

RESEARCH ARTICLE



Herrenvolk Marxism as Class Collaboration: Recovering the “Struggle for Recognition” through Losurdo’s Methodology

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ABSTRACT

A thorough study of Domenico Losurdo’s discursive projects reveals a distinct, yet implicit, set of methods for analyzing the material conditions of the world around us and for the development of his dialectical lens of “critical communism.” In this article, the authors set about to make concrete Losurdo’s methodology by outlining the potential, value, and implications of his method to contemporary political movements, and its use in constructions of historiographical narratives, while still maintaining the integrity of historical materialism. To illustrate this, the authors will be engaging with several of Losurdo’s works—including his texts on liberalism, his critique of Western Marxism, and his broader understanding of class conflict through the “struggle for recognition”—as well as their own analysis of recent *Herrenvolk* movements within Marxism in the West. This discursive analysis is in service of concretely outlining how Losurdo’s theoretical and methodological contributions to historical materialism can be applied in scholarship and political practice.

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... [T]hroughout contemporary history, the great tests of strength between abolitionism and slavery, between anticolonialism and colonialism, saw, ideologically, the pathos of the universal concept of humanity on the one side and its negation and denigration on the other. (Losurdo 2024, 102)

Although Domenico Losurdo does not elucidate a prescribed methodology in his approach to writing history, he nevertheless deploys a distinct set of methods in his work. These methods are at once striving for intellectual analyses while also urging us to use them as tools for action. Where some may see this as a double bind, we argue that they are instead locked together in a double helix of dialectical use-value—particularly for those seeking change in the vicissitudes of the 21st century. Indeed, those who may see it as a bind, who have suffered (or luxuriated in) an intellectual stasis which has justified inaction, are the very Western Marxists Losurdo put in his crosshairs in his later works—and to whom we will refer.

In this article, we will illuminate and utilize Losurdo’s method by (a) outlining the implicit technique that he has used in multiple works, and (b) employing that method

to analyze a contemporary phenomenon: *Herrenvolk* Marxism. That said, it is important to note that we are not claiming to have uncovered some manner of privileged or concrete knowledge that will clarify rapidly changing, and often occluded, political and social movements. Rather, we hope to continue in the footsteps of past Marxist philosophers so as to contribute an additional articulation that may allow for a more thorough, informed, and materialist praxis to tactically traverse the revolutionary landscape of our day and age.

Admittedly, the method developed and deployed by Losurdo is not necessarily a novel philosophical position. Yet, the analysis he commits himself to is worth understanding and adopting. In many ways, he is merely continuing the long analytical tradition of Marxist dialecticians: just as Karl Marx himself does with Hegel, Smith, and Ricardo; just as Antonio Gramsci does with Mussolini, fascism, and culture; so too does Losurdo commit himself with the words of self-professed liberals. Within the imploding wreckage of the supposed totalizing systems of the 20th century, Losurdo—contra the lineage of triumphalists like Francis Fukuyama—continues to urge us to widen our spheres of understanding, resist forms of chauvinism, and not discard the ever-increasing importance of the periphery.

Losurdo's approach when analyzing a particular historical phenomenon, concept, or personality can be broadly summarized as seeking to undertake an "all-round comparative analysis" (Losurdo 2023, 7). Elsewhere he refers to this process as aiming to place the target of study in its "concrete historical realization" (Losurdo 2004, 78), and this requires seeing the object of analysis not "in its abstract purity [but in its] concrete reality" (Losurdo 2014, viii). This approach runs counter to much of contemporary (liberal) historiography, which more often than not relies on "colossal, arbitrary abstractions" (Losurdo 2004, 9), and often equally insists upon the *denial* of history, and the *denial* of the technique of comparing broader historical eras against one another. Walter Benjamin recognized this practice, observing "[f]or the materialist dialectician discontinuity must be the regulative idea of the tradition of the ruling classes . . . , continuity that of the oppressed classes" (Benjamin 1982, 459–469). For the liberal historian, and the contemporary polemicist, to try and seek broader historical comparisons is to commit the sin of "whataboutism" (also known as the philosophical principle of *tu quoque*). Gabriel Rockhill has further identified this as a refusal to undertake "critical scrutiny and precise materialist evaluation" (Foster and Rockhill 2025, 16).

