

SPECIAL ISSUE ON WOKEISM

The texts that are published in this issue of *Meridian* are related to the conference “**Tracking Global Wokeism**” that took place in Kuwait from February 7 to 8, 2023. The purpose of the conference was to widen the spectrum of wokeness discussions and to point to the global character of the phenomenon. A book publication with full-length papers will follow.

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HANS-GEORG MOELLER

Wokeism: A Global Civil Religion in the “Age of Profilicity?” Wokeism is a secular Western “civil religion” combining identity politics and “guilt pride.” By its emphasis on the display of morality on (social) media, it is connected with “profilicity”—the curation of identity in the form of a profile or “brand.” Non-Western cultures may develop alternative secular and “profilic” wokeisms. [Page 4](#)

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Apophatic Ethics as an Alternative to Identity Politics or How to Avoid Wokeism. Wokeism promulgates a sacred truth shining with splendor and beauty – the imperative of freedom and justice for all without exclusions or discrimination. However, like almost all institutionalized religions, it takes this truth over in idolatrous ways that make it serve as a means of consolidating power and repressing opponents. [Page 5](#)

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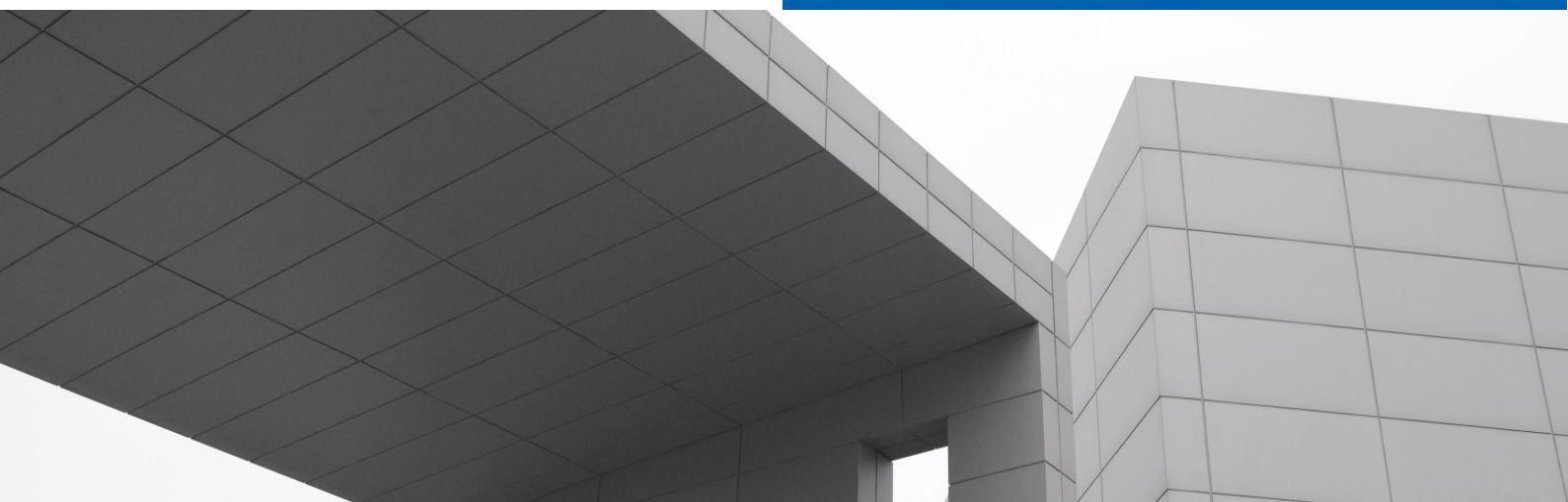
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Meridian, the GSC Newsletter, is a peer-reviewed bi-annual publication publishing notes and short articles of up to 800 words. It is published online and sent out to members of an ever-increasing community. Its focus is on Global Studies, that is, the investigation of political, economic, social, and cultural matters directly or tangentially linked to “the global.” A micro-macro perspective, or global-local perspective is common though not required. Among the topics are diversity, eurocentrism, nationalisms, ecology, glocalization, communication, technology transfer, comparative topics, cultural productions at the time of globalization. Book reviews are welcome. This Newsletter is also available online at gsc.gust.edu.kw. Submit articles (max. 800 words) to gsc@gust.edu.kw for enquiries please to botz.t@gust.edu.kw



INTRODUCTION

The word ‘woke’, initially coined by African Americans in the 1930s as an injunction to stay mindful of racial inequalities, has over the last decade been used to raise awareness of any sort of discrimination. The term has helped to advance the cause of social justice in many domains. However, a search on the internet can quickly yield the impression that “woke” is now, similar to “Political Correctness,” predominantly used in a negative fashion. People who are “too woke” are criticized as dogmatic, self-righteous, and obsessed with moral purity.

Does this phenomenon exist in the non-Western world? If yes, is it imported from America or does it have vernacular roots? Is wokeness compatible with existing traditions? The Chinese translate wokeism as “*baizuo*,” meaning “white left,” which is curious given the African American origin of the term. Feelings of guilt have led privileged Americans (and Europeans) to the adoption of wokeism. What is the Arab, African, Latin American, or Asian view on this? Is the search for “individualism” that wokeism supports less strong in these regions, thus making any introduction of woke impossible or superfluous? Is wokeism simply the domain of privileged “First World” youth and irrelevant for other places? Wokeism is based on “identity politics,” which is a typically American phenomenon. Can it/should it be imported into the non-West?

ARTICLES

HANS-GEORG MOELLER

WOKEISM: A GLOBAL CIVIL RELIGION IN THE “AGE OF PROFILICITY?”

The term “wokeism” is widely used today as a polemic and often pejorative label in North America and Europe. It generally refers to a new type of “identity politics” and “political correctness” that promotes equity and diversity of “marginalized” race, sexual, and gender identities. It is especially sensitive to language use and, for instance, demands the abolition of racist terminology and “sexist” gendering in language as well as the “correct” use of personal pronouns.

Wokeism is often described by conservative

politicians and intellectuals as a new form of radical leftism. The public intellectual Jordan Peterson, for instance, regards it as a diabolical combination of Marxism and Postmodernism. A significant minority of leftist academics, however, including Walter Benn Michaels and Adolph Reed Jr., disagrees and sees it as a new type of neoliberalism that supports capitalism and individualism and tends to downplay class struggle. After all, it is heavily employed in marketing by major corporations and mainstream neoliberal political parties, such as the Democrats in the U.S.A.

