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Identity Politics: A Marxist View

Abstract

This article has three main sections. In section 1, I discuss what identity politics is and what are its theoretical presuppositions. I also talk about the nature of the political action in identity politics, and about its limits. In section 2, I present my views on Marxist politics, which is centered on the theory and the politics of class, combined with the class-theory and class-politics of anti-oppression. I unpack what I consider are the Marxist notions of 'the common ground' and of 'the majority', as important components of Marxist politics. The *majority*, in the Marxist sense, are those who are objectively subjected to class-exploitation. And in terms of the *common ground* for politics, there are two aspects: a) the majority of people experience *one* common fate, i.e. they are exploited, and b) this exploited majority are subjected to one or more of the many mechanisms of oppression (race, gender, caste, etc.), *all* of which represent *one* experience: attack on democratic rights (or the experience of 'tyranny', in Lenin's sense). In the final section, I conclude the article and draw some implications of my arguments.

Keywords

Identity Politics, Marxism

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Cover Page Footnote

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Class politics, as seen in economic struggle in its various forms on the part of workers and small-scale producers, has been increasingly evident in recent times. Millions of men and women have struck work or have demonstrated against neoliberal capitalism, both within the framework of trade unions and outside of these. In the US, the number of people who are striking has increased: from the annual average of 76,000 in 2007-2017 to the average of 475,000 in 2018-2019. The US trend is a part of a global upsurge which includes the largest general strike in history carried out in India in January 2020 in which more than 250 million men and women reportedly participated. As well, the practice of ‘identity politics’, whether it is based in religion and caste (as in India) or race and gender (as in North America), has been very strong, and one might say, stronger than class politics. The question of class politics relative to ‘identity politics’ is a permanent topic of debate in academic and political circles. This article presents some reflections on this topic.

This article has three main sections. In section 1, I discuss what identity politics is and what are its theoretical presuppositions. I also talk about the nature of the political action in identity politics, and about its limits. In section 2, I present my views on Marxist politics, which is centered on the theory and the politics of class, combined with the class-theory and class-politics of anti-oppression. I unpack what I consider are the Marxist notions of ‘the common ground’ and of ‘the majority’, as important components of Marxist politics. The *majority*, in the Marxist sense, are those who are objectively subjected to class-exploitation. And in terms of the *common ground* for politics, there are two aspects: a) the majority of people experience *one* common fate, i.e. they are exploited, and b) this exploited majority are subjected to one or more of the many mechanisms of oppression (race, gender, caste, etc.), *all* of which represent *one* experience: attack on democratic rights (or the experience of ‘tyranny’, in Lenin’s sense). In the final section, I conclude the article and draw some implications of my arguments. Among other things, I re-iterate the idea that Marxism must take oppression seriously, and I suggest a need for a change in our language in the discussions on social oppression. I argue against the language of feminism and anti-racism of which Marxism is supposed to be a part. While Marxism must fight for an end to oppression of women and racialized minorities, feminism and anti-racism and the rest of the identity politics movement will not necessarily fight for an end to class, because at a theoretical level they severely downplay, or neglect, the importance of class, and indeed deny the *primacy* of class. This has important implications for how the identity politics people and Marxism construct their worldviews. Marxist politics and identity politics are not un-related, but there are *significant* differences. Marxist politics has the ability to subsume under it some of the legitimate concerns of identity politics, but the scope of identity politics is too narrow to subsume under it Marxist politics.

Identity Politics: A Politics of Difference Abstracted from Class

What is identity politics?

Identity politics is based on the ‘fact’ of (self) identity of a person or a group of persons (which race or gender, etc. one belongs to). The central focus of identity politics is recognition/respect: ‘identity politics describes how marginalized people embrace previously stigmatized identities, create communities on the basis of shared attributes and interests... and rally either for autonomy or for rights and recognitions’

(Lancaster, 2017). Identity politics is the politics of (social-cultural) difference. Sonia Kruks (2001:85) says: identity politics is known for:

its demand for recognition on the basis of the very grounds on which recognition has previously been denied: it is qua women, qua blacks, qua lesbians that groups demand recognition. The demand is not for inclusion within the fold of “universal humankind” on the basis of shared human attributes; nor is it for respect “in spite of” one’s differences. Rather, what is demanded is respect for oneself as different.

Strictly speaking, however, identity politics is a system of politics within which there are two inter-related components: the politics of recognition/respect and the politics of limited economic distribution, with the former being the dominant component and influencing the latter element. The economic distribution in question is generally within narrow sectors defined on the basis of identity (e.g. academic jobs for women or blacks), without any linkage to the agenda of the abolition of class relations that cause inequality. The aim of identity politics is to hide/downplay class politics (more on this later).

Here are some illustrative examples of identity politics.

When a female billionaire and war-monger bourgeois politician appeals to women to vote for her because ‘I am a woman’, that is identity politics, which hides the ruling class bias of the politician.¹

When a Hindu-nationalist sectarian leader says to an oppressed Hindu caste group or when a leader of the Democratic Party says to a black community in a city, ‘I will make one of your people a mayor’, and when these politicians do nothing to counter racism and casteism, and when these leaders do nothing to improve the material conditions of the oppressed, these politicians are practicing ‘identity politics’.

To argue that one has to be respectful of the view of a woman or a black person simply *because of* the cultural-social identity of the person and *irrespective* of the substantive content and political implications of that view, that is identity politics. For example, if a woman of color says that Marxists do not care about the interests of women (or of racial minorities) and then if a Marxist scholar who happens to be a male passionately counter-argues, providing the reason and/or evidence for his own statements, then to say that his conduct is necessarily against women and racialized minorities, that is identity politics.²

¹ In her analysis of Ms. Clinton’s failed candidacy in the last US federal election, Donna Brazile noted that her students at Georgetown University disliked identity politics: ‘They thought that Hillary spent too much time trying to appeal to people based on their race, or their gender, or their sexual orientation and not enough time appealing to people based on what really worried them -- issues like income inequality and climate change’ (quoted in Harrop, 2019).

² If a person argues against a woman who says that the division between men and women, and not the class division, is the most important division in society then that person is not arguing against the woman as a woman, but against the woman as someone whose *idea* is out of line with the interests of the working class people who are both men and women. There are indeed strong linkages between ideas and class interests (see Das, 2019a).

Theoretical presuppositions of identity politics

Identity politics (especially as it circulates in the academia) is generally informed by the post-structuralist/post-modernist mode of thinking popularized by the likes of Foucault and Laclau and Mouffe.³ This mode of thinking is characterized by such things as:

1. resorting to subjectivity⁴ and advocating for the change of people's views about one another as a main tool to cause changes in society;
2. under-emphasis on, or neglect of, the *materiality* and *objectivity* of human life;
3. ontological prioritization of the individual, often treating it as the primary site of oppression;
4. rejection of a *systemic* view of society and advocating for atomisation;
5. inadequate attention to the need to *explain* things as opposed to *descriptive* narratives;
6. seeing society as divided into groups based on identity, and neglecting the class division;
7. rejecting *revolution* by the *working class* aiming to *overthrow capitalism* and its state; and
8. favouring mainly small-scale, often localized, and (discursive/linguistic) acts of resistance by a person or groups of persons defined on the basis of identity/identities.

Armed with these ideas, identity politics (from here, I use 'identity politics' both in terms of a political movement and in terms of an intellectual movement) sees society as divided into numerous groups defined on the basis of their social-cultural identity (what a group thinks of itself in relation to other groups): the basic division is between those who are (perceived to be) culturally privileged and those whose voice is (perceived to be) not recognized. If a group is oppressed based on race and gender, the extent of its oppression is greater than that of a group that is oppressed based on race only or gender only. This additive view of oppression changed with the arrival of the concept of intersectionality.

Much identity politics is based on the concept of intersectionality, although the two are not the same enterprises. This concept is one of the most common ways in which (liberal) activists and theorists⁵ conceive of identity politics (and indeed the wider society). An African-American legal scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) is said to have coined the term. Crenshaw discussed how the court system in the US fails to acknowledge that black women experience compounded discrimination, not just as women, nor just as black individuals, but as black women. If an employer hires white women and black men, that does nothing to the oppression of black women. Crenshaw developed the metaphor of a crossroads of two roads. One denotes race. Another denotes gender. The idea here is that accidents occurring at the intersection could not be attributed to one cause only (i.e. who is coming from which road and how) and that therefore accidents need to be explained in terms of what is happening on the two roads and how they meet at the accident spots.

According to the intersectionality concept: there is a matrix of oppression in which race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. are all important, they all interact and compound the effects of individual axis of oppression⁶ (see the Table below). The idea is to allow for a peaceful coexistence of the different

³ For them, the political is autonomous of the economic, non-class relations are autonomous of class relations, and therefore struggles against oppression and against capitalism are separate struggles (See Wood, 1990).

⁴ This means what one person thinks/feels about themselves and others is said to have enormous causal power.

⁵ They are sometimes misnamed as leftists and are associated with the fight for social justice.

⁶ Sometimes, class is thrown in, but class is devoid of all of its real content (see below).

perspectives on society, which emphasize different relations and identities. Intersectionality is a scaled-up – magnified -- version of identity politics.

Table 1: Matrix of Oppression as Bases of Identity politics⁷

Identity	Oppressor	Oppressed	Ism
Race	White	Non-whites	Racism
Age	Adult	Children	Ageism/childism ⁸
Sex	Biol. men	Biol. women	Sexism
Gender	Soc. and biol. men	Soc. and biol. women	Gender oppression
Religion	Majority religion	Minority religion	Religious oppression*
Sexual orientation	Heterosexuals	Homosexuals	Heterosexism
Ability	Able bodied	Disabled	Ableism
Language	Native speakers	Non-native speakers	Linguicism
Region	Dominant region	Dominated region	Regionalism**
Nationality	Dominant nation	Dominated nation	Colonialism/ nationalism**

Notes:

*In India, it is called communalism: it refers to oppression by Hindus over Muslims and Christians).