Of course, Benjamin, Losurdo, and Rockhill are not the only philosophers and historians to have made these kinds of claims. In 1959, for example, even Western Marxists like Theodor W. Adorno recognized this creeping idealist flattening of history as nations began to initiate programs to "work through the past" as a way of foreclosing an active, materialist relationship to traumatic memory: "in this usage 'working through the past' does not mean seriously working upon the past. . . . [O]n the contrary, its intention is to close the books on the past and, if possible, even remove it from memory" (Adorno 1998, 89). This kind of liberal denial of history has led to not only a foreclosure, but also a whitewashing of truly radical moments—and along with them, real lives lived—allowing for history to serve as merely a flattened static image for whatever particular talking point is important to enact liberal governance. As Enzo Traverso has proposed:

The memory of the Gulag erased that of revolution, the memory of the Holocaust replaced that of antifascism, and the memory of slavery eclipsed that of anticolonialism: the remembrance of the victims seems unable to coexist with the recollection of their hopes, of their struggles, of their conquests and their defeats. (Traverso 2016, 10)

Liberalism and the Struggle for Recognition

Losurdo, in his work *Liberalism* (2014), charts how this ideology, which claims to uphold the “universalist” principles of the enlightenment—that is, freedom of thought, speech, action, and political rights, along with suffrage and so on—has from the very beginning been constitutively built on a *partial* application of these rights. A “community of the free” must necessarily be defined negatively against some de-humanized other, typically constructed on some basis of what Losurdo refers to as a process of “de-specification” (this process usually relies upon a racial, gender, caste, or some other arbitrary but historically and/or geographically informed system).

We can then say that this liberalism was the intellectual tradition which most rigorously circumscribed a restricted sacred space wherein the rules of the limitation of power obtained. It was an intellectual tradition characterized more by celebration of the community of free individuals that defined the sacred space than by celebration of liberty or the individual. (Losurdo 2014, 309)

As ever, the boundaries of this “sacred space” must be dialectically defined, and membership within it waxes and wanes with the vicissitudes of the class struggle. Under threat (most often economically), the ruling classes will on occasion expand the confines of this space. This expansion can come from the “top-down,” with membership afforded to certain elements of the subaltern so long as they participate in (violently) enforcing its borders. For example, Losurdo (2014, 343) cites the case of “Afro-Americans [who] sought to win recognition by participating in the front line in the Union’s wars. . . . [Their] hopes for emancipation took the form—were obliged to take the form—of their active participation in destroying [indigenous populations].”

However, when the forces of reaction are ascendant, the circumference of this “sacred space” can contract; Losurdo (2024, 78) notes “. . . before coming to power, Hitler proposed a racialization of the French people.” And in particular, working in any way to weaken the hegemonic systems of power is enough to forfeit your right to belong to the “community of the free.” For example, “Oswald Spengler in Germany took up this thesis: by becoming Soviet, Russia had thrown away its ‘white mask’ to ‘once again, become Asiatic,’ indeed ‘Mongolian’” (Losurdo 2024, 80). These are the kinds of ideological processes that Losurdo terms “de-specification,” whereby populations are progressively excluded on “naturalistic” or politico-moral grounds (Losurdo 2015). This is a mechanism which can discipline the borders of the sacred space, and its inverse can be seen in *How the Irish Became White*, in which the militant, violent enforcement of whiteness is constitutive—and indeed a permanent “membership fee”—of whiteness itself (Ignatiev 2009). That said, this racial assemblage is also not something entirely unique; there are plenty of examples (in the United States alone) of the systematic targeting of those in Black, Latinx, and Asian communities to coerce, absorb, and tokenize oppressed individuals into professions which uphold the status quo of white supremacy (Olson 2004). Therefore, any real or imagined demurral—or (dare we say) “race traitor”

activities—which may be carried out, such as anti-colonial organizing, will subsequently result in one being stripped of this privileged status.

Yet, the circle of those seen as truly human can also be expanded from the “bottom-up,” and Losurdo refers to this as the “struggle for recognition.” Losurdo, using his method of always historicizing, assesses Marx and Engels’s thought in its historical context, recognizing that, from the beginning, Marx and Engels’s conception of class struggle was open-ended, and not entirely concerned with “purely” economic concerns: “to appreciate how reductive and misleading the habitual interpretation of the theory of class struggle is, it suffices to glance at . . . their early writings onwards” (Losurdo 2016, 7). Initially, this took the form of one paying attention to struggles for national recognition, namely, Engels’s contact with the movement for Irish national liberation. However, their attention continued to “expand” to areas such as gender and race, which they saw as forming an intrinsic whole in the struggle for human emancipation. In this, they never lost sight of the constitutive place of these concerns within political economy, and, therefore, focused on essential questions from which liberation struggles must be fought.