Given the difficulty to adequately categorize wokeism in terms of the traditional political distinction between left and right, it is increasingly recognized that it functions less as a coherent ideology and more like a new “religion” (McWhorter 2021) in secular Western societies. An important element within wokeism is “guilt pride”—a form of moral superiority generated through the public acknowledgment of inherited guilt. Following post-war Germany’s successful strategy of establishing a new national identity on the acceptance of everlasting responsibility for the crimes of Nazi-Germany, young Americans, for instance, can build a sense of moral righteousness on the acknowledgment of the enormous sin of “white supremacy.” The very acceptance of such unacceptable guilt paradoxically results in a certain moral glory of the repentant sinner. In this way, wokeism is, essentially, a post-Christian secular civil religion.

Wokeism shares numerous similarities with religions, and, particularly, with Christianity. It is highly dogmatic by focusing on a few “absolute” moral values related to social justice which can only be affirmed but not denied. In this way, it does not invite argumentation or debate, but, instead, fosters moral sentiment and feelings of righteousness. It promises a secular absolution from inherited wickedness and “cancels” heretics. What is more, it operates performatively with a strong emphasis on public display including demonstrations, public gestures (kneeling, etc.), memes, or signs (such as the “one love” armband which caused controversy at the 2022 soccer world cup) and, importantly, speech acts (e.g.; “diversity statements,” pledges, corporate values), typically proliferated on (social) media.

The prime importance of public display in wokeism, and its heavy use of (social) media, signal a connection with “proflificity”—the curation of identity in the form of a public profile or “brand.” This distinguishes wokeism from traditional Christianity. Traditional Christianity differs from wokeism not only by being theistic, but also by its connection with “sincerity,”—an identity technology based on sincere commitment to social roles, especially in the family. Unlike Christianity, wokeism does not encourage individuals to add a religious dimension to their identification with traditional “family values.” Instead, it provides individuals and

organizations (corporations, political parties) with an opportunity to enhance their public profiles by infusing them with a civil religious aura. Accordingly, wokeism can not only be understood as a result of the secularization of Christianity, but also as result of the transition from an age of sincerity to an age of proficity. It is post-Christian not just because it no longer centers on faith in God, but also because it has shifted from a commitment to social roles to the curation of profiles.

If wokeism is a post-Christian civil religion in the “age of proficity,” other religions may also develop woke and profic secular variations. At present, however, it is difficult to predict if alternative forms of wokeism will emerge, for instance, in societies shaped by Islam, Hinduism, or Confucianism.

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WILLIAM FRANKE

UNSAYING WOKEISM, OR THE ROLE OF SELF-CRITIQUE IN JUDGEING OTHERS

Generic social identities, by their differential and exclusive nature, cannot take the lead in negotiations among humans without polarizing and alienating. They can be a tremendous enrichment of our humanity but only when brought in as *inflections* of something else mysterious and indefinable that is already recognized as the Nothing (nothing nameable or definable) that is common to us all. Called for is not a politics of explicit identitarian revindications but rather an apophatic ethics that leaves differential, divisive identities out of the equation in attempting to negotiate fairly among all parties participating in society.

My fundamental reservation concerning wokeism has to do with its grounding in identity politics. More often than not, what makes us free and equal is not jockeying for power among social determinations but much more our evasion of them, our making them not count, our becoming color and gender blind, or rather neutral, in order to focus instead on individuals’ performances and capabilities. Wokeism’s

identity politics are about redistributing power and wealth among abstractly and somewhat arbitrarily defined races and genders. This kind of sectorial or oppositional identification I feel, in any case, as an enslavement. Only *not* defining our identities in social terms and treating these categorizations as indifferent, or as equally valid and enriching cultural backgrounds, frees us to be ourselves. These socially identificatory labels are constructed identities that constrain any true and authentic being and freedom. They confine us to being equal and identical with others as amalgamated into groups rather than freeing us to be our own incommensurable selves. We are all truly equal and free only in being absolutely incommensurable. [1]

Once we are free of identity categories brandished as if they were inescapable fates assigning us our place among either the guilty or the innocent, the privileged or the oppressed, we are then free to redeploy our colorful and richly historied heritages as women or men, black or white or brown or yellow, queer or gay or whatever, and use them creatively to discover and invent ourselves and disclose ourselves to others. [2] Religious or cultural backgrounds, experiences of belonging to national, ethnic, or whatever social communities, when appropriated in personal ways by individuals, can immensely enrich the unique personalities that we become – but only when these identities stand as resources for creative use in reflecting facets of our unique personalities and the relations and influences that make us up rather than assigning us static valences in an invidious social taxonomy.

Only by being one’s unique self is one free and equal with everyone else striving in their turn to be fully themselves in relation to others. A new generation of individuals with diversity markers are being trained, or at least encouraged, to feel themselves “unapologetically me.” This seems right, at one level. Why should anyone feel that they need to apologize for who they are? Yet personally, and I am not alone, I feel ashamed of all my identities – white, male, straight – undoubtedly because of the vaguely woke culture *avant la lettre* in which I grew up and was educated. These identities were blamed for the worst atrocities and were made guilty of the whole history of oppression from slavery and colonialism to capitalism and race and gender discrimination, Klu Klux Klan lynchings and the rest.

I feel I have to apologize for being me in every respect of my social identities. Only by not allowing myself to be reduced to those identities and retaining as more fundamental my non-identity am I able to affirm and sustain a will to be me at all. Thus, I invoke, alongside Emanuel Levinas, as the thinker of infinite obligation to the other, Theodor Adorno, and I appropriate elements from his thinking of non-identity, the non-identical (“das nicht Identische”), for further elucidation of the philosophical grounding for my transversal thinking through and engagement with wokeism. [3]

The laudable aim pursued by wokeism of giving recognition to all independent of race, class, and gender is best fostered by not foregrounding these identitarian differentials. Justice without exclusions is indeed the goal, but for that we need to start from recognition of the non-identical that all share in common – the undefinable infinite mystery at the core of each individual – rather than with our differential identities defined and asserted over against one another. The latter, while seemingly concrete, immediate realities are actually shifting social constructions that are inevitably used for manipulation in the interests of brokering power and procuring privileges. The basis for a true community is mutual recognition of common humanity beyond these monolithic identity labels and even beyond any definition of humanity that would make it other than and exclusive of the universal being with which all are endowed, which all existing things share in common. [4] Humanity itself, like every identity, needs to be broken open to the All that indwells and envelops and “others” it.