**Nationality/nation and colonialism and nationalism, and region and regionalism⁹, like all other terms in the Table, are all framed in in terms of cultural difference or cultural superiority.

To the extent that intersectionality appears to recognize multiple bases of oppression and how they are interlocked, it surely has some usefulness. It is true that not only is a black woman oppressed by race and gender but also does she suffer from the effects of how race and gender compound each other.¹⁰ Thus intersectionality provides a reasonable description of some aspects of society. But it is a deeply flawed way of rigorously thinking about oppression and inequalities in terms of their causality. The intersectionality framework, for which many in academia, media and politics have fallen for, and the broader project of identity politics, cannot answer questions such as the following about the mechanisms of oppression. There are objective reasons why the capitalist class appropriates surplus labour (surplus value) from the working class and class differentiation among a community of commodity producers

⁷ This is partly inspired by, and partly adapted from, Adams, et al (2007).

⁸ On childism, see Young-Bruehl, 2012

⁹ Regionalism is expressed in many forms. One is provincialization of thought: many believe that Marx was from Europe, so his ideas and Marxism as such are necessarily Eurocentric and not relevant to the less developed world (See Chibber, 2013). Some even see Europe in purely negative terms and the less developed countries in more positive terms (at least, culturally). This sort of thinking generally characterizes post-colonialism, which Eagleton (2011:223) calls the foreign affairs department of postmodernism. Yet, it should also be noted that many within the European tradition typically ignore intellectual ideas from the Global South. What is necessary is not some narrowly-based ‘de-colonization’ effort but an authentic internationalist approach to ideas: valid ideas from all parts of the world should be considered, fully bearing in mind that the origin of ideas in given places might bear mark of those places, sometimes positively and sometimes negatively, and ideas from one place when they travel to another place might have to be re-fashioned in the light of the conditions of the new place.

¹⁰ In other words, her suffering (S) is the sum of effects of race (R), gender (G) and the interaction between race and gender:
 $S = R + G + R * G$

happens,¹¹ but is there a similar explanatory framework within identity politics which can answer: why it is that men oppress women or why it is that whites oppress blacks? What is it about men that gives them the causal *power* to and creates a *need* for them to, oppress women? What is it about whites (including white men and women) that gives them the causal power to oppress blacks (including black men and black women), and why do they (need to) oppress? If all the people -- whites and blacks, and men and women, and upper castes and lower castes – in a future society have an opportunity to have access to what they need for a flourishing, fulfilling life, what might happen to social oppression? If people currently do not have access to what they need, is it mainly because of racism, caste-ism, etc.?

Identity politics, including intersectionality, fragments the society in an extreme manner (see Table 1, and Appendix 1). As Cassell (2017), a critic of intersectionality notes:

As there are infinite configurations of overlapping oppressions and dominant characteristics, intersectionality theory posits that we all exist in an infinite web in which we are all simultaneously oppressing and being oppressed by each other.

Take the acronym LGBTQ. It was originally LGB. Variants over the years have ranged from GLBT to LGBTI to LGBTQIAAP shifted, and identity groups quarreled about who should be included or excluded, and who come first – that is, whose oppression is more central.¹² The intersectionality framework cannot explain what is common to the experience of all the oppressed groups and sub-groups.¹³ Metaphorically, what explains the nature of the surface itself on which the different roads intersect, and without which there can be no roads. And, what explains whether any of these roads is more important than another (the primacy question)?

Social oppression is a matter of how *individuals* behave in their everyday lives. Individuals are treated as individuals and not as ‘the ensembles of the social relations’.¹⁴ If oppression is mainly perpetuated at the individual and interpersonal level then, ‘everyone who isn’t experiencing a given form of oppression is complicit in perpetuating it and benefits from it’.

Identity politics, including inter-sectionalism, given its emphasis on the individual and on difference, eschews politics based on the common ground. This is justified epistemologically, at least partly. Patricia Collins (1990: 234) says that:

The overarching matrix of domination houses multiple groups, each with varying experiences with penalty and privilege that produce corresponding partial perspectives, situated knowledges and for clearly identifiable subordinate groups, subjugated knowledges.

The inference from the above (post-modernist) claim is that:

¹¹ In a given country, the working class comprises different social groups (e.g. men and women; different races), some of whom may be exploited a little more than others.

¹² ‘UK Facebook users can now choose from one of 71 gender options, including asexual, polygender and two-spirit person, following the feature’s successful integration in the US.’ (Williams, 2014).

¹³ See the special issue on intersectionality in *Science and Society*, 2018.

¹⁴ Marx (1845) says: ‘the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations’.

no one group has a clear angle of vision nor does it possess the theory or methodology that allows it to discover the absolute 'truth'.¹⁵

It is assumed that minorities (blacks, low-income women, gays, etc.) do not have interests cutting across their sectional identity-specific interests and that they do not necessarily see themselves that way. One might ask: do all the people of the world not have to eat, have shelter, need education, health-care and transportation, and so on? Clearly, underlying identity politics and intersectionality is an inadequate view of what it is to be a human being: that we have material needs, a view that abstracts from the fact that the humankind 'must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing, before it can pursue politics, science, art, religion, etc.' (Engels, 1883).

Identity politics is, more or less, 'class-less politics'.¹⁶ This is the identity of identity politics. The roads of single oppressions (e.g. race, gender, etc.) that are said to intersect are built on a sandy surface of subjectivity (and a superficial view of the real experiences of people). To the extent that class is at all mentioned by adherents of identity politics, it appears in four forms.

Firstly, class is seen in its idealistic form: class as *classism* – i.e. in the sense of cultural-social prejudice against the working class people (or 'the poor'), so class is seen as more or less equivalent to the ideology of sexism or racism. The thinking behind 'the politics of the body' – the politics based on (social constructions) of the female body, skin color, sexuality, etc. -- is applied to class and the working class.¹⁷ The objective relations of class are transformed into a subjective process.

Secondly, class is seen in a gradational form. That is, when any material dimension of class receives any attention, this is done in the superficial – distributivist -- sense of some people having less income, etc. than others. Thirdly, in the gradation view of economic problems, the problems of low income, etc. are seen as experienced by those who are socially oppressed (e.g. black women), i.e. as 'problems of the disproportionately poor' (Gimenez, 2018: 105), and not by wider layers of the property-less people, including the vast reserve army as well as the small-scale producers who are slowly losing their assets thanks to the operation of the law of value.

The scope of class (in its gradation form) is often narrowed to the interests of the middle-class people (i.e. high-income sections of the wage-earning class, who, given their disposable income and wealth, are closer to the capitalist class than to the working class as a whole). However, the middle class is seen as comprising various socially oppressed groups (e.g. middle class women or middle class black people). In

¹⁵ In most cases, there is indeed no absolute truth, so what is the point of Collins' implied criticism? 'Truth... mounts from lower to ever higher levels of knowledge without ever reaching, by discovering so-called absolute truth, a point at which it can proceed no further (Engels, 1886).

Truth is relative. But this relativity is relative. It is not absolute. Just because there is (almost) nothing that is absolute, that does not mean anything goes, and that the perspectives of numerous identity-based groups are equally valid and that they are as valid as the class-perspective. Indeed, subjectivists forget that 'the relativity of categories is only partial relativity and not absolute relativity' (Mandel, 1977: 167). This applies to all those subjectivists within the identity politics enterprise.

¹⁶ Any view or action that claims to ignore class serves to support the ruling class, so it is a class-view and it is class politics in that sense. When I am saying identity politics is class-less politics, I am referring to the ways in which it ignores the interests and struggles of the propertyless class.

¹⁷ There is much discussion on the body among cultural theorists including those who are sympathetic to identity politics. But for them, 'it is usually the erotic body, not the famished one' (Eagleton, 2003: 2).

practice, the demand for justice, for example, for women, becomes effectively the demand for justice for the socially-privileged women (e.g. white women) and then, for the middle class white women, and so on. In other words, in terms of economic aspects of identity politics, the question of who gets what is decided on the basis of who is seen as who (not all workers but women workers and not all women workers but middle class women workers and not all middle class women workers but white middle class women workers, and so on).

Fourthly, class is seen in oppression terms. Class as a category is seen as masculinist and what not. So, in this view, the working class is automatically seen as white males. Such a conception is blatantly mistaken. It *theoretically* devalues women's labour in the world of capitalist production and exchange. It is empirically Euro-American centric (consider millions of women workers in Asia). If the working class is seen as necessarily white and male, clearly it is to be seen as oppressor.

Fifthly, in the politics of recognition, and given its superficial understanding of economic inequality (which can apparently be addressed by some redistributive government policy in the current society), there is absolutely no acknowledgment that class has any primacy over other sorts of social relations. Class is mentioned in the same breath as race and gender, sexuality, and so on.

Overall, the identity of identity politics is defined by: its emphasis on subjective aspects of people's lives; a gradational and (Weberian) stratificatory view of economic inequality; neglect of class relations of exploitation and control over property; and its goal of making capitalism a little tolerable but not transcending it. Identity politics is intra-class or class-fractional politics. It is, more or less, (petty-) bourgeois politics. It is advanced as a tool to undermine/obscure class politics. It is based on an over-politicized view of society: it is the *cultural politics* of exclusion/domination. One culturally-defined group excludes another group from society's resources and dominates over that group.

Identity politics and/as bourgeois ideology

Identity politics – in terms of its underlying thinking and its practice – in many ways an ideology of bourgeois society. Identity politics is a bit like the capitalist political-economic strategy of slicing up of the commodity chain: the car as a commodity is sliced into tyres, windows, doors, etc. which are made in different places. In identity politics, every separate segment is invited to assert one person's rights against another person's rights. The implication is that: those who subscribe to identity politics break down the struggle into its smallest component parts: pitting black women against black men, black disabled women against black able-bodied women, and so on. *By breaking down and separating things in this way they are dividing the movement, diverting attention from the main issues and pitting different groups of the oppressed against each other.* (IMT, 2018; italics original).