By virtue of its ambition to encompass the whole historical process, the theory of class struggle is configured as a general theory of social conflict. . . . [I]t strives to take into account the multiplicity of forms in which social conflict manifests itself. . . . (Losurdo 2016, 43)

Just as its subjects vary, so does the content of class struggle. However, we can identify a lowest common denominator. On the economic-political level, it comprises the objective of altering the division of labor (internationally, inside the factory or family); on the politico-moral level, that of overcoming the dehumanizing and reifying processes which characterize capitalist society—the objective of achieving recognition. (Losurdo 2016, 83)

Losurdo, following these questions and their development since the 19th century, recognizes that the potential for the manifestation of conflict is essentially infinite, and while we must not drown in relatively “insignificant” distractions, it is essential to assert that “history” is occurring—and that the class conflict is taking place—when clashes occur “whose protagonists are not single individuals, but social subjects who, directly or indirectly, pertain to the social order, to *some essential articulation* of the division of labor and the social order” (Losurdo 2016, 43; emphasis added). Class reductionists always seek to limit the situations in which one is able to obtain “some essential articulation.” According to Marx, Engels, and indeed Losurdo, struggles between classes, and struggles for emancipation (whether they be national, gender, race, etc.), are merely different species within the same genus. “Each of these . . . struggles challenges the prevailing division of labor internationally, nationally, and within the family” (Losurdo 2016, 44).

As such, Losurdo chastises those who claim that the struggle for recognition and its manifestations are “a distraction from class struggle” (Losurdo 2016, 10). We must remember that, for Marx, the revolutionary program requires us to “*overthrow all relations* in which man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being” (Marx 1975, 182; emphasis in the original). Losurdo sees this broader understanding as inevitable, noting “[t]he struggle for universalism [leads] to a confrontation with a sociopolitical system whose practice of dehumanization [is] intrinsic” (Losurdo 2024, 104). Equally for Marx and Engels, according to Losurdo, this broader perspective forms not a hindrance, but instead “a general theory of class conflict,” whose modalities manifest in contingent,

historically, and geographically informed categories—not as autonomous concepts, but as underlying dialectically-understood articulations of the fundamental contradictions between classes. Indeed, as Engels wrote, it was “. . . Marx who first discovered the great law of motion of history, the law according to which *all [alle]* historical struggles . . . are in fact only the more or less clear expression of struggles between social classes” (quoted in Losurdo 2016, 43; emphasis in the original).

The recognition of personhood represents a fundamental site of struggle in the history of humanity: indeed, the limited but real recognition of personhood (in the eyes of the owning classes) is the chief difference between the proletariat and the slave (Losurdo 2016, 74–75). And thus, one can see that expanding this recognition is a mode—and an essential aim—of class struggle as such. For capitalism to function, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie must both arrive at the market with at least some nominative recognition of freedom *as persons*.

For example, this has been expressed in the form of the struggles for suffrage, in which men with property (i.e., primarily a class consideration) were first included in those bestowed with voting rights, and eventually the property restrictions were removed and identitarian categories (i.e., gender, race) have determined, and continue to determine, whether one is included in the “sacred space” of democracy, as well as the relative “weight” of one’s vote. This freedom, which has been built on depriving specified others of the same freedom, is the *modus operandi* of how the promises of liberalism are actualized in capitalist systems. In modern parliamentary democracies with nominal universal suffrage, this is not as explicit as it may have been formerly, but when viewed in a global perspective—as well as when considering the democratic status of migrant workers, undocumented persons, and those otherwise prevented, discouraged, or excluded from engaging in democratic systems—it is abundantly clear how this freedom still relies upon the structural exclusion of Othered groups.

