

The Long Wave of Ideology

by [Enzo Reale](#) (July 2020)



American cities on fire. A mayor humiliated and driven out of a demonstration he had helped organize. The statues of Churchill and Lincoln desecrated. British police on the run from the angry crowd. The indiscriminate criminalization of the *white man*. Politicians and law enforcement officers on their knees in front of the rioters. A cultural revolution in progress on the streets of the democratic West. What is happening? They are the fruits of a poisoned twenty-year period, which officially began in Durban three days before the attacks of September 11, 2001 and was announced by the anti-globalization urban guerrilla of Genoa in July of that same fateful year. What happened in the South African city on the

occasion of the *World Conference Against Racism* (organized by the UN) was little told, due to the massacre of the Twin Towers that monopolized the media attention: yet it was a fundamental step to understand the progressive erosion of liberal democratic principles in our societies. Although the final declaration was mitigated after the withdrawal of the American and Israeli delegations, the whole preparatory process of what should have been an opportunity to recognize the rights of all oppressed minorities turned into a summary trial against Israel for the treatment "*inflicted on Palestinians*," during which Zionism and racism were explicitly equated and there was talk of "*ethnic cleansing of the Arab population*" and "*new apartheid*." The "*anti-imperialist*" majority, dominated by Arab and Third World propaganda, managed to push an agenda in which the only accomplished democracy of the Middle East and the largest democracy in the world, the United States—considered as the only historical perpetrators of slavery—were put in the dock with an already written sentence: irony of history, the *Conference Against Racism* turned into a theater of anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism, where illiberal regimes sentenced open societies for their "*historical faults*." An orgy of victimhood that, a few days later, found its most spectacular realization in the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, that hit the political, economic and ideal heart of a West that finally paid for its abuses.

Indignation was not long in giving way to the usual reversal of reality: the victims had it coming. The Al-Aqsa intifada, the wave of attacks against Israel launched a year earlier under the pretext of Sharon's walk to the Temple Mount, was then in its hottest phase. Again, with the complicity of a broad sector of Western public opinion, instead of forming a united front against a fanaticism that used the same subjects in whose name it said it acted as cannon fodder in its strategy of terror, instead of producing protective antibodies, our societies squandered the moral

capital gained after the collapse of Communism in a dramatic self-flagellation: if we've created the most prosperous and free society in history, it must necessarily be at the expense of someone else, who is now taking revenge. The long wave of ideology defeated in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall, orphaned from its historical references, changed skin but maintained substance and messages. In Genoa, remembered today only for police violence, we witnessed another tragic representation of how the totalitarian ashes still smoked under the rubble of that historical disaster: the physical destruction of the city was again justified as the "*revolt of the oppressed*," the slogans and symbols of death of Communism presented as instances of liberation, as the demands of social justice revealed their true nature: a frontal attack on liberal democracy, in its political and economic forms, the real target of fundamentalists of every age, color and origin.

Twenty years later we are facing a mutation of the same phenomenon, the eternal return of ideology, technologically perfected, socially multifaceted in apparently multipurpose battles but all characterized by the same common denominator, at times more subtle in its manifestations but perfectly recognizable in its outcomes and objectives. A phenomenon easier to identify when it reveals all its potential for material destruction (the riots in American cities and the clashes in European ones), but even more insidious when it manipulates principles, concepts and language using the tools that precisely the democratic political system, that it wants to transform, makes available. An explosive combination of political radicalism, populist and anti-capitalist rhetoric, of identity sectarianism cloaked below the hypocritical veil of the politically correct, the single thought that invaded Western mentality after September 11, 2001 (but perhaps even earlier) to become a constitutive element of its involution. A degenerate son of liberal democracy that the latter not only did not dare to repudiate, but fed and spoiled, ending up being devoured by it.

