swirl around him. Every new criticism, every new demand for equality, every new scientific discovery fills his heart with dismay. Making sense of them all is a herculean task: better to treat them as different expressions of the same impulse. Nazi racial 'science' explored not merely the innate traits of Jews but also those of other groups ranging from 'Aryans' to the Slavs and the Chinese. The Ku Klux Klan and the Aryan Nation never hated just blacks and Jews; their disgust extended to Catholics and other minorities as well. Because prejudice comes in clusters and its victims are arbitrarily defined, the bigot can place primacy on a particular target as circumstances dictate. He can champion the fight against homosexuality in one situation, religious heretics in another, or Roma in still another. Each target of hatred reinforces the others as an overriding worldview emerges built on stereotypical images. Nowhere is this tendency demonstrated better than when a bigoted fictional character insists the Jew is 'as vain as a Spaniard, ignorant as a Croat, greedy as a Levantine, ungrateful as a Maltese, insolent as a Gypsy, dirty as an Englishman, unctuous as a Kalmyk, imperious as a Prussian and as anyone from Asti' (Eco 2011, 6).

For the bigot, subaltern groups congeal into a single all-encompassing and overwhelming threat. Fighting them calls for narrowing their opportunities, refusing to see them for what they are, and identifying them as inherently inferior with fixed traits and an unchangeable status. Thus, the bigot constructs the Other— even as a network of stereotypical images constructs him. That the bigot lacks knowledge about those suffering prejudice serves his purpose. Fantasies about malevolent Arab sheiks, rich Jews controlling London, and shiftless people of colour only reinforce this ignorance. Such images are fixed and finished. The bigot fears the prospect of individuals choosing their identities and is unsettled by what they are willing to accept (or deny) with respect to their religions, conventions, and communities. With each such choice, the bigot's standing erodes a little more, and the Other, in expressing his will, threatens to become a subject in his own right.

That is precisely what the bigot wishes to prevent. So, he longs for a time when the Other was treated as such: when he was expected to step off the sidewalk as the bigot passed, when the Other never sat on the same bench and didn't drink from the same fountain. Vienna in 1938 had benches with signs stating that Jews and dogs were not permitted to sit on them; Hitler closed public swimming pools to Jews. Imperialist settlers had the same mindset when it came to the colonized peoples. But there was a sense in which the Other remained anonymous: he was everyone in a given group and 'no one' in particular. The subaltern vanishes as a living, singular individual. Consequently, she always

totters on the edge of becoming one of ‘them’ who threatens the bigot – and ‘us’ (Heidegger 1962, 167–69).

Referring to them and how ‘they’ behave enables the bigot to avoid dealing with any evidence that reflects their real activities. He is uninterested in distinctions. Differences between Islam as a faith and Islam as a political enterprise, or between Sunnis and Shiites, fall by the way-side. Judaism and Zionism become interchangeable. Blacks, gays, Latinos, and women are fashioned into images of what the bigot imagines them to be. This construction is always (whether consciously or unconsciously) designed to serve his interest. Only by imposing anonymity upon the Other can the bigot affirm his own subjectivity. The implications of that dynamic are concrete. The vision of ‘them’ shapes who ‘we’ are: the Other invades our sentiments, our analytic perspectives, and thus our everyday lives. Umberto Eco was correct when he noted that the motto of the bigot is ‘*Odi ergo sum*. I hate therefore I am’ (Eco 2011, 17).

The bigot requires recognition by the Other to affirm his superiority and his existential sense of self. But he is made uneasy by the mass media and the Internet. He senses his victim’s discontent with his lack of freedom, his paralyzed subaltern status, and things as they are. Most of all, however, he intuits the Other’s lack of respect for who he, the bigot, is and what he believes. Just as modernity steadily undermines the identification of the subaltern as Other, it also intensifies the bigot’s prejudices. His hatred of modernity is thus a function of modernity itself. Fundamentalism, for example, is a modern phenomenon. The quest for purity is a response to the seeming triumph of the profane. In the fundamentalists’ view, revenge should be taken against blasphemers and the heretics. But there are so many of them! Old-time religion, family values, and small-town traditions are nearly powerless against global developments predicated upon diversity. The terms of engagement have been set: the bigot is condemned to fight a guerrilla war against the encroachments of the Other and the erosion of his way of life.