As discussed above, the structuring of a “sacred space” of personhood under liberalism is further complicated by the mechanisms whereby it can be expanded or contracted depending on historical and economic circumstances of a given time. Capitalism, particularly in its colonial and imperialist forms, has always utilized various forms of class collaboration as a “divide and conquer” measure, relying on segments of the population to define and enforce the “community of the free,” which subsequently delimits the scope of the struggle for recognition, and thereupon allows said groupings to be rewarded with some measure of recognition for their own (artificially determined) community. Gerald Horne has identified this process as starting from the very beginning of the settler-colonial project in what is now referred to as the continent of North America. Horne argues that diverse European populations, who would have typically been at odds with one another in their particular homelands due to economic, religious, ethnic, historical, and/or other conflicts, were able to cohere “through a perverse mitosis . . . into a formidable whole of ‘whiteness,’ then white supremacy, which involved class collaboration of the rankest sort between and among the wealthy and those not so endowed” (Horne 2020, 10–11). This constructed identity was, of course, built on the negation of recognition and the dehumanization of the enslaved African population, as well as the indigenous nations. Thus, the colonial metropole was successfully able to dull class consciousness among settler populations; and furthermore, it developed a twofold solution to any tensions that may have arisen at home: it could simply “export” troublesome

individuals to the colonies, while the bounties of the colonial spoils could serve as a bribe to certain sectors of the working populations. Without this mechanism in place, both the colonies and the metropole were threatened. As Horne (2018, 148) has argued: “When Africans, indigenes, and poorer Europeans began to rebel simultaneously, simple survival meant concessions to one of these groups.” The effects of these processes have their imprints on all aspects of our social lives—intellectual production, and the practice of resistance, have not escaped unscathed.

Western Marxism

As Marx and Engels point out in *The German Ideology*, “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas” and the corollary to this is that “the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to [those ruling ideas]” (Marx and Engels 1998, 67). Through both the insidious ideological effects of the economic processes loosely described as the “labor aristocracy” and more deliberate propaganda efforts effected by “[t]he dominant industries of knowledge production in the imperial core . . .” (Foster and Rockhill 2025, 14), political thought and practice in these countries—including Marxist thought itself—has been largely compromised, falling in line with the needs of ongoing capital accumulation on a world scale.

Throughout his career, and most fully in his penultimate work *Western Marxism*, Losurdo charts this development. He uses the term “Western Marxism”—a label also adopted by some of its proponents, such as Perry Anderson—to describe the forms of Marxism that became dominant in the imperial core. Fundamentally, these changes have occurred due to processes of accommodation with hegemonic liberalism, the contours of which are outlined above. In various manifestations and currents, the kind of Marxism practiced in the imperialist countries, and among comprador classes elsewhere, has necessarily been burnished of its revolutionary edges, and degraded into forms of opportunism, class collaboration, and/or reaction.

Losurdo identifies that a key motivation for the codification of a school of Western Marxism was the October Revolution itself, and most pertinently, its success in taking power. Indeed, the need to quell the fears of Bolshevism on the part of the bourgeoisie in the imperialist nations led to their dialectical negation against “that form of Marxism.” In other words—and this pattern continues to this day—if it is successful in taking power, then it is definitionally *not* the kind of Marxism welcome in polite company. A state-building project of real sovereign power within our messy material world was considered either *gauche* or (necessarily) a practice of barbarism. This latter phenomenon can be seen in the racialized and Orientalizing practice to which the Soviet Union, and subsequently other successful revolutions, have been subjected (Losurdo 2024, 142). Rather than properly analyzing the messy realities of post-revolutionary state building, Western Marxological nuances and puzzles could be safely considered, and the results could be published in modest monographs, so long as one threw in a few requisite denunciations of those “wrong type” of Marxists. More radical scholars could pontificate upon utopian dreams of the conflict-free endpoint of communism, or lament the fallen revolutionaries of uprisings, so long as those glorious dead had the important prerequisite of having been unsullied by success. This, importantly, was not the kind of Marxism that appealed to the

rest of the world. “What inspired the revolution of colonial peoples was not the password of a ‘state that is withering away’ but a state that is being built” (Losurdo 2024, 49).

Then, as Losurdo puts it, “two Marxisms are delineated according to two different temporalities,” where Western Marxists “love to contrast the poetry of the remote future to the prospect of the long-term prose of immediate tasks” (Losurdo 2024, 223). Indeed, Western Marxists will routinely lambast real projects of sovereign construction—which are being actively assailed on all sides by numerous enemies—for not living up to the promises of their imaginary futures!¹

The concrete history of the new post-revolutionary society, which seeks to develop itself among the tentative contradictions, difficulties, and errors of every kind, is defined en bloc as a degeneration and betrayal of the real movement in the name of the remote and uncertain futures. . . . (Losurdo 2024, 224)