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[1] I am extending my critique of identity politics argued in *The Universality of What is Not: The Apophatic Turn in Critical Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), 291-314, and in “A Negative Theological Critique of Postmodern Identity Politics,” *Religions* 10/488 (2019): 1-15.

[2] Exemplary here is Rachel Khan, *Racée* (Paris: Humensis, 2021), drawing on all her ethnic, religious, and national backgrounds and invoking Romain Gary as guiding light, notably his *Chien blanc* (Paris: Flammarion, 1972).

[3] Emanuel Levinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), trans. Alphonso Lingis as *Otherwise than Being and Beyond Essence* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991). Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1966), trans. E. B. Ashton as *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge, 1990).

[4] Such a metaphysical dimension of ethics was theorized also, earlier, for another time and in other terms, by Levinas in *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'extériorité* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971). We need today to strive to think such an ethics beyond the frame of his humanism as articulated in *Humanisme de l'autre homme* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1972).

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IGNACIO LÓPEZ-CALVO

THE AFTERLIVES OF WOKENESS AND THE LIMITS OF EPISTEMIC COLONIALISM

Even if the terms and concepts of woke, cancel culture, cultural appropriation, and woke capitalism have not always been incorporated into the local languages around the world, similar concerns are increasingly percolating in sociopolitical debates in many countries, but often adapted to local concerns (caste system instead of racial discrimination in India, for example). The ways in which these American terms have been exported (or not) reveal the limits of epistemic imperialism and cultural colonialism, as not all them are always easily understood or imported across cultures. In some cases, they are creolized, adapting their meaning or application according to the local circumstances. In the following paragraphs I will provide a few examples of the reception of these concepts in Latin America.

In Chile, according to Maria Montt Strabucchi, professor of cultural studies at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, the idea of being canceled exists and is used, mainly by younger people – they say, for example, they are going to cancel me for saying this. Instead of being woke, in Chile people use the idea of “deconstructing,” as in “he has to be deconstructed,” “deconstruct yourself.” And the idea of cultural appropriation has been gaining ground, especially after a lawsuit against the fashion brand Carnaval over clothing inspired by designs of the Selknam culture, from Tierra del Fuego, at the southern tip of South America. Regarding topics such as woke capitalism and identity politics, Montt Strabucchi thinks that these are still niche topics dealt with mostly in academic circles.

Moving on to Mexico, according to Jaime Ortega, a Mexican political science professor at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, “woke” is derogatively used in his country as a synonym for “politically correct.” For this reason, he adds, no one defines herself as woke; the woke one is always the other. The term is also used to disparagingly describe those who aspire to discuss issues that, according to Ortega, are supposed to be much more relevant in the United States than in Mexico, such as Gender Studies, Trans Studies, etc. In another nuance of the term, someone who is woke tends to be concerned about using inclusive language and even reprimands uneducated peasants for not using it. Woke, Ortega adds, is a very progressive, middle-class person (often academics in the humanities or people on social media) who can afford to travel a lot and considers himself to be cosmopolitan, ecologist, and/or feminist; it is someone who feels to be in a position of moral superiority over others and reprimands them for not being like him. From

Ortega's definitions, therefore, it seems as if the concept of "woke" in Mexico is negatively seen as snobbism and a foreign cultural imposition that does not have much to do with Mexican reality.

As to the reception of these concepts in Peru, Rodrigo P. Campos, a communicator and language instructor, explains that rather than "woke," the common word in Peru to refer to people who question preconceived ideas that normalize violence against others is "deconstructed." And although the term "cultural appropriation" is known, it is mostly used ironically, even in progressive circles, to mock people obsessed with "canceling" others. It is also used to refer to mixed-race people trying to pass as white. Likewise, it is normal today to find *chifas* (restaurants that serve Chinese Peruvian food) that are run by people with no Chinese ancestry. And even if the food is not very authentic, clients do not seem to have a problem with it.

The concept of identity politics belongs exclusively to the academic world. Right now, Campos adds, there are huge social protests in the south of Peru because there is a sizeable vulnerable population that does not feel as if they are part of the country, as the government has consistently ignored them. For them, identity politics, including the discourse about sexual minorities, reproductive rights, feminism, gay marriage, etc., are secondary, something of a bourgeois struggle for people with a college education. Instead, they are more concerned about surviving, not dying from easily curable diseases, how outside actors destroy their land for mining or growing coca, and about their children dying because they drink contaminated water. Woke capitalist does exist in Peru: they take the side of progressive agendas because they feel that they will sell their products better that way.

All in all, both in the United States and in Latin America, it is important not to confuse criticism with cancellation. Likewise, criticism of cancel culture should not become an easy alibi to get away with privilege and discrimination, or to avoid defending political positions with valid arguments.

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NESMA ELSAKAAN

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS AND WOKEISM IN COMPLEX ARAB CONTEXT(S)

Political correctness (PC) and Wokeism (W) refer to ideas as well as policies widespread in America, especially among minority groups struggling for equality. They are not likewise present in all European countries. For instance, in Italy, while "il politicamente corretto" is referred to in political debates, W has started to circulate recently with very critical connotations (Meotti 2023). In Muslim-majority Arab societies, vulnerable groups are struggling for social equality. Can PC and W inspire activists and intellectuals in these contexts? As Western concepts, are they compatible with Islamic values?

PC and W are not touched on in Arab contexts, not even among transnational and global activist groups advocating human rights. On Wikipedia, there is an entry in Arabic on the emergence, development, as well as current debates on PC. Interestingly, the entry argues that early Arabs were familiar with PC, for they called a blind person "Abū Baṣīr," "or the One who sees well" (Wikipedia). However, calling a blind person "Abū Baṣīr" does not imply being politically correct. It is a linguistic technique known in classical Arabic as "muḥālafat ḏāhirat al-lafz," a sort of irony that addresses something said in contrast to reality.

While PC is translated in Arabic as "ṣawābiyyah siyāsiyyah" there is no exact translation of W. The few accounts on W- including Wikipedia's entry- use morphologically adapted borrowings such as "wūk" and "wūkiyyah" (Awn 2022). One possible translation of W could be "ṣaḥwah" which is derived from the verbal root "ṣa-ḥa-wa", or "to wake up." This word refers to a social movement known as *al-Ṣaḥwah al-'islāmiyyah* (Islamic Awakening) that arose in Saudi Arabia in the late 1960s. Moreover, "ṣaḥwah" evokes the awakening of some Muslims after the disaster of 9/11. This awakening is addressed by scholar Khaled Abou El Fadl to define the duty of Muslims to wake up and "confront acts of extreme ugliness committed in their religion's name" (Abou El Fadl 2014, 282). Thus, "ṣaḥwah" is not a proper translation of W. The Arabic language has different synonyms for "wake up," such as "istayqāza", the tenth verbal form of "ya-qi-za." "Yaqīz" is a noun for someone "awake." "Yaqaḏah" is thereby a possible translation of W and "yaqīz" of "woke."