This brave new world, for the bigot, generates only confusion and anger. There are now nearly two hundred countries; an explosion in the number of belief systems has taken place; and more than three quarters of the people on the planet speak more than one language. Religions are ever less geographically determined. The Grand Mosque in the holy city of Mecca is now dwarfed by a mammoth clock tower, an imitation of Big Ben, which serves as the centrepiece of a huge shopping mall with an eight-hundred-room luxury hotel. Religious devotion now increasingly occurs in a secular context in which past affiliations are on the decline. There are worship sites on television and on the Internet. Evangelical Christians now pray in ‘mega-churches’ with their own malls and sports complexes or in smaller ‘gatherings’ and spiritual ‘communities’ within their cafes and art galleries; mullahs use cell phones; creationists justify themselves with ‘research’; and the faithful organize through the web. Religious decisions are increasingly affected by the modern problems of everyday life attendant upon abortion, sex education, homosexuality, and the misconduct

of priests. Identity is becoming ever more fluid and susceptible to the world of commodities.

With the emergence of this disenchanted multicultural world, bereft of absolutes and chaotic in the multiplication of possibilities for self-definition, the bigot experiences an identity deficit. The lack of respect he receives only heightens his nostalgia for privileges enjoyed in times past and the traditions that justified them. Little thought is wasted on the Other who suffered the costs. The bigot chose not to look then, and he chooses not to look now. Like Bertolt Brecht's character J. Pierpont Morgan in *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* (1932), who owns a slaughterhouse but cannot look at blood, the bigot turns away from the world that his prejudices helped shape. Most Israelis have not visited the Occupied Territories, few memorials recall the numerous slave revolts in the Americas, Hindus in India consider the Muslims in their midst a 'pampered minority,' and apologies to the victims of Western imperialism have not exactly been forthcoming.

The bigot is content to cloak the past in sentimentality: the happy slaves in the fields, the happy women in the kitchen, the happy white people with their picket fences, the happy Jews in the ghetto, the happy colonized happily learning the rudiments of civilization from the colonizer. For some reason, however, the subaltern always seems ungrateful. That is intolerable to the bigot. Doubts are thereby created that he cannot bear. They heighten his insecurity, his unconscious guilt, and thus the brutality he employs to expunge those feelings.<sup>10</sup> So far as the bigot is concerned, he is acting in the subaltern's interests – and, even if he isn't, the unjust treatment is only natural and morally necessary.

Living in a world of prefabricated images and stereotypes, the bigot simply cannot understand why the Other should resent him. The only explanation is that the worthless wretch is being fed lies by some alien force: carpet-baggers, intellectuals, communists, or terrorists. The bigot suffers what from what Henri Parens has called 'stranger anxiety' (Parens 2007, 3). The degree to which the bigot is affected by this neurosis is the degree to which his paranoia intensifies. The Other becomes increasingly diffuse and ill-defined, yet increasingly omnipresent. The bigot tends to project his own fear of the Other into rationalizations for why she cannot or will not assimilate. There is always some imputed quality that makes it impossible for her to do so. Jews are too pushy and won't embrace the Saviour; gays are depraved and won't engage in 'therapy' to 'cure' their sexual inclinations; women lack rationality; blacks are lazy and dangerously hypersexualized. All of them consider the bigot their enemy and, so far as he is concerned, their common hatred can only derive from the common resentment of his superiority.

Whatever the controversy, therefore, it is always the aggrieved, never the bigot, who should show restraint. The onus of social responsibility is always on those responding to his provocation. This leads the bigot to adapt his prejudices to meet new conditions. Anti-immigrant sentiments and stereotypes have gracefully shifted from one group to another over time. The supposed laziness

of blacks, once considered biological, is now thought to be due to their reliance on the welfare state. Women are no longer unfit for various jobs because of their supposed physical handicaps, but because of their perceived emotional makeup and the pressure of surrendering their traditional roles as homemakers. Under cover of a belief in the Second Coming of Christ, Christian true believers who were once rabidly anti-Semitic have now apparently decided that the next Antichrist will not be a Jew but rather an Arab and that support for Israel is less noxious than the thought of Islam controlling Jerusalem. Nevertheless, the original intent of the bigot remains what it was: the leopard doesn't change its spots.