As mentioned earlier, identity politics encourages people to think about how oppression is sliced into different little sites: a white woman is oppressed by gender, but she is also said to oppress blacks. If it is believed that, for example, black men are 'privileged' relative to black women and black heterosexual men are privileged relative to black homosexual men, then the totality of oppression is indeed fragmented. It is as if one person can freely choose from a basket of 'commodities' of identity. This is an

attitude that sits very well in a society where people are free to change their employer (while they are not free not to work for a wage) and a society that valorizes the freedom of the middle-class consumer.¹⁸ Identity politics ‘mimics’ the ideology of private property and of competition in bourgeois society. It insists on the primacy of subjective experience as the source of understanding and changing the world.¹⁹ It is argued that only those who have lived through oppression understand it and are able to fight it, so those who are sympathetic to the plight of oppressed and marginalised groups without themselves having a direct experience of oppression are relegated to a secondary role as passive supporters.²⁰ If the direct experience of oppression is the main or the only condition for one to develop an insight into oppression and how to fight it, then the implication is that: the insight into oppression as a form of ‘cultural wealth’ is the monopoly of a few as if it is their private property. Given the matrix of oppression, there are many perspectives on oppression, all of which are partial perspectives (e.g. a gender perspective, a race perspective, etc.), and they are all competing,²¹ but there is no common ground among them. To the extent that some layers that are already privileged in some ways want a larger part of the national (economic) cake in a country without challenging the control over the production of the cake itself (that is without challenging capitalist economics, politics and ideology), identity politics is more or less the ideology of the (petty-)bourgeoisie used to justify its own economic and political privilege and contribute to the reproduction of capitalism.

The nature of the political in identity politics and its limits

We have seen that in the identity politics framework, including in its intersectionality form, social oppression often becomes mainly a matter of how people *think*.²² Material aspects of oppression when

¹⁸ ‘In identity politics realm’ most collective identities are like shirts rather than skin, namely they are, in theory at least, optional, not inescapable. In spite of the current fashion for manipulating our bodies, it is still easier to put on another shirt than another arm. Most identity groups are not based on objective physical similarities or differences, although all of them would like to claim that they are ‘natural’ rather than socially constructed. Certainly, all ethnic groups do’ (Hobsbawm, 1996).

Hobsbawm continues: ‘Second, it follows that in real life identities, like garments, are interchangeable or wearable in combination rather than unique and, as it were, stuck to the body. ...identity politics assumes that one among the many identities we all have is the one that determines, or at least dominates our politics: being a woman, if you are a feminist, being a Protestant if you are an Antrim Unionist, being a Catalan, if you are a Catalan nationalist, being homosexual if you are in the gay movement. And, of course, that you have to get rid of the others, because they are incompatible with the ‘real’ you’ (ibid.).

¹⁹ To say that our personal experience has an influence on our views about the world is one thing. But to assign primacy to the personal experience when it comes the production of our views about society is another.

²⁰ ‘We realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation are us. Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work. This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in *the concept of identity politics*. We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression.’ (Eisenstein, 1978; italics mine).

Sharon Smith says: ‘the central premise of the theory of identity politics is that only those who experience a particular form of oppression are capable of fighting against it--that, generally speaking, everybody else is part of the problem and therefore can't be part of the solution, and when you come right down to it, all men benefit from women's oppression, all straight people benefit from gay oppression, and all whites benefit from racism’ (Smith, 2018).

²¹ Of course, sometimes they may form alliances.

²² bell hooks says: ‘For me it's like a house, they share the foundation, but the foundation is the ideological beliefs around which notions of domination are constructed’ (quoted in Adams, 2018). For Patricia Hill Collins, ‘Empowerment involves rejecting the dimensions of knowledge, whether personal, cultural, or institutional, that perpetuate objectification and dehumanization’.

they are included in identity politics ensue from the thinking, mental construction (e.g. what does it mean to be a man, what does it mean to be a black, and so on). Therefore, a most important form of struggle is seen as political correctness in language, speaking, and writing.

Implicit in the enterprise of identity politics is a narrow view of knowledge and action. Our knowledge is, of course, shaped by our own personal experience. To the extent that poor blacks are subjected to more police brutality than poor whites, the experience of poor blacks is very significant. It matters very much. But in the formation of knowledge (and in conducting political action), personal experience is only one factor. Our knowledge – our view of what is happening and why, and our view of what is to be done -- is not only shaped by our own *empirical* experience but also by our *theoretical* consciousness – i.e. consciousness of the system as a whole, of its underlying social relations and causal mechanisms which are expressed in the form of experience.²³

If the direct experience of a process is the sole cause of knowledge and of our view of how to act on it, then how would identity politics people respond to this remark from Marx about himself?: ‘nobody had written so much on money and had so little [of it]’ (Marx quoted in Eagleton, 2011:171). Marx was not in India when the sepoy (troops) mutiny happened as a revolt against British rule in the mid-1850s. Marx was not in the US before during and after the abolition of slavery. Yet, he could write against colonialism and slavery from the standpoint of the colonized and the slaves. He advocated for the fight against colonial rule whether in Ireland or India and he advocated for the need to fight against slavery and racial oppression and inspires contemporary Marxists to take an anti-colonial stance.

Marx was hardly someone who had the experience of being exploited as a worker but he is so far the best theorist of exploitation.²⁴ Does one have to be urinated on by an upper caste person for one to develop insight into caste oppression? Does one have to be lynched by a Hindu mob in India for one to develop insight into such lynchings and solidarize with those who are lynched? In the on-going protests in India against the unconstitutional Citizenship Amendment Act that grants citizenship to non-Muslim immigrants into India and denies citizenship to Muslims, the protestors are indeed both Muslims and non-Muslims.

The fact that oppressions based on race and on gender, etc. intersect does not mean that there is a necessary need for a united struggle against injustice, according to identity politics. The demand for recognition for women or blacks or lowest castes is not based on what unites them (e.g. the non-satisfaction of their material needs, and the assault on their democratic rights as a Marxist would argue, on which see more in the next section), but on the fact that blacks see themselves as different from whites, women see themselves different from men, and so on.

With some justification, it is possible to say that identity politics is ‘from below’ and ‘from above’. When wage-earning people with lower income and economic insecurity, forced to compete for jobs or welfare, use their upper caste or racial advantage to outcompete others, that is identity politics ‘from

²³ After all, we live in an ontologically-layered society where *social relations* (of production and reproduction, etc.) set up *mechanisms* which produce *outcomes* which are *experienced* and perceived differently by different people (see Callinicos, 2006: chapter 5).

²⁴ And our knowledge is also shaped by our ability to empathize (at least with the vast majority of people, those who are not exploiters): there is the true idea that all humans avoid suffering, and that idea can mutually connect all people, including those who may not be suffering at this moment. I do not have to be beaten by a policeman to know that being beaten up hurts and therefore I should do everything to stop people from not being beaten up.

below'. These two forms feed into each other. When ruling class politicians talk about policies aimed at keeping the borders safe from immigrants (especially, immigrants who share a different ethnic background than the majority community in the destination country), or when employers divide the members of a union based on race, that is identity politics from above. Identity politics is indeed often driven by the politics of elitism, led by bourgeois or petty-bourgeois leaders. It is against, or it neglects, the interests of toilers, the majority. It is generally the case that the elites (e.g. black mayors; low-caste politicians, female and lesbian professors, business people) – i.e. people from already-advanced layers -- from the oppressed communities get some benefit from identity politics.²⁵

Identity politics has highlighted the importance of oppression. That is a good thing. But as already indicated above, most other aspects of it are extremely problematic.

Identity politics, as practiced by middle class people, rarely raises the economic and political issues that concern women from poor peasant or low-paid working class background. The identity politics does nothing to ensure that *all* toilers – toilers from all castes, all races and genders, and all people with varying sexual orientation -- get what they need in life. So those who benefit by exploiting the toilers and all those who benefit from such identity-based divisions are let off the hook. The exploiters and their political supporters have little to fear from identity politics.

While on the surface identity politics seems to benefit the socially oppressed groups, in actuality, ordinary people get little from identity politics. This is not accidental: identity politics, given its view of class and class politics, and given its fragmentary nature of political movement, serves as a tool to undermine the conditions for action that will result in ordinary people getting benefits. Identity politics undermines any ideological-political project of fighting against the structure of class relations.

It is generally the case that significant reforms are possible as a result of struggles for revolutionary changes.²⁶ Identity politics divides the working class, and in this way and in other ways, undermines the condition for revolutionary struggles as well. So, identity politics ultimately undermines the extent to which reforms (including legal reforms) in the conditions of the oppressed can be granted, and remain in place. And, to the extent that identity politics demands material redistribution, and to the extent that some concessions (reforms) are granted due to identity politics, they are more likely to affect a small section within an oppressed group (e.g. employment for a few people within an oppressed group) at the expense of the class of workers and class of small-scale producers.

One aim of identity politics is to increase the representation of under-represented groups (e.g. more women in the bureaucracy, more blacks and browns in academia and union leadership, etc.). The implicit idea here is that greater presence of women and other oppressed groups in the public places (e.g. workplaces) 'would help eradicate or alleviate their oppression' (Cassell, 2017). This idea ignores the following truth: 'oppressed groups are not oppressed because they are underrepresented; they are

²⁵ Interestingly, in the period 1991 and 2012, among the aboriginal communities, the top 1% augmented the wealth they held by 4.4 percentage points to 19.5% while the top 1% of dalits had increased their wealth by 2.5 percentage points to 14.4% between 1991 and 2012 (Paliath, 2019).