Concepts appear before names. Perhaps for this reason there is not yet an Arabic word for W. Does this mean that Arabs are not aware of discrimination? In many contexts, inequalities based on gender, religion and sex orientation are overlooked. Moreover, the claims of PC and W are

culturally not acceptable. PC is rhetorically cast as a synonym for homosexuality- and paedophilia (Rawāsiḥ 2022). Advocating homosexuality is taboo in practically all Arab cultural milieus. The misleading ideas about PC and W are the reason why they are difficult to integrate into Arab cultural contexts. There is also the problem of conspiracy theories and new forms of colonization. Western reformist projects are thought of as imperialistic. Arabs who adopt such projects are accused of being agents of the West and enemies of Islam (e.g. feminists.) Also, many believe that egalitarian ideas are grounded in religion. Consequently, no need to import Western values that are against Islamic ones (Elsakaan, 2019). But are PC and W against Islamic values?

To be politically correct is to avoid harmful language and actions towards the vulnerable. To be woke is to be aware of forms of discriminations and willing to change the society for the better. Both discourses bespeak awareness of injustices and imply the fighting of inequalities. This perspective does not violate Islamic values of justice (*‘adl*). In Islam, there is a covenant between God and Muslims: if they fail to establish justice and bear witness to the truth, God “is bound to replace [them] with another people who are more capable of honouring God through establishing justice on this earth.” (Abou El Fad 2003: 38) Furthermore, “the Qur’an explicitly commands Muslims to bear witness for truth and justice, even if the testimony is against themselves [...] Thus, silence is a sort of suborning the corruption of the religion” (Ibid, 40). This is what the Qur’an says: “O ye who believe! stand out firmly for God as witnesses to fair dealing and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to Piety: and fear God for God is well-acquainted with all that ye do.” (Qur’an 5: 8)

Conclusion

For ideological reasons, PC and W are scarcely discussed in contemporary Arab contexts. It stands to reason that equivalent discourses and values are only possible if they come from indigenous debates without any Western pressure.

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JIBRIL LATIF BROWNING

WOKEISM: CAN WE LAUGH ABOUT IT?

The word woke emerged out of the black American experience in the 1930s. For decades, it denoted staying vigilant about physical threats of violence to black people, and for a long time the word served a certain pragmatic intercommunal utility. Black people would tell each other, “Stay woke brother” to stay safe from police brutality and other threats. However, to define today’s cancel culture, we can say it is broadly the attempt to ostracize others for violating perceived social norms, and when someone criticizes wokeism and cancel culture, two terms that are associated, no one claims that they are being anti-black or racist.

Therefore, one could argue that anglophones left of center have entirely expropriated the word woke from black Americans and integrated it into an ideological movement with roots in post-modernism, intersectional feminism, antiracism, and adjacent ideologies, and that terms developed by academics in these disciplines have been deployed journalistically against targets since 2012 in a pivot to prescriptivism that has coincided with the rise of Big Tech, the failure of legacy media business models, and a generation of narcissistic and coddled minds reaching adulthood. As these “woke” people have graduated and assumed positions of power in recent years, the institutions of previous repute now under their control have been visibly scrambling to adopt an almost slavish adherence to an ideological protocol with insatiable checklists: pronouns in bios, diversity quotas, equity statements, and land acknowledgment statements. While these signify virtue to some, they signify repression for others.

One could even say that to the varying degrees that woke ideology has become hegemonic in its permeation of academic institutions, media, and corporate culture, a spiral of silence represses a silent dissenting majority. However, there are people who push back and challenge political correctness, that are colloquially called “based” and “red-pilled”

which are terms that have come to mean someone who is rational and or antihegemonic. The discernable phenomenon under investigation, therefore, is that the ones who seem able to survive cancellation often do so through the use and shield of comedy, and if and when they survive cancelation, they are thereby heroized for their authenticity and antisystemness, setting the foundations of a counter-hegemonic narrative and alternative media sphere.

The based hero par excellence is Dave Chappelle, who has achieved possession of a license for social critique unmatched by his peers for speaking to issues that touch on deeply held beliefs people feel afraid to voice. To a lesser extent, this helps to begin contextualizing the phenomenon of a large demographic of males, mostly younger but not exclusively, gravitating towards content from Jordan Peterson, Andrew Tate, and Joe Rogan which coincides with the increasing irrelevance that legacy media has on this demographic which has lost trust in journalism, mainstream news and institutions seen as woke.

This phenomenon also helps contextualize the arguments about Critical Race Theory in schools in the U.S., and why the American comedian Kevin Hart was cancelled and banned from performing his comedy set in Egypt for affirming “Afrocentrism”. These spectacles and debates often play out most visibly in what appear to be surface level disagreements about pronouns, race and gender, but in actuality they are deep philosophical disagreements about first principles, metaphysics, and beliefs about the nature of reality as long held norms and beliefs are being challenged.

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ZOLTAN SOMHEGYI

CURING AND CARING THROUGH ART: MEMORY AND MEMORIALS IN TIMES OF CHANGING INTERPRETATIONS OF THE CONTESTED PAST

The past is not fixed, and actually it has never been stable. The interpretations and hierarchy of values change from time to time. Works and projects of art, especially monuments and memorials are particularly helpful, with which and through which one can relate to the past, and they are especially useful to tackle issues related to a contested and contaminated past,

hence to encounter sensitive issues that otherwise would perhaps be even more difficult to confront.

There can be many inspiring aspects connected to monuments, including (1) the publicness of the work, (2) the modes and styles of confrontation with the past, or (3) the properties, including the aesthetic qualities of the piece etc. However, one of the questions that is particularly actual today is (4) the fate of the work, especially of (public) monuments and memorials.

In a classical sense, monuments are erected to commemorate certain events or personalities. However, this original intention and hence also the earlier “message” may change. For example, its relevance can fade, the historical, political or cultural significance of what the monument aims at maintaining nevertheless loses its importance in the eye of the later generations. It can become so also because of our overly optimistic hopes of the forces of this “externalized” act: we somehow think that once a monument is erected, we can fully rely on it to do its job, to keep the memory alive. However, it is often the contrary. Like, as Robert Musil famously stated in 1927, monuments are definable as “invisible”, claiming that their most noticeable characteristic is that of remaining unnoticed.