Whether the bigot has disfigured 'the face of the other,' in Emmanuel Levinas's phrase, is immaterial. He always feels himself the insulted party: it is his critics who are intolerant and insensitive. The bigot must therefore find ways to justify his aggrieved status – and protect his privileges. So it is that 'they' are ruining the neighbourhood; 'they' are taking advantage of liberal programs and wasting the bigot's tax dollars; 'they' are always the culprit. And, since they are the culprit, it makes no sense to let them utilize their civic rights to question the bigot's rectitude and further destroy the community. As he sees it, freedom should belong only to him. The bigot can pray where he wishes and say what he wants. But the freedom that applies to him does not apply to the Other. This double standard is a necessary consequence of bigotry – and it always has political ramifications. It has become a common refrain, in complaining about the spread of Islam in the West, to suggest that building a mosque is different from building a synagogue because the former constitutes a political statement or provocation. Similar sentiments informed the bitter controversy over whether a mosque might be constructed in New York City at 'Ground Zero.'

The language of intolerance seems eminently reasonable to the bigot. Manichean assumptions define his world: he is unconcerned with nuance. That is why, today, gays make such a convenient target. Their practices are deemed unnatural or self-consciously perverse. Being gay is either an unalterable biological determination that makes the gay person appear abnormal, or it is a choice that thereby renders him purposefully degenerate. Either way, the gay person challenges what it means to be a 'real' man or a 'real' woman. Gender roles must remain what they were because what they were is 'natural' – and what they are now is not. The bigot takes his arguments where he can find them. He is a bricoleur who uses whatever he happens to find along the way. Any text can be made to say anything and the more sacred the better: Old Testament, New Testament, or Koran can all be used to argue that heretics and nonbelievers deserve the sword, women are inferior, homosexuality is a sin, and segregation is natural. If the bigot's critics use the same texts against him, which has happened more than once, then – obviously – they have misread them.

The language of intolerance is unconcerned with argumentation or substantiation. Yet the bigot does not exactly lie: something other than simple falsehood is at work. Lies are subject to falsification, but the bigot's existential self-definition is not. This is the underpinning for the language that he employs

to make sense of reality. It short-circuits contradiction. The notion of 'deracination,' for example, has a self-evident moral connotation for the bigot. But it assumes a notion of race that is elastic in that it can apply to a species, a group with common physical attributes, a nation or ethnicity, or individuals supposedly defined by genetic or genealogical traits.

Today, perhaps, racial categories are more hinted at than employed in public discourse. But they still provide the more intellectually inclined bigot with a point of reference for justifying his superiority and his target's inferiority as well as explaining the decline of society. Intolerance can affect even established philosophical categories like 'rootedness,' 'identity,' or 'authenticity,' when these terms are employed to deny reciprocity and to privilege one particular group over others. Everything is 'rooted' in the bigot's 'authentic' experience of 'identity' so that the categories are hijacked to further the same purpose: invalidate any meaningful standard of responsibility for judging either the bigot or his victim.

During the eighteenth century, calls for tolerance inspired the struggle for a republican state under the liberal rule of law. Free speech was considered the precondition for all other civil liberties: it would have defeated the purpose to insulate this or that religion or this or that religious figure from criticism or even 'blasphemy.' The extent to which freedom of speech is inhibited was seen as the extent to which pluralism is constrained and the recognition of those who think differently was viewed as an implicit attack on the bigot. In the media age when anyone can say anything and the need for pluralism becomes the justification, however, some maintain that the original understanding of tolerance requires revision. According to them we must now confront the phenomenon of 'repressive tolerance' whose proponents believe that the content of speech is always secondary to the right to speak (Marcuse 1960). Their logic permits intolerance, places stupidity on the same level as intelligence, and attempts to bind future generations to the ignorant prejudices of those that preceded them. Repressive tolerance is willing to accept hate speech, flat-out racism, the denial of global warming, or the rejection of evolution as mere matters of opinion.