²⁶ Identity politics aims to fight for reforms. They and everyone else who seeks to *only* fight for reforms forget that: 'The most effective way to secure real reforms is to pursue the tactics of the revolutionary class struggle. Actually, reforms are won as a result of the revolutionary class struggle, as a result of its independence, mass force and steadfastness. Reforms are always false, ambiguous . . . they are real only in proportion to the intensity of the class struggle.' (Lenin, 1906).

underrepresented because of systemic oppression in society that create barriers to participation in public life and politics' (Cassell, 2017). This is true even if it is the case that their under-representation might contribute to their oppression.²⁷ Yet, increasing representation of, for example, white women in the labour market does not in itself increase the total number of jobs available at a given point in time. It is not in the nature of identity politics to demand that in society as a whole there should be decent jobs *for all*. Its main goal is, given that there are n number of jobs, more of them should go to what it considers to be socially oppressed groups. As a result, it is in the nature of identity politics that all these groups fight *among themselves* for a shrinking pool of jobs rather than *fight with* the ruling class and its state to provide secure well-paying jobs to all. In fact, a little algebra shows that if we take only 5 oppressor identities (from the Table on matrix of oppression), there will be 63 identity groups (see the Appendix). From the idea that there are numerous identity groups that constitute society, the next step is to think that: 'The working class becomes the enemy instead of the ruling capitalist class' (Cassell, 2017).

Much of identity politics is about the politics of recognition and is, as mentioned earlier, at the expense of class politics. The fact that abstraction from – or gross under-emphasis on -- class and class politics is a necessary part of identity politics is clear. Representing political and/or economic interests of the bourgeois class and the privileged middle-class layers, identity politics eschews the politics of the common ground. Its neglect of class politics is proportionately related to its valorization of the politics of difference and to its popularity in academia and media as well as in bourgeois politics.

Consider this example. If the choice is between a black professor or a female professor, both of whom are theoretically 'enslaved' to the World Bank or to fascistic politics, and a white male professor who writes about the need for the abolition of class society and of oppression and imperialism, how does the recruitment based on identity politics serve the cause of social justice and transformation? Consider further how reactionary identity politics can be in trade unions:

At one trade union congress in Britain the advocates of Identity Politics moved a resolution that stated that the union must automatically accept any accusation of harassment made by a woman against a man as true, with no further proof than the word of the woman concerned. A male delegate challenged this as follows: "I am a shop steward. Imagine that I have a woman supervisor who wants to get rid of me. She would have a very easy task: just accuse me of harassment and I would be sacked immediately and the union could not defend me." On this occasion, the motion was defeated. But the danger of such policies is evident (IMT, 2018).

Those who practice identity politics generally tend to have a lot of trust in the ability of the state to solve the problems of the oppressed, when in fact the state is the fundamental mechanism because of which the system of exploitation and oppression continues. Prioritizing the politics of recognition over class politics, the identity politics people are simply liberals in their progressive, and sometimes, Marxist, masks. Their outer limit of political operation is the Democratic party type, and perhaps the Democratic party under the Sanders type. Many identity politics people are likely to be the soldiers in the battle field of social democracy. Surely, the identity politics people are critical of society; they even offer criticisms of capitalism. But there is a difference between what is merely anti-capitalism on the one hand and Marxism on the other. Marxism is a criticism of capitalist from the standpoint of overthrowing it. In contrast, to the extent that identity politics, including intersectionality, offers any criticism of capitalist

²⁷ Even then, we know that black mayors or lower-caste politicians do little to improve the conditions of blacks or lower castes.

society, their ‘oppositional criticism’ is social-democratic at best, and can be and ‘is nothing more than a safety valve for mass dissatisfaction, a condition of the stability of the social structure’ (Trotsky, 2008: Preface).

Marxist Politics: Class Politics with a Difference

What is Marxist politics?

To understand the relation between Marxist politics and identity politics, one has to first understand what Marxist politics is.²⁸ In terms of politics (i.e. the question of what is to be done?), the Marxist view is that: socialist society is the only solution to the humanity’s major problems and that socialism is established following the *overthrow* of capitalism and all forms of class relations. The overthrow of capitalism is to be achieved on the basis of a theoretically *conscious, organized, self-emancipatory class struggle* of the *workers* and other *oppressed groups* who, by utilizing a flexible combination of multiple tactics, including electoral and extra-electoral struggles, with the focus on the latter. The toiling mass replace the *capitalist state* and establish its own *democratically-functioning* transitional state and use its *political power* (political hegemony) to stop overthrown classes from returning to power and to begin, nationally and *internationally*, the construction of socialism, a society where there is popular democracy in every sphere of life.²⁹ One sees Marxist politics when workers of different races and genders strike work and when they participate in political movements against the government for concessions, and when workers’ parties and unions fight against social oppression and against wage-slavery.

Theoretical presuppositions of Marxist politics (as an ideology of socialist society)

Marxist politics is based on an explanatory class-based theory of what is happening and why, and a theory of what is to be done? If politics is about conflict over who gets what, how and where, all politics, is ultimately, and in however distorted a manner, the politics of conflict between classes and class-fractions. All politics is ultimately class politics. In *German Ideology*, Marx and Engels (1978:54) say:

all struggles within the state, the struggle between democratic, aristocratic and monarchy, the struggle for the franchise etc., etc. are merely the illusory forms in which the real struggles of the different classes are fought out among one another.

In Marxism, informed as it is by the philosophy of dialectics and materialism (Das, 2017: Chapter 5; Ollman, 2003; Timpanaro, 1975), there is thus the primacy of class politics, which is based on the fact that class has primacy. To say that class has primacy is to say that while there are many important divisions, processes and relations in society, class – including in its capitalist form, and the latter taking the form of imperialism – is the *primary* division. The major division in society is not between blacks and whites, upper castes and lower castes, Jews and non-Jews, Hindus and Muslims, men and women, and homosexuals and heterosexuals, and so on. The major division is the class division, i.e. the between those who control the means of production and exploit workers and those who do not control means of production and are exploited.

²⁸ For greater details on this topic, see Das, 2019b, and Das, 2017: chapters 11-12.

²⁹ The italicized words are some of the keywords in Marxist politics.

Then to say that class has primacy is to say that the major problems of the world that are faced by men and women (and children) from different racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds living in different national territories – the problems such as poverty, inequality, unemployment, precarity, recurring bouts of crisis of profitability causing economic insecurity for billions, dispossession of small-scale producers, austerity, global warming, vulnerability to major infectious diseases, wars, the rise of the Far Right, attack on democratic rights, curtailment on freedom of speech on the internet, lack of facilities for decent education, health-care and cultural enjoyment, attack on basic science (natural sciences) and on social sciences and humanities, and so on – *are fundamentally* caused by mechanisms of class/capitalism.³⁰ These mechanisms of include the following (Das, 2017):

1. private ownership of productive resources;
2. a process of production and exchange oriented towards private profit, not the direct satisfaction of people's material and cultural needs;
3. tendency towards the commodification of everything;
4. tendency towards concentration and centralization of means of production, through class differentiation, producing massive inequality and monopolization in ownership
5. a competitive tendency towards the production of commodities seeking to reduce labor costs to the minimum and by compromising the health of the environment and of people;
6. exploitation of labor, including super-exploitation (especially, of oppressed groups)³¹;
7. exploitation of small-scale producers when they are forced by market conditions and/or state interventions to sell the products of their labor at low prices;
8. dispossession of small-scale producers and of those using the commons, and
9. imperialism.³²

The mechanisms of class/capitalism also include the operations of the state, with its ideological and coercive apparatuses, and the various political parties that manage the affairs of the state, the basic aim of the state being to meet the common political-economic interests of the capitalists and landowners, and to keep the toiling men and women in their place by using a mixture of coercion and ideological interventions and limited and temporary material concessions (Das, 2019, chapter 9). In fact, alienation (separation) from the control over the means of production and of subsistence and alienation (exclusion) from the state's ideological and coercive power define the life of the majority (the toilers), and this 'double alienation' that characterizes the classness of workers is the focus of Marxist thinking and politics.

While class has primacy, that does not mean there are no non-class relations or that they do not matter. Class divisions/processes/relations support, and are supported by, non-class divisions/processes/relations. While the major problems of the humanity are not fundamentally caused by mechanisms of social oppression (e.g. gender or racial oppression or oppression of homosexuals), social

³⁰ Roughly, these are the mechanisms of class relation, and mechanisms of capitalism as a form of class relation, of capitalism at a specific stage of development (developed capitalism; imperialism as capitalism), and of capitalism as it concretely functions in a specific time and place, influenced by non-capitalist relations of production and exchange and by relations of oppression.

³¹ This, in simple terms, means the appropriation of much of the fruit of the labor of propertyless wage- and salary-earners in the workplace, often amounting to them not being paid a wage to cover their cost of maintenance.

³² This includes both economic exploitation of workers and small-scale producers of less developed countries by the big corporations of rich countries, supported by their militarily powerful states, and the political-cultural subjugation of less developed nations.

oppression has indeed much influence on class society, on the exploited people. It can influence which groups are more exploited and which groups suffer more because of the problems created by class relations. Social oppression can compound the effects of class exploitation in the form of the major problems referred to earlier, for some groups. If blacks, dalits and aboriginal peoples earn much less than whites, upper castes and non-aboriginal inhabitants, then surely class/capitalism only cannot explain this disparity. The effects of class/capitalism are worse for oppressed groups than for non-oppressed groups.