The curious part is that nevertheless even this “invisibility” is not fixed, just like anything else from the past. Recent debates on monuments and memorials, and, especially the demolishing and decommissioning or at least defacing of monument have shown that monuments can step out from the invisibility, and can ignite important discussions on the (re)interpretation of history or on stopping honoring figures and events that are no longer viewed as deserving of honor in the way that they may have seemed when the memorial was erected. The many contemporary discussions, among others stimulated by, for example BLM or #metoo, can all offer fertile theoretical background to continue reconsidering monuments, memorials as well as the modes of remembering through (public) art in general. What leads to an equally inspiring set of questions is the survey of both theoretical and practical implications of these processes. Perhaps the most important of these is the question of what to do with these monuments? Leave them there? Demolish them? Let them stay as they are modified or defaced by the public, i.e. to let it become a new public monument by the new public? Or bring it to a museum, so that the monument becomes a monument not of the originally commemorated figure or event, but, on a meta-level, of the interpretation of history of a past epoch? One of the most interesting approaches – though it requires broad social consultation, as well as creativity and perhaps even some financial support – is to do something with and around the actual, original monument. I think a good example of this is Michele Bernardi’s and Arnold Holznecht’s intervention in Hans Piffraeder’s Mussolini frieze in Bolzano/Bozen in Italy. A very minimal intervention, leaving the

original in its original space, nevertheless transforming it into a memorial of the controversies and tragic atrocities of Fascism and providing thought for reflection about the modes of avoiding its recurrence.

A similar direction could possibly point towards a solution that has at least the potential for fruitful discussions in an inclusive way, involving much of society. If something similar could be stimulated around more and more of the controversial memorials, that could pave the way of expressing various approaches, offering multiple readings of a contested history and its commemoration, and thus finding modes of conciliation and reconciliation.

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ISMAIL LALA

WOKEISM AND SPIRITUAL LEGALISM

Wokeism is the banner under which individualism strives to assert itself in the modern context. If this is true, then jurisprudence, which seeks to impose universal judgements for moral and social transgressions, would be its natural antithesis. Yet in the spiritual legalism of the ubiquitous thirteenth-century mystical theorist, Muhyi al-Din ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240), Islamic jurisprudence is highly subjectivised. Standardisation and codification are subordinated to the lived reality of the individual. Does this individualised law represent a 'woke law', or does Ibn 'Arabi's spiritual legalism simply seek to assert the primacy of intentionality in jurisprudence? This study explores the fault lines between a 'woke' Islamic law and an individualised Islamic law through the legal framework Ibn 'Arabi delineates, and interrogates whether the two may be seen as the same thing.

As is commonly known, the term 'woke' has evolved from its origins in the civil rights movement as a term denoting the consciousness of systemic inequalities to a symbol for political correctness in which the rights of all marginalised groups are protected. My purpose here is not to go over the various iterations and evolutions of the term, it is to investigate the idea of protecting individualism that 'wokeism' has come to represent in the modern context, against a jurisprudential system that—by its very nature—seeks to impose a procrustean legal outline that all individuals must conform to. Does this mean traditional Islamic jurisprudence cannot be 'woke'? And if it can, what would a

'woke' Islamic law look like?

Rather than look at the wide-ranging application of Islamic jurisprudence across the globe, it would be more fruitful to go back to the origins of the term in the Qur'an. Q9:122, in which the verbal form V of the term features, runs:

And the believers should not go out to fight all at once. Of every group of them, a section only should go, so that those who are left behind may gain 'tafaqquh' in religion, and so that they may warn their people when they return to them, that they may be warned.

The celebrated grammarian, Abu'l-Qasim al-Zamakhshari (d. 1144), explains that the term entails 'difficulties that come with acquiring it (i.e. the law)' (Zamakhshari, 2:323). The reason for this, Eric Winkel believes, is that the law is constantly changing according to the needs and spirituality of each person; indeed, it imbibes 'the radical ambiguity of existence' (Winkel, 1996, 44). It is this 'radical ambiguity', he laments, that formalistic legalism has suppressed. Ibn 'Arabi's law for the individual, or his sapiential legal thought restores this aspect of the law and returns the term to its original denotation (Murata, 1992).

Ibn 'Arabi explains that humankind is the pinnacle of the divine creation because it has the potentiality to manifest all of God's 'most beautiful Names' (*Al-Asma' al-husna*) that are mentioned in the Qur'an in one locus of divine manifestation, unlike all other existents in phenomenal reality and the pre-phenomenal realms that only manifest one Name (Ibn 'Arabi, 2002). Yet the potentiality to manifest these divine Names, which represents the impetus for the creation of the cosmos and everything in it, is not always realised (Lala, 2019). The journey each person takes towards the actualisation of their potentiality is always unique, which is emblematic of their unique relationship to God. The corollary of this is that Islamic law, which is the conduit for actualisation of this potentiality to manifest all the divine Names, must needs be unique for each person and in each moment. This gainsays imposition of generic laws upon people, or even, the same laws at different moments for the same person.

Ibn 'Arabi's solution to this is what we might categorise as a 'woke law', inasmuch as it champions the individuality of each person and respects their personal journey towards actualisation of their potentiality. This is not to suggest that the modern usage of 'wokeism' can be superimposed on the legal paradigm Ibn 'Arabi delineates in the thirteenth century, which would be consummately anachronistic. Nevertheless, Ibn 'Arabi's break from other legal theoreticians in not choosing to establish definitive legal rulings for all situations, and instead affording the individual a choice of rulings—each with distinctive spiritual underpinnings—to better foster their inculcation of divine traits (Lala, 2022),

represents an exaltation of individuality that has parallels with modern iterations of ‘wokeness’.

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THE CONCEPT OF WOKEISM IN ISLAMIC LEGAL PHILOSOPHY

In recent decades, the concept of wokeism emerged as an ideology in the West. At the beginning of the twentieth century, wokeism provided support for the oppressed, persecuted, and marginalised black people in America with the intent of opposing racism. However, the term has recently started to be used as an outrage that exploits financially, physically, radically and mentally particular groups of people. The Fairport Education Alliance defines wokeism as such: “Wokeism is weaponised personal grievances masquerading as a genuine social concern. It's defined by its fraudulent nature, as being distinct from legitimate social grievance. Wokeism only knows outrage – it knows not empathy for victims.” [1] For many, the meaning of wokeism has shifted from positive to negative.