Every teacher knows that there is no place for hate speech or name-calling in a classroom: it is impolite, intimidating, and disastrous for a meaningful discourse. Challenging intolerance is a difficult cultural and political process in which it is impossible to extrapolate from one society to another. But the common aim is surely securing the possibility of dialogue. A democratic society is based on respect for civil liberties and a willingness to hear what many believe should not be spoken. Dealing with this situation requires common sense mixed with a commitment to tolerance. Those wishing to censor the bigot should remain wary of turning him into a martyr. The defence of free speech should not preclude moral protests against attempts to manipulate tolerance for repressive ends. But moral protests are not the same thing as legislation. To move from one to the other is to play into the bigot's hands. He always tends to favour authority over liberty. Because his aim is to deprive the subaltern of

agency, legal censorship is a dangerous way for libertarians to respond and it is even more dangerous to treat its employment as a cause for celebration. There is nothing that the bigot fears more than open dialogue, cosmopolitan sentiments, and pluralism. He knows that these are the cultural trends he must resist if the Other is to remain the Other.

## 5.2. Identity Deficits

Jean-Paul Sartre once said of the anti-Semite that he ‘turns himself into stone.’ The bigot flees from his own freedom. Prejudice locks him as well as its target into pre-established categories: neither can alter his fate. The bigot is unwilling to entertain new possibilities, unwilling to think in anything other than stereotypes, and unwilling to change.

He embraces ‘bad faith’ and thus he is inauthentic by definition. In this same vein, according to Sartre, the authentic Jew exhibits good faith only if he recognizes the socially constructed ‘situation’ in which the bigot sees him. Individual freedom is meaningful only in its exercise: the subject has an identity. Only the Jew can confront the anti-Semite with the empirical reality that prejudice ignores. The Jew can have humanist, liberal, and socialist supporters. No one else, however, can challenge the anti-Semite in quite the same way.

Sartre’s *Anti-Semite and Jew* caused a sensation when it first appeared in 1947. But its implications have often been misunderstood and its salience narrowed. Sartre’s approach is relevant for understanding not just the anti-Semite but the bigot in general. His view of identity, with its emphasis on the conscious exercise of freedom, describes a basic influence on struggles undertaken by other targets of prejudice. The bigot no less than his victim experiences the existential impulse toward self-definition: ethics becomes a function of whether the individual is willing to take responsibility for this impulse and how it is translated into action in the given ‘situation.’

With its emphasis on individual freedom and personal responsibility, for fairly obvious reasons, existentialism became the dominant philosophy in the aftermath of World War II. It was the age of Camus, Sartre, and – perhaps above all – Kafka. Communism and fascism along with their revolutionary agents were in the dustbin of history, or unwittingly headed there. Moral progress on a grand scale seemed a pious myth given the experience of Auschwitz and the later revelations about the Gulag. The aftermath of World War II produced a new preoccupation with the plight of the Other, with ethical responsibility, and with the rights of the individual. In deliberate contrast to the protestations of those Nazis at the Nuremberg Trials who insisted that they were just following orders, the new existential philosophy called on the individual to assume responsibility for his or her ‘situation.’ Such existential themes entered the popular consciousness not through philosophical works like Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* (1943) but through a host of novels, plays, and films. They

congealed to form an ethos that is impossible to document fully or pinpoint empirically. This ethos existed, so to speak, beneath the radar. Even so, it would prove decisive for the new battles between the bigot and the Other.

Nonconformism took on a new validity and, among the cultural left, individuals were encouraged to assert their 'authentic' subjectivity – and hence their identity – in reacting not only against anti-Semitism but also against sexism, homophobia, racism, and the Eurocentric delusions of Western colonialism. Inspired by *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Simone de Beauvoir's classic *The Second Sex* (1952) called on women to fight their second-class status. It was greeted by a campaign of vilification impossible to imagine today. A similar concern with resistance by the subaltern appears in Jean Genet's work about transgendered life, *Our Lady of the Flowers* (1943), and his *Thief's Journal* of 1949 (which was dedicated to Sartre and Beauvoir). Sartre's *Saint Genet* (1952), a daring intellectual biography, highlighted the road to authenticity undertaken by his friend, Genet, a onetime thief and homosexual prostitute. Many of these writers also showed marked empathy for the struggles against colonialism and for those representing new social movements. Sartre's famous introduction to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and Genet's last work, his moving evocation of the Palestinian refugee camps and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, *The Prisoner of Love* (1986), are testaments to solidarity among the subaltern.