Marxism therefore takes extremely seriously the impact of social oppression on the lives of the oppressed and the need to eliminate it. There is objective evidence that social oppression is a reality, that millions suffer because of it. In India, the 'world's largest democracy', a low-wage platform of global capitalism, wages are low overall: the daily wage for regular urban workers is Rs. 449 in 2011-12. But the low-wage regime hurts women more than men. For example, the regular urban male workers receive Rs. 470 a day, and regular urban female workers receive Rs. 365 (Sanghera, 2018).³³

In the US, one of the oldest democracies in the world, 'As of 2016, the typical black family had a net worth [wealth] of \$17,100, roughly one-tenth the \$171,000 accumulated by a white household' (Ingraham, 2019). In the same year, 'the typical black family earned \$35,400, while the typical white household brought in \$61,200'. And, in 2014, 'white college-educated families earned about \$24,000 more per year than black college-educated families' (ibid.). The gap has shown no sign of decreasing. As is widely known, a higher proportion of blacks than whites is poor and is subjected to police violence in the US. To say that the main division is between workers and the business class is not to say that blacks do not suffer as blacks and as workers.

While class relations 'coexist' with non-class relations, it is a mistaken view that class, in the abstract, is *constituted* by social oppression. Because class is seen as constituted by oppression, according to many it is impossible to talk about class without talking about race, caste and gender, etc simultaneously, at the same level of analysis. That mistaken view abstracts from the fact that: relations of production or class relation define the main axis of division in society and has primacy over other processes and that class relations operate at a more general level, and social oppression mechanisms operate at a more concrete level, and that divisions based on race and gender, etc. become the bases for oppressions when they can be used tools of exploitation or super-exploitation (See Das, 2017: 332-339; Gimenez, 2018:100). A Hindu or a white business owner would be happy to – and compelled to -- exploit any worker, Hindu or Muslim, white or black, and compelled to do so given the coercive law of value. To partly paraphrase Lenin (1914): 'it makes no difference to the hired hand' whether he (or she) is exploited chiefly by the white male capitalists rather than the black female bourgeoisie. Or, as a contemporary Marxist, Eagleton (2003: 19), says: 'capitalism is an impeccably inclusive creed: it really doesn't care who it exploits'. It is [thus] admirably egalitarian...'. Elsewhere, Eagleton (2011:213) says: capitalism is characterized by 'relative indifference to gender, ethnicity, social pedigree and so on when it comes to who it can exploit or to whom it can peddle its wares', although the actual histories of

³³ And 'a graduate woman [i.e. a woman with an undergraduate degree] is paid Rs 609, on average, across sectors while a man with a graduate or higher degree will earn Rs 805' (Sanghera, 2018). Households of India's lowest castes (ex-untouchables or dalits) and aboriginal peoples earn 21% and 34%, respectively, less than the national household income average of Rs 113,222, and among the upper caste groups, Brahmins earn 48% above the national average and non-Brahmin forward castes, 45%. As well, Muslims, reported an annual household income 7% less than the national average (Paliath, 2019).

capitalism and oppression are ‘tightly intertwined in practice’.³⁴ Black workers, including unemployed blacks, might feel that blackness defines their life more than anything else, but that thinking, that feeling, does not mean class is not the main dividing line. Experience is important.³⁵ But experience alone is not a reliable guide to knowledge about the inner workings of society.

The primacy of class means the primacy of class politics (which aims to abolish class and build socialist society). But class politics does not mean there is no other form of politics. The idea of the primacy of class does not endorse the following view: the lives of blacks, women, dalits (these are the lowest castes in India, the ex-untouchables) and other oppressed groups are of less value than those of the groups which are not socially oppressed. Such a view is held by those who mistakenly think about class as a category, or about the working class, in terms of identity politics: the identity politics people mistakenly see class – and the working class -- as inherently masculinist, Eurocentric, etc. For a Marxist, the level of civilisation of a given society can be gauged by how well – how democratically -- it treats the social groups that have been historically oppressed – not only ethnic and racial minorities and people with disabilities but also women and children.³⁶ For Marxists, society must absolutely respect the women’s right to their own body, and there must be absolutely zero tolerance for discrimination, no matter how subtle, based on skin color, whether of a man or of a woman.

The non-class divisions/processes/relations – mechanisms of social oppression – have three aspects: a) political-social subjugation and b) discursive neglect/contempt of oppressed groups, which (i.e. a+b) then enable c) the super-exploitation of socially oppressed groups by the ruling class, supported by its state. To say that the mechanisms of social oppression are expressed in the form of political-social subjugation and discursive contempt – i.e. tyranny, in Lenin’s term -- is to say that such mechanisms represent an attack on democratic rights of the oppressed groups (e.g. blacks, dalits, Indian Muslims, women, etc.), and especially, democratic rights of the socially oppressed groups belonging to the toiling classes (workers and ‘self-exploiting’, self-employed, small-proprietors). If a black and a white can do a job equally, denying the job to the black – this is racism -- is a violation of their democratic right.

Similarly, if a Muslim is being lynched by a fascistic Hindutva mob for eating or selling cow meat, this act is a violation of Muslims’ democratic right: everyone should have the right to eat whatever they want, so a Muslim should. It is also a question of class, in the double sense. Firstly, those who are lynched are generally wage-earners and/or small-scale producers. Secondly, lynching is a part of the sectarian agenda that is a reaction to the capitalist crisis and that is conducted to not only divide the majority (the toilers) who can/do fight against capitalism and its political managers but also divert the toilers’ political attention from the failures of capitalism and its state, making the toilers falsely believe

³⁴ To the extent that Marx’s own major (theoretical) work is gender-blind (cf. Brown, 2012), this fact ‘can sometimes be explained by the fact that capitalism is too, at least in certain respects’

³⁵ According to neuroscience, this includes emotional experience (e.g. feeling), which does influence cognitive thinking (Davidson, 2019): ‘the brain does not honor the kind of anachronistic distinction between thought and feeling. Thought and feeling are absolutely intermingled in the brain, and so there are no areas of the brain that are exclusively dedicated to one and not the other. There’s a lot of interconnectivity’. One implication of this idea is that being passionately against capitalism and its political and intellectual supporters – a degree of ‘class hatred’ -- can positively affect one’s cognitive thinking. Tronti (2019: xviii) says: ‘Knowledge is connected to struggle. Whoever has true hatred has truly understood’. (Of course, too much negative emotion can also be negative!).

³⁶ On the topic of violence against children, see (Das and Chen, 2019).

that their miseries are not because of capitalism and its state (irrespective of whichever party is in power) but because of minorities (e.g. Muslims, immigrants, etc.).³⁷

An attack on democratic rights of the socially oppressed – tyranny -- allows a) greater political subordination of these groups among the toiling masses by the ruling class and its state, and b) their above-average-exploitation, *relative to* the toilers who are not socially oppressed experience, including on the basis of political-social division of the toilers. With falling profitability (owing to the investment in machines and raw materials, etc. relative to wages rising faster than the rate of exploitation)³⁸, a major counter-tendency is to raise the rate of exploitation, so the super-exploitation of vast sections of the working class is one of the mechanisms of doing this. Super-exploitation can be justified better if it involves oppressed groups, which are already social constructed as being worthy of less (see below). The super-exploitation of some groups explains -- and is enabled by -- the political subordination of those groups, and both super-exploitation and political subordination in turn have a discursive aspect.

Social oppression does have a discursive form/aspect: there is *an idea* of social oppression. This is social oppression as reflected in people's mind. And a part of this discursive aspect is the fact that some groups are seen as inferior than other groups when no objective conditions exist. When a white or an upper caste woman refuses to mingle with a black woman or with a dalit woman, and makes an effort to stop them from participating in a public event or in an institution, this objective fact of oppression/exclusion coexists with a subjective fact: blacks and low caste people *are* perceived as inferior by many. But a group being perceived as inferior is not the main cause of the group being exploited. It is generally the other way around. There is a saying in a part of India: a wife of a poor man is the object of mockery and humiliation from everyone. It is generally the case that no one dare perceive a wealthy member of society as inferior in any way, whether looks, intelligence, physical ability, or whatever.

Consider the following lines from Marx (1844) on 'The power of money':

The extent of the power of money is the extent of my power. Money's properties are my – the possessor's – properties and essential powers. Thus, what I am and am capable of is by no means determined by my individuality. I am ugly, but I can buy for myself the most beautiful of women. Therefore I am not ugly... I, according to my individual characteristics, am lame, but money furnishes me with twenty-four feet. Therefore I am not lame. I am bad, dishonest, unscrupulous, stupid; but money is honoured, and hence its possessor. Money is the supreme good, therefore its possessor is good. Money, besides, saves me the trouble of being dishonest: I am therefore presumed honest. I am brainless, but money is the real brain of all things and how then should its possessor be brainless?

As attacks on democratic rights and super-exploitation of oppressed groups become a regular feature in a society making them an *objective fact of life*, a fact that is, more or less, driven by the needs of the ruling class, this fact creates a wider *culture*, a set of ideas, that in turn can justify social oppression.³⁹ These

³⁷ The oppression of Muslims is one of the several aspects of the deepening fascistic tendencies in India. This topic is explored in detail in my newly released book (Das, 2020).

³⁸ There is much literature on this topic (see Roberts and Carchedi, 2018; Roberts, 2016; Smith, 2019)

³⁹ A political practice or an idea is generally rooted in material conditions (e.g. exploitation and resistance against it) but over time it may continue to exist even if its material condition does not (quite) exist in their original form: the precise material condition – i.e. unequal control over land in a society of economic backwardness -- that resulted in the Indian caste system

ideas and corresponding practice might gain some autonomy vis a vis economic conditions structured by class relations: not every case of oppression happens because it serves capitalism. Within a capitalist society, which is characterized by uneven capitalist economic and political development, it is the case that pre-capitalist or non-capitalist class relations and corresponding ideas are combined with capitalist practices and ideas, more in some areas than in other areas.⁴⁰ Where reactionary ideas against women and religious and other minorities exist, they may owe their origin not (so much) to capitalism but to pre-capitalist practices and ideas. To *this* extent, these reactionary ideas have a degree of autonomy vis a vis capitalism. Besides, in capitalist society, some among the property-less might have reactionary ideas against women, even if they have no property for their children to inherit. Ideas of the ruling class do have a lot of influence on others.