Despite the inversion of the meaning of wokeism, its conceptualisation remains unclear and contested. Some academicians describe it as utopic limitless liberalism or cancel culture obsessively voicing race, class and gender

inequalities. [2] Others define it as political correctness to provide support to the ostracised, marginalised, and weak people by exploiting the feelings of these people with the intent of protesting political and legal policies of governments. [3] Still others acknowledge the concept as a new religion on account of its deifying group identity. [4]

This article evaluates the concept of wokeism first as a utopic limitless liberalism/cancel culture and then as political correctness within the scope of Islamic legal philosophy. In the first instance, if the concept of wokeism is accepted as limitless liberalism/cancel culture, the meaning of liberalism and its limits is sought to be identified in terms of an Islamic legal perspective. Liberalism is one of political and social concepts rooted in the West. It generally brings out a kind of individualism that severs an individual from community and leaves his/her individually isolated. [5] In considering the concept of *ummah* (an imagined community which links all Muslims), a liberalism that envisages an isolated individual is not appropriate from the perspective of Islamic legal philosophy. While liberalism does not necessarily tolerate the repression of the community on individuals' freedom and rights, the concept of *ummah* puts an emphasis on the mutual responsibility of individual and community. In this regard, a Muslim individual cannot claim limitless liberalism because he/she is liable to his/her community. The concept of wokeism as limitless liberalism/cancel culture has its limits and conditions in accordance with the mutual responsibility of individual and community that is established in Islamic legal philosophy.

In the second instance, it must be evaluated whether the concept of wokeism as political correctness exists in Islamic legal philosophy. The concept of “obedience to the ruler” is an entrenched idea in traditional Islamic law. Muslim scholars have almost unanimously agreed that it is obligatory to obey the ruler who takes power whether by consent or by force. In their view, obeying the just or unjust ruler is still a better attitude than revolting against him/her because civil uprising and insurrection conduce to civil conflict and the depredation of both public and private possessions. [6] The unity of the Muslim community, therefore, is acknowledged as the key legal reason that induces Muslim scholars to establish the principle of obligatory obedience within the doctrine of *siyāsa shar'iyya* (a fundamental legal doctrine that establishes the relationship between the ruler and its subjects). Some conditions have also been established to identify the concept of obedience to the ruler. If the ruler strays away from justice, righteousness, and virtue, it is the duty of people to admonish and exhort him without applying violence, hatred, and deception. This establishes the legal basis of the concept of admonition and exhortation in the relationship between the ruler and his subjects. It will further have to be evaluated whether wokeism as both limitless liberalism/cancel culture and

political correctness exists in Islamic legal philosophy.

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ANGELA GONZALEZ ECHEVERRY

TRACKING WOKEISM: THE CASE OF BATALLON AYACUCHO, MANIZALES-COLOMBIA IN THE POST-CONFLICT REALITY

Women are like laws,
they were made to be violated
(Bolaño, 691).

I would like to begin with a controversy that took place at the end of 2020 in Colombia when a neighbor of the Manizales' Military Base denounced the use of denigrating songs against women during a training camp. The complaint was made in the local newspaper, opening a dialogue on systemic practices of symbolic gender violence, in which hate speech, misogyny and machismo are replicated. Adriana Villegas Botero, the author of the article, *No es broma, es violencia*, explained how she casually overheard the soldiers repeat and shout while marching in circles in the courtyard of the base, a song with

the following words:

"upon Lucifer's mustaches, killing criminals, the thirst for subversive blood, war, the tar of the boots, "climb up, climb up, guerrilla fighter, I am waiting for you with grenades and mortars at the top of the hill"/ "men, when they see a good butt, ..." and "taca otca taca taca taca ta". Izquier, 2, 3, 4" (*La Patria*, October 19, 2020).

The complainant points out that we, as Colombians, live in a context where comments that may be jokes for some people, normalize violence against the other, particularly against women. The song continued:

One minute before dying,
I heard my girlfriend's voice
With a bitch's voice she told me 'If you die, I will give you over to the police'
Because I am, ja, I am, ja, a black vampire!
I never had a mother, and I never will!
If I ever had her in my hands, I would hang her.
I never had a girlfriend, and I never will!
If I ever saw with my eyes, I would rip them out!
When my mother in law dies,
I hope they bury her face down because I will make a ladder
To get to her grave, and stamp on her skull.
With my mother-in-law's hair, I will make a scourer to brand her daughter
On her bellybutton, and even lower. (*La Patria*, October 19, 2020).

The official in charge of Manizales Base denied the event. Denying the songs were sung is negating the reality of the military practices in which systematic use of derogatory language spoken by the soldiers inform and, indeed, existentiates reality. Therefore, any brutality or excessive violence against people is justified from the state and perpetrated by its institutions.

In this context, the use of a gender narrative in military songs can be analyzed under the notion of *Wokeism* and may serve to examine the effect of the military apparatus in the Colombian post-conflict reality with regards to three fundamental factors: (1) who sings the songs, (2) in what context these tunes are sung, and (3) the normalization of violence against women and, by extension, other minorities and culturally marginalized communities. These three factors are relevant because many of the social and political issues related to the Colombian conflict have not been resolved, despite the signing of the peace agreement in 2012.

The macabre tone of the songs acts as an invitation to gender violence repeated in the daily life of the military community and in the training of soldiers throughout the country. This nation, that is protected by the state in case of vulnerability by its soldiers, still retains the authority to reprimand them. The act of condemning the songs can thus be seen as a manifestation of cancel culture.

It is likely to be thought that in this accusation, or in the chants themselves, there is nothing new because many soldiers in different places have similar songs in their training. It might also be thought that this type of military practices only reflects an innocuous hyper-masculine embrace of tradition. However, opening a conversation about an incident that is not isolated, and is perhaps emblematic of a major problem, can be framed within the boundaries of

Wokeism advocating to cancel a practice that depicts the Other harmfully. This initiative anticipates a transformation of invisible violence that, in some cases, has been silenced or ignored by the overwhelming records of victims and deaths in a conflict that had lasted for more than half a century and has still not fully ended.