Turning the disenfranchised and despised Other into a self-conscious subject and member of the broader community became the fundamental aim of political 'engagement.' Humanism as well as liberal and socialist ideologies with Enlightenment roots increasingly were considered inadequate for this undertaking. Their universal categories and philosophical assumptions were seen as ignoring the unique experience or 'situation' of the woman, the homosexual, the person of colour, or the native. A new preoccupation with 'difference' ironically came to emphasize notions of solidarity based on the organic attributes associated with ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, nation, religion, or race. The idea of the universal intellectual associated with a tradition ranging from Voltaire to Sartre now made way for what Michel Foucault termed the 'empirical intellectual' (Bronner 2002, 73). That the subaltern should now speak in his own name about his empirical experiences was a laudable and democratic goal. But the primacy accorded the empirical experience of this or that group not only often fostered intellectual parochialism but also, on a more practical and mundane level, enabled the subaltern, in a self-serving and self-righteous fashion, to disregard criticisms or suggestions from outsiders.

Narrow forms of identity politics remain popular. What today appears as a left-wing position, however, was actually forged in the crucible of reaction. Joseph de Maistre put the matter strikingly when he wrote that 'there is no such thing as man in the world. In the course of my life I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians, etc.... But, as for man, I declare that I have never met him in my life; if he exists, he is unknown to me' (Berlin 1992, 100). Many progressive authors have cited his famous statement approvingly. But it actually opens with

the words: ‘The Constitution of 1795, just like its predecessors, was made for man.’ An arch-reactionary, Maistre employed his empirical understanding of cultural identity (and cultural repression) against liberal democracy, pluralism, socialism, and ethical rationalism. He was a prophet looking backward. What bound people together, according to him, were the mythical, romantic, and existential ‘roots’ that they share and that the Other does not. From the royalist-clerical counter-Enlightenment of the eighteenth century to the present, every reactionary movement would be driven by his kind of pseudo-concreteness and contempt for universal ideals. It is not the maintenance of ‘difference,’ ghettos, or notions of ‘separate but equal’ that are an affront to the bigot, but rather the spectre of reciprocity. Hatred of this idea drives him to invest in notions like integral nationalism or the organic community – in which he has standing, things are as they should be, and all is right with the world.

*The Cult of the Self* was the title of Maurice Barrès’ trilogy, which included *Under the Eyes of the Barbarians* (1888), *A Free Man* (1889), and *The Garden of Berenice* (1891). Virtually unread, and unreadable today, his books are interesting only as a reactionary response to the Bildungsroman, which was introduced by Goethe and other important figures of the Enlightenment. For many, however, Barrès’s guiding impulses are still salient. He understood identity as anchored in intuitive feelings inherited from a specific social experience of the past. Only members of the community with whom the bigot identifies are believed to have the insight, intuition, or experience needed to make judgments about their culture or their politics. Emphasizing the ‘rootedness’ of the individual in the history and life of a unique community, Barrès, Paul Bourget, Édouard Drumont, Charles Maurras, and others attacked the ‘deracinated’ liberal and cosmopolitan ‘intellectuals’ like Lucien Herr, Jean Jaurès, and Émile Zola, who defended the unfortunate Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish army captain unjustly convicted of treason. The belief that reason is subordinate to intuition and prejudice in guiding human affairs, affirming national identity, and making political judgements is fundamental for the bigot and a cornerstone of the anti-Enlightenment tradition (Sternhell 2009, 216). Those who deny their roots in favour of universal standards of justice are traitors by definition. Equal treatment for a Jew as a citizen of France will result only in further deracination and the erosion of its Christian heritage.