Ordinary people (e.g. workers, labouring peasants) do participate in identity politics but in large part because of their false consciousness. The psychological satisfaction that the ordinary people may get by thinking that one member of their own caste or race is a big leader or a big capitalist, a sense of satisfaction that identity politics type thinking feeds into, is a false sense of satisfaction and is out of line with their genuine material interests.⁴¹ False consciousness – consciousness that is out of line with one's own material interests -- is a reality. Marxists take the fact of false consciousness as true, although identity politics is inherently inimical to the idea of false consciousness: if I think I am x, then that is my identity, and conducting myself in line with this identity is in my interest, and no one can challenge it. In other words, thought cannot be thought to be wrong. This kind of thinking is clearly mistaken from the standpoint of Marxist politics. Identity politics is a concrete expression of false consciousness. So identity politics cannot fight false consciousness. In fact, identity politics, given its main theoretical presuppositions *promotes* – thrives on -- false consciousness.

Underlying the false consciousness (that informs identity politics) is class-related mechanism. For one thing, such a sense of satisfaction – apart from any small material concessions that may be granted to oppressed groups -- may alleviate the impact of actual alienation in the workplace and in the wider economic sphere that workers and peasants experience. Present here is false consciousness in the sense that the exploited classes' identification with their own exploiters does not reflect their objective economic and political interests. Therefore, giving legitimacy to their consciousness or thinking that whatever they think is right and basing one's politics on that thinking is bad thinking, epistemologically and politically.

For another: given the situation of scarcity of jobs created by the capitalist system, and given institutionalized racism, sexism, casteism and communalism (see Table 1) serves the capitalist system by dividing any potential opposition to the system, and given that class-based organization is often weak or non-existing⁴², direct producers (workers, small-scale proprietors) may practice 'identity politics': as mentioned in the previous section, some workers may make use of their upper-caste identity to stop workers from lower castes from competing with them for jobs. These workers may even believe that low caste or racialized workers are inferior and act on that belief by excluding them.

does not exist now in the same way and with the same impact on living standards that it did earlier, and yet caste system continues to oppress millions, including in cities.

⁴⁰ This is the idea of uneven and combined development that Trotsky (2008: chapter 1) talked about.

⁴¹ Consider all the talk about dalit capitalism or black capitalism or female CEOs and female entrepreneurs, etc. What great benefits are produced for those who struggle to put food on their table or pay monthly rent if a few dalits or blacks or women become capitalists or CEOs or army generals or top bureaucrats, etc.?

⁴² This is in part thanks to the operation of the capitalist state always aiming to divide, suppress and neutralize the anti-capitalist opposition.

By over-emphasizing identity, identity politics is in line with the false understanding that if whites get more than blacks, whites necessarily exploit blacks. In other words, in people's mind, the relations between white workers and black workers replace the relations between (white and non-white) exploiters and (white and non-white) workers. To the extent that whites or upper caste people get higher wages than others, the real beneficiary is the capitalist class. From the total wage-fund at a given point in time, more is given to some groups and less to others, but every wage earner is getting only a small part of the net product they produce. Whites and upper caste workers are not getting a higher wage *because* they are exploiting other workers. In fact, oppressed groups should at least get what the socially privileged groups get, and indeed both groups should get a lot more than they do now, and they will do so, if they are united as workers. Identity politics impedes such unity.

As mentioned, when white workers identify themselves with white exploiters and refuse to unite with black workers against their common class enemy (capitalists), what is on display, partly, is an idea: white workers, as workers and as citizens, and upper-caste peasants as peasants and citizens, get a sense of satisfaction by virtue of their race-based and caste-based identity which unites them with their exploiters and with those politicians who advocate racism and casteism.

So identity politics is not entirely a middle class practice nor is it entirely about recognition. There is some 'identity politics from below': ordinary toilers can resort to identity politics to fight or cope with their economic desperation and insecurity, and especially when alternative ways of thinking and when opportunities for a more progressive response are not available. But ordinary toilers also break the barrier of identity politics, again and again, when male and female workers, black and white workers come together to fight class exploitation and gender and race-based oppression. There is a certain 'class instinct' driven by their material conditions, an instinct to fight against these conditions, and such a fight requires them to be united across their identities. Of course, such unity is thwarted by a degree of false consciousness. In the Marxist view, their false consciousness, which reflects the reality in distorted ways and which is out of line with their objective interests, is changed through the process of united struggle, i.e. when male and female workers and when workers of differences races and castes and religions fight together. To fight together, they must learn to respect and recognize each other's democratic rights and thus change their discriminatory and false consciousness. The alteration of consciousness can really happen 'in a practical movement' (Marx, 1845),⁴³ supported by theoretical self-education.

⁴³ Marx (1845) continues: 'revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew'.

More generally, people produce new ideas, not mainly through the battle of ideas but through practice – daily practice (the act of production and reproduction) and political practice. The practice is to be understood widely.

'Man's (sic) social practice is not confined to activity in production, but takes many other forms--class struggle, political life, scientific and artistic pursuits; in short, as a social being, man participates in all spheres of the practical life of society' (Mao, 1937).

For Marx/Marxism, society is much more a battle of material interests of different classes (and class-fractions) than a clash of ideas (especially in academic circles). But when ideas corresponding to people's material interests grip the mind of the masses, these ideas act like a material force and can contribute towards reducing the 'turnover time' for – expediting -- social change which is driven by structural contradictions.

What is to be done then?

Marxist theory of society, including social oppression, informs Marxist politics. If social oppression involves a) political-social subjugation/exclusion/marginalization, b) discursive neglect or contempt and c) super-exploitation of socially oppressed groups, and if social oppression is ultimately rooted in class relations, then struggle against social oppression must involve struggles at four levels: political subjugation; discursive neglect/contempt; super-exploitation and other economic problems of socially oppressed groups, and struggle against class relation itself, including its normal effects on all toilers (e.g. low wages; economic insecurity, etc.). These points need to be elaborated.

Marxist politics involves a fight against oppression -- i.e. fight against the attack on democratic rights, both *general* democratic rights such as freedom of speech and assembly and *specific* democratic of oppressed groups. Marxist politics then involves a fight for material concessions including those embodied in transitional demands as well as partial demands.⁴⁴In Marxist politics, these fights – fight to defend democratic rights and fight for material concessions - are seen as parts of, and being within the framework of, the fight for the abolition of class relations. Marxist politics is not the fight for a capitalism where wages are a little higher than they are now and/or where women and other oppressed minority groups are a little less oppressed and more represented within the state, union bureaucracy and academia, although Marxist politics is always for fighting for whatever concessions that can be achieved, as a part of the fight to end wage-slavery.

The question of oppression, for a Marxist, is ultimately a question of class, both in terms of the origin of social oppression and in terms of how to abolish it. While some improvements in the conditions of female workers or black workers can happen with day-to-day struggles, the abolition of patriarchy and racism, and elimination of imperialism (which includes oppression of backward nations by advanced nations), can only happen in a society without capitalism.

Marxists should always consider intellectually and politically supporting struggles for progressive changes in relation to social oppression, and they do. For example, Marxists support movements that oppose discrimination against Muslims, Blacks and migrants, and that demand women's and low caste people's right to enter a public space (e.g. place of worship)⁴⁵ to which their access is not allowed, even if these struggles as such are not socialist struggles. Indeed, Lenin's 'Tribune of the people' is a fundamental Marxist principle that guides Marxist politics:⁴⁶

[The Marxist-socialist is] *the tribune of the people, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people*

⁴⁴ These are the demands such as secure employment for all with inflation-adjusted wages which the system may not grant and which bridges the gap between current level of consciousness and socialist consciousness. The transitional demands stem 'from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat' and these demands are the ones that 'ever more openly and decisively...[are] directed against the very bases of the bourgeois regime' (Trotsky, 1938).

⁴⁵ In many parts of India, upper-caste landowners do not allow lower-caste people (especially, ex-untouchables or dalits) to visit the village temples that they visit or access the village wells. Such undemocratic conduct on the part of landowners is a part of the exercise of their class power. So Marxists have supported struggles of lower castes over access to the rural public spaces. Such struggles are directly linked to the struggles against the landowners as a class.

⁴⁶ This point has implications for a political organization and for Marxist intellectuals and Marxist journals such as *Science & Society*, and *Historical Materialism*.

it affects; who is able to generalise all these manifestations and produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation; who is able to take advantage of every event, however small, in order to set forth before all his socialist convictions and his democratic demands, in order to clarify for all and everyone the world-historic significance of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat' (Lenin, 1901).

Marxist politics centers on mechanisms that unite the majority of society. Marxist politics is *majoritarian* politics but this majoritarianism is diametrically opposite to Modi's or Trump's majoritarianism which is based on the identity politics of the majority: the majority is defined on the basis of religion (Hindus in India) or race (white in the US). There is no objective basis for such a definition of majority. India's and America's problems are not fundamentally caused by the fact that there are a Hindu majority vs a Muslim minority or there are a white majority vs blacks/browns. For Marxists, the majority – almost 90% of the people in a country -- is defined on the basis of objective social relations: they are the toilers, with little or no property and who include men and women, blacks and whites, and higher and lower castes, Hindus and Muslims, aboriginal peoples and others, immigrants and 'natives'. This is how Marx (1848) himself saw the majority:

All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority. The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air.