Therefore, it can be considered that the military narrative is not merely routine and the repetition of phrases, despite having a simple rhyme that is regularly used, and easy to follow. The songs propose a frivolous oratory pattern from the argumentative point of view, whose purpose is to encourage combat desire (protreptic). The connection between the songs and the mood of those who listen and follow the canticles is accentuated by the euphoria required at the beginning of any military confrontation. There is a clear stimulus that arises from the repeated language, the steps accompanied by the music and in general from that excitement and empowerment of the performance requested by the commander of the troop. Generally, its content takes advantage of pejorative platitudes in a racist or homophobic tone, elevating the self-confidence of the soldier.

The woke call denounces a narrative that is grounded on the discriminatory use of force against a female target (the girlfriend, the mother, the mother-in-law), even as it is encouraged by the state despite its damaging effects. The repercussions of reiterating the Others being vilified is clear. Whether it is the guerrilla, the bandit, or just a woman, this kind of violence can be extended to other minorities. In conclusion, the normalization of a tradition is no longer ignored. There is a clear call for a transformation of a language in a post-conflict framework, where it is imperative to renovate cultural practices because laws and agreements have not been sufficient to structure an inclusive and less hateful society. The exercise of cancel culture may be here a legitimate response to demands for new narratives.

Despite some reactions to the so-called excesses of *Wokeism* and what some others named reverse censorship, the resistance to the content of the military songs generates an important dialogue that turned the public gaze to the way in which the military power has constructed the Other; whether it is the female

subject or the guerilla, they are always seen as an adversary/enemy. This opponent must be eliminated because it is implicitly worthless. Indeed, the case of Manizales displays the intersectional nature of cultural practices and the impact on gender citizenship. What was once a passive membership, today is a way of activating political participation. Villegas Botero subverts the violence of these songs by speaking against the tradition, redefining the scope of military narrative, and pushing the institutions to be transformed.

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ALEJANDRO CARPIO

WOKEISM AND CATHARISM. ON RELIGIONS THAT MIGHT HAVE EXISTED

The Cathars were a religious sect of dualists that flourished in Southern France and Northern Italy in the 11th Century and was exterminated by a crusade in the 13th Century--the only one that took place on European soil. Almost 800 years later, several historians formulated a reinterpretation of the Cathar phenomenon that considered the possibility that the Cathars did not really exist at all.

This fascinating debate can shed light on the contemporary religious movement known as *Wokeism*. There are vast methodological differences between studying medieval heresies and addressing contemporary cultural phenomena like *Wokeism*; even so, Cathar and *Woke* questions share common ground. When speaking of *Wokeism*, one of the obstacles that current cultural critics face is the possibility that, like the Cathars, the proponents of *Wokeism* are more an invention of ours than a clearly identifiable group of subjects who profess an actual religion.

Catharism is said to have been influenced by Bogomilism, a dualist religious movement that originated in Bulgaria in the 10th Century. One of the main tasks of traditionalist historians is understanding and proving how the contact between Bulgarian Bogomils and the French Cathars (if they ever existed) came to be. To this day, the evidence of that contact is thin.

In their book *Cynical Theories*, Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay make the case for another transfer of knowledge: in this case, Postmodern philosophy and intersectionality, through the education system, into the population at large. A challenge for the study of *Wokeism*, if we are to believe Pluckrose and Lindsay, will be to draw a convincing picture of, for example, Foucault's influence on young American school

teachers. This is, of course, an easier task than outlining how traders and travelers transferred a heretic, daring idea from 10th Century Bulgaria to the South of France the next century. But without a careful study of the ways in which the writings of, say, Judith Butler influenced a large segment of the population including young TikTok users, we are left with a degree of speculation. What I mean to stress with this extravagant comparison is that scholars must always be wary of falling into *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* fallacies and that, in order to prove a transfer of knowledge, one must provide evidence. In a way, Wokeism is a modern heresy. If we understand Postmodernism as a heresy inside the Western Enlightenment tradition, and Wokeism as a popular manifestation of it, by way of my analogy, then we run the risk of playing the part of inquisitors, even if it is not our intention.

Another point of contention is the use of the name “Cathars” to describe the supposed group of people with distinguishable quasi-religious beliefs. It is commonly understood that the dualist heretics in Languedoc called themselves “the good men” and were later named “Cathars” by the historian Charles Schmidt in the 19th Century. “Woke” is also a term with which those who we call “woke” do not necessarily identify. In her study, Taylor points to inquisitorial records where even the name *good men* “cannot be synonymous with the people whom inquisitors called heretics” (250), thus questioning if they were even called “good men” at all. She suggests that it is not even certain that the Cathars were called “good men”, which terribly complicates the discussion. How can we be sure that there were a group of people (called “Cathars”, “good men” or any other term) when we can’t even organize them under a coherent name? Is the fact that they were called “heretics” enough to guarantee that they were a heretic group? Should we trust the inquisitors?

Those who explore the relationship between Postmodernism and Wokeism tend to do so in a very condemnatory and even hysterical manner; in fact, this has been a key feature of right-wing intellectuals and activists. People like Chris Rufo (and now, regrettably, Lindsay) warn of the “dangers” of a perverse ideology as if they were fervent Dominican monks watching over orthodoxy of the Church. Wokeism is perceived as a heresy of sorts by mainstream contemporary ideology in the sense that it displays a departure from a traditional Western worldview, especially with regards to its Postmodern roots. The term “heresy”, as I submitted before, is a hostile term to describe a religious set of beliefs that is a deviation from mainstream religious ideology and it is thus applicable to understand the “antiwoke” movement. All this is to say that there is a political element to it which we must address and with which we must contend.

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TOMMASO OSTILLIO

WOKEISM AND DEMOCRACY. A TERRIBLE MIX

Though opposite in their political purposes and goals, the Wokeist left and the contemporary extreme right thrive online because of the same psychological patterns. More precisely, like other animals, humans are gregarious beings who inherit social norms and cultural values from their peers in their immediate surroundings. This learning process and its consequences are known as information cascade and herd behavior, respectively. By definition, an information cascade occurs whenever one consciously reads environmental information to emulate the action of others intentionally.

Notably, an information cascade can become a powerful way to defy uncertainty when one intends to learn to do something quickly. Instead, herd behavior takes place when one acts without such an intention but does so for social acceptance. For instance, someone follows an information cascade when they surf songs on Spotify based on what their peers listen to the most. In this way, they can discover new types of music and enlarge the songs they listen to on Spotify. However, if they were to seek the approval of their peers on Spotify by precisely emulating what they are doing, they would act within the scheme of herd behavior.

The Consequences

It is worth noting that an information cascade can be the root cause of herd behavior. For instance, although one can sometimes take someone else as a mentor who consistently dispenses good knowledge, following this person’s advice uncritically may sooner or later backfire. Specifically, in such cases, someone may buy into beliefs they accept uncritically and under social pressure. If so, some view becomes truthful because everyone else claims so.