After World War II, when the aged Maurras was condemned by a postwar court for his collaboration with the Nazis, he responded: ‘This is the revenge of Dreyfus.’ The great conflict of the 1890s had solidified the intellectual connections between republicans and socialists even as it had generated the original proto-fascist movement Action Française, whose ideology fused religious dogmatism, integral nationalism, and anti-Semitism. Notions like the liberal rule of law and human rights, cosmopolitanism, and deliberative discourse were treated by these bigots as conceptual threats to the lived life of the individual. Identity was, by contrast, seen as resting on a supposedly organic connection to a community whose unique discourses and experiences are intimately and

existentially familiar to the individual. An apodictic form of knowledge is embraced that prizes intuition and resists what today is often termed deliberative discourse and the evidentiary claims of the other. Barrès stated this bluntly in his *Scenes and Doctrines of Nationalism* (1902): ‘Truth is not something to be known intellectually. Truth is finding a particular point, the only point, that one and no other, from which everything appears to us in proper perspective. [...] It is the past centuries which form my vision; that point from which everything is seen through the eyes of a Frenchman ... That is French truth and French justice. And pure nationalism is simply the discovery of that point, searching for it, and when it is found, holding fast to it and receiving from it our art, our politics, and the manner of living our life.’

The bigot has always believed that there is *something*, some indefinable quality deriving from blood or nationality, that creates a special capacity for experience and belonging. The two are related since the supposed ability of an individual to experience the world in a particular way creates an affinity with others like him. This experiential capacity trumps what emerges in discourse or any ethic with universal postulates. Such experience or intuition, whatever is self-referential, becomes the bigot’s privileged criterion of judgment. This self-referential position insulates his decisions from questioning or contradiction. It also creates the basis for believing in some hidden form of group solidarity whose recognition alone serves as the basis for authenticity (cf. El-Haj 2012). In a famous 1925 essay, Franz Rosenzweig called this reliance on revelatory intuition or experience, itself generated from within a particular group, ‘the new thinking.’ This great Jewish theologian of the early twentieth century, who wrote *The Star of Redemption* (1921), believed that ultimately such revelatory experience illuminates ‘my’ essence and what it means to be human. But the ‘new thinking’ is easily open to manipulation: it allows for a kind of mythical individual identification with the achievements of remarkable ancestors within his group (that is, with Einstein or Du Bois) that is at once self-inflating and self-deluding. This feeling of pride in ancestry is actually inauthentic by definition: it has nothing to do with the real activity of the individual in question and is thus unearned.

But that is perhaps the point. The bigot believes that his identity, his upbringing in a particular community, gives him special insights and so the ability to judge others. There is no possibility of transgressing what Helmuth Plessner termed ‘the boundaries of community.’ Those who do not listen to the inner voice of identity – or, better, *his* inner voice – are traitors by definition. Reaffirming the bigot’s identity calls on him to view reality from the standpoint of his faith, his ethnicity, or his nation. His intent is to restore the past or what Benedict Anderson (2006) termed an ‘imagined community.’ Its allure can be as real for the weak and the exploited as for the exploiters. Insular preoccupations with discrete forms of bigotry can lead one victim of prejudice to denigrate the suffering of others. A certain victim internalizes the bigotry directed against him and turns it against the other: Israel has, for example, enforced

restrictive housing codes against Palestinians in the Occupied Territories that are remarkably similar to those once used by anti-Semites against Jews in the ghettos.

Competition also emerges among groups over who has suffered the most: Camus likened this phenomenon to the 'algebra of blood.' People of colour can be racists, women can be sexists, and Jews can act like anti-Semites. *West Side Story* (1961) makes this point rather well. Ethnocentric, national, racial, religious, or gender prejudices are not confined to rich, white, male Christians. Conflicts between Latinos and African Americans occur frequently and not only among gang members. Enough primarily religious organizations representing both groups have hindered the struggle for gay rights. The target of bigotry can be a bigot in his own right. That prejudice is an attempt to assert social power does not absolve the powerless of responsibility. To deny this is to deny the powerless their residual and always imperilled moment of freedom. Exclusionary ideology can take any number of forms. But it always taints anti-authoritarian struggles and distorts a progressive politics of resistance. What advocates of these exclusionary ideologies have in common is their willingness to dismiss liberal and cosmopolitan ideals in favour of narrow interpretations of group experience.

American identity politics took off after 1968 following the collapse of the civil rights movement and the Poor Peoples' Campaign. Voices from many subaltern groups that suffered prejudice and discrimination started rendering identity ever more 'concrete' through an ever-greater specification of subjectivity. Within the women's movement, for example, black women, gay women, and black gay women demanded recognition of a new identity. Those voices undoubtedly deserved to be heard, but there was a price. Each repressed 'voice' generated a new interest group or lobbying organization that was concerned less with broader forms of solidarity than with the needs of its own clientele. Whether pursued by the dominant or the subaltern, the strategy of dogmatic identity politicians and their interest groups is to foster the belief that those sharing the same natural or experiential attributes somehow together from the perspective of the 'community' and constitute a target of aggression by the outside world. An unwillingness to countenance an exercise of identity (other than the bigot's own) is the core of the problem. The bigot defines the norm, and he necessarily defines it in a way that protects his interests.