As mentioned earlier, Marxist politics mobilizes the majority around two inter-connected main goals: democratic rights of everyone must be respected (so there can be no oppression), and no one must be exploited. The two mechanisms – defense of democracy and fight against exploitation – can contribute to the creation of the nation of toilers, in every country and across the countries (the working class is ultimately an international class). The majority of people are exploited. That is a common ground. Working class women are exploited as workers and are oppressed as women. As workers, they have a common ground with male workers. As well, while social groups such women, blacks, dalits, Muslims, Jews, immigrants, refugees, disabled people, homosexuals, and indigenous people are all oppressed in specific ways (some are oppressed on the basis of gender and others on the basis of race), what is common to all of them is that there is an attack on democratic rights of all the groups. Denial of a job to people because they are women or because they are Blacks represents the violation of democratic rights of people as women and as Blacks. Just to take the example of women: women workers face specific problems within the class society, one that is also discriminator towards women. These problems include unequal division of labour in the family, the double burden of work on women, violation of women's body in the public or private spheres, and so on (Gimenez, 2018), and must be raised by, and are raised by, Marxists intellectually and politically. The relation between men and women is an objective relation of similarity/connection and a relation of difference, and Marxists, unlike those who pursue identity politics, consider both these relations.

All workers (including semi-proletarians, or small-scale producers with small amounts of property who work as part-time workers) – who form the majority – are exploited, while some are exploited more than others. Similarly, all workers are oppressed (their democratic rights are violated), but some workers are oppressed in one way and other workers are oppressed in another way. Within the working masses, low

castes, blacks and women, generally speaking, suffer more than high castes, whites and men. Marxists must advocate for the abolition of oppression. Yet, Marxists must deny the claim that only low caste leaders or women can exclusively speak on behalf of low caste workers or women. Nor can the question of oppression of low castes or women or Blacks take precedence over class politics. Marxists cannot agree that working class women or working class blacks must identify themselves first and foremost with all other women or all other blacks. This is because there are ruling class and working class elements within the groups that are defined on the basis of identity (e.g. women and blacks). There are capitalists (and/or landowners) among women, Blacks, and dalits and Muslims, even though majority of women, blacks, dalits and Muslims are workers.

For Marxists, the interest of working class women or working class blacks is fundamentally the same as those of working class men or working class whites. Their interest is in the creation of a society where everyone is productively employed and where everyone, more or less, enjoys the fruits of their labor more than they do now, and where everyone's material and cultural needs are met, and everyone gets the respect they deserve. In this society, everyone's democratic rights are defended, which is reflected in the fact that in the management of the common affairs of the society people from all genders, sexes, nationalities, races, castes, religions, etc. have an equal say.⁴⁷ The target for Marxist politics is the totality of class mechanisms, which at a concrete level, include the fact that specific groups of toilers are also socially oppressed and are often oppressed on multiple inter-connected grounds (race, gender, etc.). Marxist politics is about fighting class exploitation head-on and through that fighting oppression and it also targets oppression directly. In fact, as Cassell says (2017):

By radically transforming the economic and social foundation of society along socialist lines, the structural and economic roots of oppression would be eradicated. Without a minority exploiting class producing for profit, there would be no social or material drive for the majority to be divided and stratified along sex, gender, orientation, ability, race, language, religion or any other category. When we are no longer forced to compete for employment, education, child care spots, food, water and affordable housing, the way we relate to each other will change on a fundamental level.

Democratically elected and immediately recallable leaders in our workplaces in addition to democratic oversight over hiring processes can serve to prevent discriminatory practices in the workplace. Collective and democratic ownership and control of the media and educational institutions will go a long way towards combating discriminatory attitudes in society and ensuring that the beautiful diversity of humanity is both taught and celebrated. Changing the socio-economic foundation of society would see a profound change in the world outlook and attitudes of the masses.

A Marxist political project is basically a project that seeks to counter the attacks on democratic rights, including those who are socially oppressed, and that seeks to abolish class. It can neither ignore the fact of social oppression and its politics, nor can it refuse to see as primary, class and its politics. Marxist politics advocates democratic thinking and conduct in every sphere of life, including the most private and intimate. For Marxists, the genuine spirit of democracy must determine every aspect of the relation

⁴⁷ In fact, gradually, the force of people seeing themselves in terms of identity traits (e.g. race, caste, etc.) will diminish gradually. There will be less and less need for it.

between men and women, and between people from different racial, caste and ethnic groups, within capitalism and beyond.

For Marxists, their goal (i.e. socialism, which is effectively popular democracy in every sphere of life) is political and their method of struggle is also political (in that the participants within the socialist movement must have a democratic relations among them). The multi-pronged fight that Marxist politics advocates for must be conducted on the basis of democratically-functioning socialist political organization of the toilers of all the different social groups, at sub-national, national and global scales. This is an organization that non-dogmatically applies Marxism as a guide in concrete conjunctures and that remains independent of different fractions of the exploiting class/es.

While every attempt should be made to ensure that sites of Marxist politics -- Marxist organizations, Marxist journal editorial boards, Marxist reading groups, informal schools established to disseminate Marxist ideas, and so on -- include people from different social backgrounds (e.g. different races, languages, genders, etc.), it is futile to believe that given the current arrangements in society, a perfect representation of different groups is possible. And it is utterly anti-Marxist to include in the leadership of a Marxist organization people who have nothing to do with Marxism but whose only credential is that they are from this or that socially oppressed group. This is identity politics at its worst, from the standpoint of Marxist politics.

Marxists cannot subordinate their organizations and their journals/newspapers, etc. to the leadership of women, blacks and dalits of bourgeois and petty bourgeois background who are pursuing their own interests under the guise of fighting for the cause of 'all women' or all blacks. For Marxist politics refuses to make a choice between a black capitalist and a white capitalist or between a male landowner and a female landowner or between a straight war-mongering army general and a gay who does the same.

Marxists are critical of any ideological or political agenda concerning social oppression that is merely, or that is, more or less, about the affairs/interests of the 'middle class elements' (e.g. more or less securely employed university teachers or well-off small-scale producers), often organized within NGOs with negligible attention paid to the experience of the ordinary working class men and women.

Marxists cannot trust non-proletarian (bourgeois and petty bourgeois) elements to fight for the demands of working class women. Such a view is no different from the correct view that while, in a late developing capitalist society, a successful fight for bourgeois democratic rights can benefit the bourgeoisie as well as workers and peasants, and yet the bourgeois will not lead such a fight because of its fear of such a fight growing over into a proletarian fight against bourgeois property. The role of leadership in the fight for democratic rights of women and other oppressed groups fundamentally falls on the class-conscious elements in the working class, allied with the poor peasants, including men and women, and whites and blacks. Just because women are oppressed that does not mean that the agent that can fight to abolish women's oppression can be *women as women* rather than a class agent: the working class that includes *both* men and women and that takes women's oppression very seriously.⁴⁸

The motto of Marxist politics can be summed up as:

No socialist revolution, no elimination of social oppression.

No anti-oppression struggle, no easy matter to complete socialist revolution.

⁴⁸ Of course, this does not invalidate the need for building a women's movement and anti-racist movement inside the proletarian socialist movement.

Conclusion

While some deeply conservative elements within the ruling class may be against identity politics of racial and other minorities,⁴⁹ the long-term economic and political interests of the ruling class as a whole is hardly threatened by identity politics precisely because the underlying theoretical-political agenda is an agenda of avoiding Marxism and socialism. The kind of ‘theory’ that informs identity politics, although it represents itself as critical, is ‘afraid of conflict with the powers that be’, or at least it is not much of a threat to the powers that be (the capitalist class and its state).⁵⁰ The ideas underlying identity politics are directly the ideas of the ruling class as well as the ideas that are supported by the ruling class, that are refined and supported by the vanguard of middle class men and women, as ruling ideas.

If economism (trade unionist politics) is a problem that needs to be fought, then the politics of identity-based recognition-*ism* is no less. Yet, just as trade unionism does not need to be discarded but subordinated to class struggle (struggle for power), certain progressive aspects of what is called identity politics can be subordinated to class struggle. This is the meaning of Marxist politics being dialectically opposed to identity politics.

To the extent that identity politics is about the minimal distribution of material things (for small sections of an oppressed group), the net effect of identity politics is generally negative, or its net positive effect is much less than assumed: i.e. it is much less than what the outcome would be of class politics that includes the fight against oppression. Identity politics itself can do nothing to increase, for example, the number of secure jobs for all with an inflation-adjusted wage, or to increase access to higher education and decent health-care for all. The sectoral politics that identity politics is, as it is concerned with competing sectors each trying to get a slice of the given cake, identity politics achieves very little a) for all within an oppressed group and b) for all the toilers in a society irrespective of their minority status. Even if small groups of people receive some benefits from identity politics (e.g. jobs, on the basis of affirmative action, or some forms of recognition), identity politics divides the working class in its opposition to capitalism, and thus weakens its power to extract more concessions and its power to fight against capitalism to abolish it altogether. The main identity of identity politics is that it undermines class politics.

The struggle for freedom from racism, sexism, religious discrimination, casteism, etc. must be a struggle against class relations and capitalism, and much more than that. That is, there has to be a struggle against racism, sexism, etc., even if it is the case that the abolition of class relations will immediately remove many mechanisms behind social oppression.

To the extent that social oppression has a degree of autonomy vis a vis capitalism, the mere fact of the struggle for socialism will not *eliminate* all traces of social oppression, including undemocratic attitude towards racialized minorities and women. It is necessary to unite workers and small-scale ‘self-exploiting’ producers (e.g. peasants), based on what is common to them: the fact that they are exploited (as sellers of labor power or sellers of the products of their labor power). The class unity must also be based on the fact

⁴⁹ The right-wing agitator Steve Bannon has reportedly said this about identity politics: ‘The Democrats -- the longer they talk about identity politics, I got 'em. I want them to talk about racism every day.’ (quoted in Harrop, 2019)

Note that while right-wing people object to identity politics of minorities, they themselves engage in identity politics, especially, the identity politics of the majority (white supremacy, Hindu supremacy, etc.).