Where *Black Lives Matter* is tied to the so-called militant anti-fascism, the cities burn and the statues are demolished—even those of the anti-slavers, even those of people who *really* fought fascism, mistaken for reactionaries by an uneducated but conveniently trained mob. In the past it was called collectivism, now it's called identity politics, but the aim is always the same: to assimilate the individual to a group, to take responsibility away from him, to endow him with an ideology and an enemy to fight, to avoid independent thinking, to cancel criticism, to homologate. Just like any *Pravda*, the *New York Times* forces James Bennet to resign for publishing the controversial opinion of a Republican senator on street protests, and the liberal *intelligentsia* not only does not arise but applauds the triumph of sectarianism: Bennet had it coming. In London, vandals smear the monument to Churchill, labeled as a racist, and in the rest of Europe immediately stand up those who, from its *progressive* keyboard, hear the call of the pack and rush to explain that the former Prime Minister, after all, was not a saint. In Richmond (Virginia), following the wave of demonstrations for the killing of Floyd, the governor decides to remove the statue of Confederate General Lee, although his positions on slavery were notoriously very distant from the *cliché* that we would expect from a Southern military leader. But more than with reality, the current cultural revolution has to do with the imposition of its own vision of history and social relations. The iconoclastic fury that leads to the breaking down of symbols considered oppressive, reactionary or simply *bourgeois*, aims to repudiate the past in the name of a new beginning, of a humanity freed from the sin of previous generations. In an attempt to erase history not aligned with the spirit of the time, the eternal ambition of the "*new man*" lurks, as opposed to the "*former people*." All tragic utopias have been inspired by this fundamentalist conception of the human history. One day the monuments will end and the politically correct will have to find other idols to tear down, to meet the needs of other minorities who will feel

discriminated, no matter whether rightly or wrongly.

After the end of real socialism, the Left had to rethink its strategy: with the class struggle by then discredited, the transition to identity politics was almost natural, and the defense of large collectives of “exploited” left room for increasingly specific and numerically reduced groups. As noted by Fukuyama in his essay [*Identity*](#), in this ostensible transition the Left soon passed from the need for equal recognition to that of the superiority of certain groups, as bearers of instances worthier than others hitherto commonly accepted. From here to revisionism, to selective memory, to abuse, to the refusal of everything that doesn’t comply with the new orthodoxy, is a short step. If the classical liberal conception sees in the affirmation of individual rights the realization of human dignity, its politically correct caricature makes collective recognition the *raison d’être* of its action. In this swinging movement, made up of courses and recourses, which is nothing more than the repetition of the same ideological battle with other means, maximalism is linked to the apogee of populism, mistakenly considered in Europe exclusively as a right-wing issue. Actually, like national-populism, returning social-communism uses in its attack on liberal democracy the same tools, with the essential difference that, unlike its apparent antagonist, enjoys generalized social approval and an almost absolute impunity. It’s in the *people vs. élites* rhetoric that identity politics find their sublimation: *pars pro toto*, only a few are really “*the people*” and opponents of all sorts automatically become “*enemies of the people*”, not legitimate interlocutors but obstacles to be removed. In a rather incomprehensible passage, if we do not analyze its ideological premises, the logical indignation for the killing of George Floyd is first transformed into a revolt with clear political connotations against the White House and then turned against the same sympathizers with the movement, like the mayor of Minneapolis, forced to head away amid the insults of the

demonstrators who ordered him to dismantle the police force of the city. In line with the dogmas of the politically correct (that is, the dress with which authoritarianism presents itself in public), populism also uses the language of democracy to corrupt and degrade it. Its action is especially subtle and difficult to refute *prima facie*: who can oppose the condemnation of racism, social injustice or domestic violence? Who can reasonably fail to declare himself "*anti-fascist*" apart from the fascists? The trap lies in the fact that populism aspires to a definitive closure, to the formulation of a final question for which there is only one answer. This is why in non-democracies "*we, the people*" is an instance of liberation while in democracy it turns into its exact opposite. Look at Spain, where the slogans of anti-Westernism rule in *Podemos'* populist and civil war rhetoric: "*The Right will not rule anymore this country.*" It's the same drift that, in Venezuela, has led Chavism to occupy power by electoral means and never let it go. Elective affinities don't lie: *Black Lives Matter's* co-founder never hid her admiration for Maduro and his pauperist regime.