Importantly, when a group of people herds around a belief whose probability of being true is somewhat low, it is often because an availability cascade is at work. The latter is an information cascade inflating the likelihood that some claim is true. So, for instance, when mainstream media excessively broadcast news about a plane crash, people may consequently overestimate the likelihood of dying in a plane crash.

Concurrently, an availability cascade is a potent enabler of group polarization. Indeed, if some people

are long exposed to the same availability cascade and discuss its content with one another, they may soon become more extreme in their views about it. This happens online every day when people discuss same-sex marriages, immigration, and the like.

The Matter at Issue

Although the patterns described above are embodied in human evolutionary history, automating the triggers of such patterns via social media algorithms is far from a good idea. That is because the latter algorithms can quickly become availability cascades automators. Particularly, algorithms create filter bubbles by bombarding social media users with personalized, targeted content. Besides, algorithms make sure that people who view similar content get together. Thus, social media algorithms are not only potent enablers of availability cascades. But they can also become powerful enablers of group polarization.

Several studies have shown that the social mechanisms described above are at work when right-wing extremists get together. Yet little has been said about how these social mechanisms enable leftists to become ever more radical in their views. In this regard, it is worth stressing that social media algorithms are dangerous enablers of adverse reversals of pluralistic ignorance. The latter concept defines situations in which the members of a social group accept a social norm while privately rejecting it.

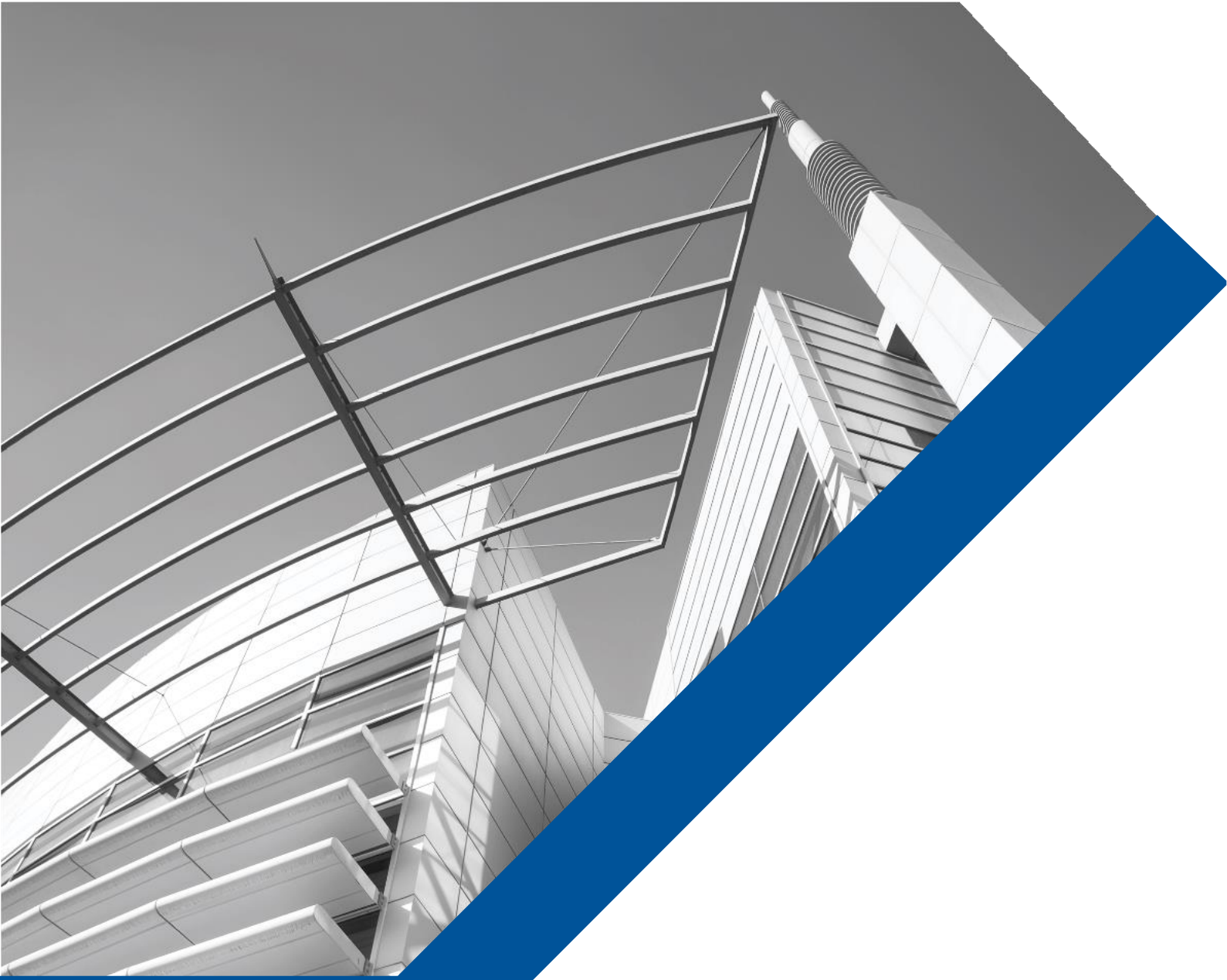
For instance, when lecturers ask whether there are questions after a confusing lecture, students often respond with a roaring silence. Namely, students would have questions but refuse to voice them because everyone else is silent. Yet if anyone broke the silence, everyone would be better off because the teacher could clarify what is unclear. This social process is called positive unleashing. In the same way, potential extremists might be unwilling to espouse their views in their immediate social circles but could find accommodating social environments online because of the abovementioned patterns. This is what an adverse reversal of pluralistic ignorance is.

In filter bubbles featuring polarization, people may buy into an absurd claim. For example, right-wingers, on the one hand, may buy into ridiculous claims about the QAnon conspiracy theory and equate Trump to Cyrus of Persia. On the other hand, leftwingers may buy into equally absurd beliefs, e.g., “men can get pregnant” or “minors do not have a gender.”

Either way, both groups embrace anything everyone else in their online social circle believes. As a result, both groups feel entitled to use violence to force their vision onto others outside

their groups. That is why, like the contemporary right wing, the Wokeist left is fundamentally incompatible with the founding values of liberal Western Democracies, where people are free to believe anything they want without risking of being harmed by those who disbelieve the views they espouse.

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