Identity politics has been an important force in attacking 'white-skinned privilege.' It has fostered respect for previously marginalized groups. But the preoccupation with identity has also divided the exploited. Solidarity becomes insular, interest in other targeted groups becomes minimal, and cosmopolitan sympathies become secondary. In the United States the problem goes back at least to Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass, when mutual distrust between civil rights advocates and feminists hampered both causes. In the 1970s and 1980s, too, as public resources diminished and a backlash began against

the new social movements, ideologies expressing frustrated forms of subjectivity legitimated (often ferociously) the pitting of one subaltern group against another. *Do the Right Thing* (1989) by Spike Lee beautifully depicted the translation of all this tension into the bigotry of 'the street.' In his movie, set in a poor Brooklyn neighbourhood, none of the characters of different ethnicities (African American, Latino, Korean, and Italian) actually listen to one another in their everyday interactions. Even after the groups momentarily unify against an egregious expression of police brutality, each is still ultimately thrown back into the same perspective forged by his own group, and life simply goes on.

No one needs existential self-validation more than the bigot's victim, and this subaltern can also puff himself up. He too can despise the unnatural outsider, the lazy immigrant, the conniving Jew, or the cosmopolitan intellectual. He can support cultural imperialism, terror, ethnic cleansing, and genocide or all of them together. The subaltern can cling to his own self-serving narrative, and he too will often change his tactics as circumstances dictate. American politics is littered with instances where blacks have been pitted against Latinos and against white workers, and white workers against women and gays (to take just a few examples). In their attempt to avoid universal claims and categories, as well as 'master narratives,' those promoting these damaging political storylines highlight not only the truly unique character of different prejudices, but also the empirical and supposedly concrete experiences of identity used to combat them.

What is true of prejudice between subaltern identity groups is also true within such groups. Hierarchies have existed for centuries among Jews of different national origins, and American blacks have discriminated against one another according to the darkness of their skin. Racial conflict among Asians also has a long history. Patriarchal, homophobic, and anti-Semitic prejudices have been expressed, often notoriously, by movements that have advanced ideologies ranging from Black Power and Latino identity to the liberation of Palestine. This fragmenting of the subaltern is among the most important reasons that progressive forces have splintered. Each has an institutional incentive to privilege the concerns of its clients and battle other subaltern groups as resources grow scarcer and competitors multiply. Because identity is employed to justify the diverse ambitions of diverse organizations claiming to represent diverse subaltern constituencies, each can easily be played off against the others. Coalitions with other exploited groups remain possible. Nevertheless, the narrow pursuit of identity creates incentives to engage in what I have often called the moral economy of the separate deal.

The bigot is not incapable of solidarity. It's been said that 400,000 KKK uniforms were secretly sewn by Southern women – and not one ever betrayed the cause. But the bigot's solidarity is always with those 'of his kind.' His notion of solidarity is stunted, closed in on itself, and beyond reproach. In this modern age, he is as intolerant and staunchly parochial as he ever was. But he has

become sly – and he tries to cover his tracks. It is the task of his critics to uncover them – and, perhaps, what he is (consciously or unconsciously) hiding. Each identity generates its own prejudices; personal experiences can always be invoked to the person's benefit in any argument, or when the need for any particular self-definition arises.

The issue is less the analytic dissection of how identities intersect than the criteria for choosing between loyalties or dealing with circumstances in which identities conflict. And, in fact, the most universally admired movements of the subaltern have highlighted the principle of reciprocity. These were the movements led by figures like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nelson Mandela. In fashioning support, they often dealt with conflicting traditions within their ranks. As they exploded the bigot's stereotypical understanding of the subaltern, they also evinced solidarity with the more general strivings of the oppressed.