Just like in Durban, this anti-racism in the streets proves to be pretty racist, so that the killing of Floyd becomes an opportunity to demand an act of general contrition and repentance from the entire white "*race.*" It is significant that practically none of the protests is aimed at the criminal conduct of the policeman, who, moreover, now risks forty years in prison, but at his belonging to a group, that of the "*whites,*" as such oppressors. Once again, we are facing the collectivization of individual behaviors, also criminal ones, in an ideological climax in which even the principle of personal criminal liability disappears: Chauvin's knee is that of all the "*whites,*" Floyd's neck that of all the "*blacks.*" There are many problems with this characterization but some of them stand out immediately. The first is that it is assumed that the alleged murderer's conduct is determined by racial motives. The second is that certain deaths arouse indignation

only if the culprits belong to a certain group: cities are not burned when an African-American kills a white man or another African-American. The third is that the fact in itself doesn't matter, what really counts is the symbol, in this case the categories of the victim and the executioner that, in a neo-totalitarian narrative that doesn't allow any replicas, are the result of a deeply unfair social superstructure, to be overthrown since discriminatory. The fourth, the most serious, is that this representation, based on group identity, that preaches a criminal law where what matters is not how you act but in the name of what you do, becomes by now the only acceptable version of the reality, if you don't want to be accused of racism, male chauvinism, fascism and so on. In the act of kneeling performed by simple citizens, policemen and politicians we don't envisage the respect due to a victim but a cultural and moral surrender, an act of humiliation to a permanent ideological blackmail which is, historically, the step that precedes submission. *"I'm not going to kneel, precisely because I reject racism,"* we should have listened from a ruling class worthy of the name. Instead, we saw Trudeau with his head bowed, in a *auto-da fé* whose flames will be difficult to extinguish.

A cult in progress, in a nutshell, but with deep roots in the totalitarian experiences of the last century, with its followers, its avant-gardes, its rituals of hatred and denunciation, its claim to *"re-educate,"* its indisputable precepts and, above all, the legitimization of revolutionary violence as catharsis, not only forgivable but desirable as it is exercised for the supreme good of the transformation of society. Everything has already been invented in politics. A cult practiced in the name of an anti-fascism which has been completely emptied of content. You'll never see the so-called anti-fascists where oppression is real, in the streets of Hong Kong, around the Xinjiang internment camps, in the prisons of Tehran, in the torture chambers of the Venezuelan police. Democracies are their battleground. Let's be clear: today the

definition of antifascism means absolutely nothing. Antifascism makes sense only in the general category of anti-totalitarianism, as a theoretical concept, as a liberal democratic ideal to defend. But, while Communism is still a reality in some state systems, Fascism as a historical phenomenon has not been so for a long time. The problem with current anti-fascists is not that they intend to fight fascism (that does not exist) but that they attack everything that, in their unquestionable judgment, identify with fascism, that is practically anything that is not (extreme) Left.

Against the long wave of ideology, against the eternal return of the same, that today takes the forms of identitarian regression, the only antidotes remain the rule of law and the protection of individual freedoms and opportunities, and the ideals of liberal democracy the only truly revolutionary instance that is worth pursuing, without kneeling. Just like the *drunkard, racist and misogynist* Sir Winston Churchill did.

«[Previous Article](#) [Table of Contents](#) [Next Article](#)»

Enzo Reale is an Italian journalist living in Barcelona who writes about international politics. His articles have appeared in [Atlantico Quotidiano](#), *New English Review*, *L'Opinione*, and *Il Foglio* and he is the author of [1972 \(I posti della ragione erano tutti occupati\)](#). You can follow him on Twitter at [@1972book](#).

NER on Twitter