⁵⁰ That this is the case is clear in a CIA (1985) report called *France: Defection of the Left Intellectuals*.

that workers and small-scale producers are also socially oppressed, as black workers, as dalit peasants, and so on. Almost all workers and small-scale producers, i.e. almost all exploited people, are social oppressed in one way or another: ageism, sexism, racism, religious sectarianism, etc. (see Table 1). And while different workers experience different forms of oppression, what all forms of oppression represent is a single thing: assault on democratic rights. In other words: ageism, sexism, religious discrimination are different examples of the attack on democratic rights. Democratic rights of all must be defended.

Marxist politics is very different from the politics of identity according to which instead of class solidarity, different sectors of the working class and oppressed have different interests and should have their own separate organizations and they should form alliances. Marxists argue for a common struggle based on common interests as well as specific interests of Blacks and women, low castes and so on, organized through mass workers' parties and trade unions that fight against all oppressions that all workers experience as well as against class exploitation.

The intellectual and political defense of Marxism is unlike the act of sipping a cup of coffee leisurely or having a nice little collegial academic debate about the nuances of this philosophy or meanings of this or that word, although having coffee and developing debating skills can all be a part of the Marxist work! There is a need for a permanent struggle for the primacy of class and of class politics (including anti-imperialism), in all spheres of struggle. These include the intellectual (Althusser, 1971). Defending Marxism is an act of active and conscious antagonism towards -- and ruthless critique of -- everything that is non-Marxism/anti-Marxism, including in its unconscious forms. It is a militant act to defend 'the Marxian doctrine, which directly serves to enlighten and organise the advanced class in modern society' (Lenin, 1908).

The Marxist way of examining social oppression and class exploitation and their mutual relation might require a change in our language. Currently, there is a plethora of terms such as anti-racism, feminism, anti-casteism, etc. which are more or less associated with identity politics. The idea is, for example, that there is something called feminism, and Marxist ideas about women are a part of feminism. In other words, there is to be a peaceful coexistence of various ideas. But a Marxist would ask: what does feminism qua feminism mean? Marxist ideas about feminism are very different from liberal views. There can only be Marxist feminism (in the sense, for example, in which Gimenez (2018) practices it⁵¹), and similarly, there can only be Marxist anti-racism, and so on, all as parts of one single thing: Marxism. For a Marxist, there cannot be something called feminism within which Marxists have a contribution. In contrast, the idea that there is feminism within which Marxism has a part leads the holder of such an idea to this destination: the Democratic party or something similar, whose aim is to justify and reproduce capitalism with slightly more equality between genders and races, etc. The idea that there is Marxist feminism which is a part of Marxism, leads to a very different, and beyond a point, opposite, destination: (collective effort toward) an proletarian socialist movement against capitalism and social oppression, at multiple scales, including the global. The genuine, consistent fight to eliminate racism, sexism and gender inequality must take one beyond identity politics of race, sex and gender: the magnitude of the intensity and scope of the fight

⁵¹ The collection of Marx (and Engels') work on gender in Brown (2012), among numerous other works of Marxist feminism, shows that it is a theoretically stimulating and politically productive field of knowledge. One can say the same with respect to Marxist anti-racism (see, for example, the work of Fields, including Fields, 1990) and Marxist anti-casteism (see, for example, Bandyopadhyaya, 2002; Namboodiripad, 1981; Patnaik, 2016; Ranadive, 1982; Singh, 2014).

against social oppression beyond a point (i.e. the outer limit of identity politics) leads to a qualitatively different struggle: struggle for socialism. The law of the transformation of quantity into quality kicks in.

Marxism has only limited common ground with bourgeois identity politics. In other words, there is much difference between the two. But this difference between the politics of difference (or identity politics) and Marxist politics or class politics is a matter of dialectical difference in the Harvey (2006) sense: the difference is dialectical in that the two forms of politics are not un-related (and there is thus some common ground), but they are significant differences. Marxism, including Marxist anti-oppression ideas, is one set of ideas. Identity politics, including that of what goes in/by the name of feminism and racism, etc. is guided by a different set of ideas. And these ideas of Marxism and ideas of identity politics are connected to different sorts of class interests. There are basically two kinds of ideas: ideas that justify bourgeois society and the ideas that seek to fundamentally challenge such society from the standpoint of workers. In other words, bourgeois and socialist perspectives.

Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology formulated by the working masses themselves in the process of their movement, the only choice is — either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course (for mankind has not created a “third” ideology, and, moreover, in a society torn by class antagonisms there can never be a non-class or an above-class ideology). Hence, to belittle the socialist ideology in any way, to turn aside from it in the slightest degree means to strengthen bourgeois ideology (Lenin, 1901).

As Lenin (1913) says elsewhere:

there can be no “impartial” social science in a society based on class struggle. In one way or another, all official and liberal science defends wage-slavery, whereas Marxism has declared relentless war on that slavery. To expect science to be impartial in a wage-slave society is as foolishly naïve as to expect impartiality from manufacturers on the question of whether workers’ wages ought not to be increased by decreasing the profits of capital.

Feminism, anti-racism and anti-casteism belong to the sphere of bourgeois thinking. Marxist feminism, Marxist anti-racism and Marxist anti-casteism, in short, Marxism, belong to the sphere of socialist thinking. In feminism, the fundamental division in society is between men (who include property-owners and property-less) and women (who include property-owners and property-less). In anti-racism, it is between whites and blacks, with no distinction between their class character. Similarly, in anti-casteism, it is between upper castes and lower castes. For, Marxism, the fundamental division is between an exploiting class and an exploited class. If feminism/anti-racism is not Marxism, it is then bourgeois or petty bourgeois ideology. The theory of identity politics is the discussion of oppression minus the discussion of the materiality, state power, exploitation and mass revolutionary movements. Marxist social oppression-ism (e.g. Marxist feminism, etc.) is the discussion of oppression plus the discussion of the materiality, state power, exploitation and mass revolutionary movements. The former cannot include the latter. The latter can include the former. A Marxist *must be* a feminist, anti-racist and anti-casteist, but a feminist, an anti-racist and an anti-casteist, i.e. those who merely subscribe to identity politics, need not be a Marxist. *Here* lies a world of difference that the politics of difference would want to ignore. Even anti-capitalist feminism or anti-racism could be a feminism or an anti-racism that does not believe in transcending capitalism and that believes in making changes in capitalism based on its so-called criticisms of capitalism, rather than transcending capitalism.

Marxists cannot say: there should be no feminism. There will be feminism as long as there is bourgeois society. But Marxist feminism cannot be a part of it. One should not assume that feminism necessarily encompasses Marxist views about women and bourgeois views. Similarly, one should not assume that there is something called a feminist way of solving society's fundamental problems, and the Marxist movement can just be a part of that feminist movement. Ditto: anti-racism and other forms of identity politics.

Let all feminists and anti-racists (and all those who subscribe to identity politics) answer this question: are they against the elimination of class relations, including capitalism as well as all forms of oppression? If no, they should clearly say so and not seek to monopolize over the idea of social justice, because the social in social justice is a lot more than what they think it is and acknowledge that their identity politics, both in theory and action, is severely limited because it avoid serious engagement with class. If yes, then they should say how they see the causal connection between class exploitation and social oppression, whether they see class exploitation as primary, and how they wish to implement the political agenda of transcending exploitation and oppression.

Given that the class project (Marxist politics) is a project that fights for the democratic rights, including of the oppressed groups, and for the abolition of class in all its forms, and given that identity politics is what it is (politics of recognition, etc. for specific groups, and sub-groups and sub-sub-groups and ultimately individuals), then it is clear that class politics is superior to identity politics. Of course, the identity politics people will not agree. They will not agree that Marxism is very different from identity politics, the anti-oppression politics that is abstracted from class and that is generally aimed to undermine, and be a substitute for, the class project.⁵² To these people, the Marxist response would be what was Marx's to his actual and potential critics of his work (in a preface to *Capital I*):

'I welcome every opinion based on scientific criticism. As to the prejudices of so-called public opinion, to which I have never made concessions, now, as ever, my maxim is that of the great Florentine: ...Go on your way, and let the people talk' (Marx, 1977:93).

⁵² One of the most unyielding Marxist critics of identity politics, Tom Brass, says: 'Marxism is emphatically not the same as identity politics – the two positions are in fact dialectically opposite and incompatible' (Brass, 2017:82).

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Appendix 1: The Algebra of Identity Politics

It will be interesting to objectively see how identity politics fragments the society in unhelpful ways. To do this, it will be necessary to use some algebra.

There is an algebraic formula for combination: it allows us to figure out the number of possible combinations of r objects from a set of n objects (without worrying about the order in which objects appear). It is like asking how many different committees of 2 people one can choose from a group of 15 people. Here, r is 2 and n is 15 here. Or, how many different groups of people with two identities (e.g. white man; Christian man) one can choose from a population of 15 types of people based on their identities?

The formula is:

$$\frac{n!}{r! (n-r)!}$$

where n = total number of objects (in our case, the total number of identities) and r = number of combinations of identities (in our example, it is 2), and $!$ (which stands for factorial) is the product of an integer and all the integers below it (e.g. factorial 3 = $1 \times 2 \times 3 = 6$).

Returning to the second column of the Table, we choose the following groups of people in the oppressor category: white, adult, man, Christian, heterosexual and able-bodied. So, $n = 6$. We will find out how many possible groups of people we can have with at least two identities. Applying the formula we get: $6!$ divided by $[2! (6-2)!] = 15$. There will be 15 groups of people with at least 2 identities.

Now, how many groups of people we will have if a person is allowed to have 1 or more identities, up to a maximum of 6 identities? The answer is: 63. There are 63 different groups of oppressors. And if we choose 5 identities (e.g. black, woman, etc.) from the oppressed category, there will be another 63 groups. And if we allow for some groups to be both oppressor and oppressed, there will be many more identity groups. This is the algebra of identity politics. But of course, identity politics will call algebra itself a tool of oppression, a social construction, lacking any objectivity (see Costa and Hanover, 2019).