Only by embracing a critical perspective on identity can it become something more than an experiential given and a natural fixed attribute. Identity will then involve an ethical choice among what are often mutually exclusive (reactionary and progressive) traditions within what is supposedly the common history of a community, ethnicity, gender, nation, or religion. There is a sense in which 'a culture that encourages its members to be aware of their own traditions, while at the same time being able to take a distance from them is superior (and thus more 'civilized') to one which only flatters the pride of its members' (Todorov 2010, 34). Nuance of this sort is feared by the bigot. That is because it may imbue the Other with a subjectivity that supposedly only he can enjoy.

'Craving recognition of one's special, interchangeable uniqueness is part of the human condition,' writes Melissa Harris-Perry, 'and it is soothed only by the opportunity to contribute freely to the public realm' (Harris-Perry 2011, 38). Spontaneous action from below, the practical exercise of democracy, is the way in which the subaltern gains recognition and forces the bigot to take him seriously. Frances Fox Piven (2006, 146) has noted that 'the mobilization of collective defiance and the disruption it causes have always been essential to the preservation of democracy.' The struggle for liberty has always been the struggle for recognition by 'ordinary people' who do not occupy the highest rung on the ladder: the person without property, the person of another colour, the person of another sexual orientation, the heretic, or the immigrant. All of them have suffered discrimination that was buttressed by prejudice. It is worth remembering that the recognition they gained was in spite of the bigot, not because of his charity, wisdom, or cultural flexibility.

## Notes

1. 'After more than a century of claims that high intellectual or artistic accomplishment is somehow rooted in heredity and, more specifically, in the

- possession of ‘genes for high intelligence’ or ‘genes for creativity,’ there is no credible evidence for their existence.’ (Lewontin 2012, 18).
2. Discursive exclusion and relegating the Other ‘to silence does not simply correspond to (or is not simply reflective of) the relative powerlessness of black people at the time. It also reveals the evolving internal dynamics of the structure of modern discourse in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Western Europe – or during the Enlightenment.’ (West 1999, 70).
  3. See Marx to Arnold Ruge. 1843. Available at the Marxists Internet Archive, [http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43\\_09-alt.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43_09-alt.htm).
  4. See Erich Fromm’s analysis conducted during the late 1920s and early 1930s (when, it should be noted, social democracy was on the defensive and communism was entering its totalitarian phase). (Fromm 1939/1984).
  5. This is not only true in the West. (Nanda 2003).
  6. Inspired by ‘slave morality,’ resentment directs itself against what is different, creative, and unique, leading to a conformist definition of what is good, true, and beautiful. It thereby projects the failings of the inferior on an artificially constructed enemy. While Nietzsche viewed resentment as fundamental to all religious, democratic, and egalitarian movements, today it is expressed most by their opponents. (Nietzsche 1887/2003, sections 10–11)
  7. The wife of Tim LaHaye – the bombastic evangelical minister warning of apocalypse – makes her own hysterical pitch for stability and traditional marriage by noting that the husband’s authority is ‘not earned, not achieved, not dependent on superior intelligence, virtue or physical prowess, but assigned by God.’ (LaHaye 1993, 134).
  8. See, in particular, the ‘World Values Survey’ (1997) directed by Ronald Inglehart and the ‘Human Development Trends’ analysed by Hans Rostling. Available at [www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org); [www.gapminder.org/downloads/human-development-trends-2005](http://www.gapminder.org/downloads/human-development-trends-2005) (accessed October 25, 2013).
  9. ‘The cosmopolitan sensibility presumes a certain capacity for empathy on the part of all individuals beyond the constraints imposed by their race, gender, or ‘situation.’ It assumes the existence of cultural differences and, from a critical standpoint, it celebrates the friction between the particular and the universal.’ (Bronner 2002, 333)
  10. Legitimizing the status of the bigot requires devaluing the subaltern. ‘These two attempts at legitimacy are actually inseparable. Moreover, the more the usurped is downtrodden, the more the usurper triumphs and, thereafter, confirms his guilt and establishes his self-condemnation. Thus the momentum of this mechanism for defence propels itself and worsens as it continues to move. This self-defeating process pushes the usurper to go one step further; to wish the disappearance of the usurped, whose very existence causes him to take the role of usurper, and whose heavier and heavier oppression makes him more and more of an oppressor himself.’ (Memmi 1991, 51).

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