This makes clear the ideological function such denatured and defanged forms of Marxism serve: class collaboration. By definition, Western Marxists must disavow any form of politics, in practice or in rhetoric, which can threaten the power of their own ruling classes. And there exists both the stick (direct and indirect repression) and the carrot (a marginal share of imperialist super-profits) to reinforce these guardrails. John Bellamy Foster further notes how Western Marxism has taken a variety of forms which are a regression “toward idealism,” a “retreat from the dialectics of nature” and ontological materialism, and, most tellingly, also “a retreat from the critique of imperialism and the whole problem of revolutionary struggle in the . . . Global South” (Foster and Rockhill 2025, 2). This reduces Marxism from being an active project to a “mere academic field concerned with the circle of reification, or structures without a subject: the very negation of a philosophy of praxis” (Foster and Rockhill 2025, 2). Thus, though taking multifarious manifestations, the ultimate result is the hamstringing of Marxism’s revolutionary potential, a blunting of international solidarity through a limiting of the sacred space of revolutionary politics, and a (literal) disarming of its revolutionary actors. This constitutes a “class compromise,” an outlet for political energy, and an “acceptable and reputable form of Marxism” for the ruling classes (Foster and Rockhill 2025, 15). And, as Ali Kadri points out, its utility for accumulation goes even further: “Western Marxists are those who critique capitalism from the standpoint of providing it with positive feedback” (Kadri 2023, 4).

Herrenvolk Marxism

In as far as Western Marxism functions as a form of opportunism, and therefore of liberalism, it will always replicate its errors and undermine Marxism’s universalizing project. As a form of class compromise, this can occur even more perniciously, with occurrences of self-described liberatory movements chauvinistically emphasizing one aspect of the struggle for recognition at the expense of others (often in accordance with the beliefs and practices of their ruling class). Losurdo (2016, 101) describes this process as a “mutilation of the class struggle.” This method of denoting a “sacred space” and specified community, within which its liberatory aims are practiced, is a quintessential replica of the ideal liberal politics—that of violently enforcing a “community of the free.” We are choosing to designate this phenomenon *Herrenvolk* Marxism, following

Losurdo's usage of *Herrenvolk* democracy and *Herrenvolk* socialism—equally, we echo Losurdo's assertion that “the use of Hitler's language [here] is significant” (Losurdo 2024, 254). In other words, we see the development of Western Marxism as embodying a Marxist left deviation (i.e., utopianism) whereas *Herrenvolk* Marxism takes the form of a right deviation (i.e., tailism), each with distinct social and political formations. However, in both cases there tends to be overlap—with the end result being class collaborationism and a hegemonically “compatible” Marxism.

An over- or under-emphasis on particular aspects of the struggle for recognition—loosely and non-exhaustively categorized by Losurdo in *Class Struggle* (2016) as respective questions of nation, gender, and/or race—can be seen in the historical examples discussed below, and each can clearly be seen as a failure or retrograde step for their respective liberatory projects. Likewise, each example will exhibit certain manifested forms of opportunism; some will show an attempt at a strategy of collaboration with hegemony, and others an expression of their relation to production (and, most often, a relation of contiguity to imperialist super-profits). These historical phenomena are all complex and specific, but their presentation in this article is being simplified to show instances of the overall process being described.

Losurdo charts this phenomenon and marks its first appearance early in the socialist movement with what he calls a “*Herrenvolk* Socialism,” which proposes liberation at the expense of others, led by “the followers of Fourier and Saint-Simon of a more or less socialist type” who sought to build utopian communities “on the lands wrested in Algeria from the Arabs” (Losurdo, forthcoming). Losurdo goes on to highlight the “socialism” of the Israeli *kibbutzim* which were, quoting Arendt, “characterized, on the one hand, by support for ‘chauvinist’ goals, and on the other by a commitment to the pursuit of collectivist experiments and a . . . strict realization of social justice” within one's own community (quoted in Losurdo 2014, 180). Indeed, one pertinent aspect of the Zionist project is the epitome of what happens when one group's “national question”—that is, one group's struggle for self-determination—is weaponized at the expense of another.

Herrenvolk Marxism understands the national question only through the lens of social chauvinism. Western Marxists will engage with this as well, but for different reasons—they are committed to utopian abstraction, political disarmament, and a retreat from defending actually existing socialist and anti-imperialist projects in service to a perceived liberal utopian enterprise. Take, for example, Trotskyist denunciations of perceived socialist “degenerations” in Vietnam, Venezuela, China, etc. Losurdo reminds us of the danger here: “When it avoids the national question and the genuinely internationalist task of support for oppressed nations, putative cosmopolitanism or internationalism turns into an uncritical, fanatical chauvinism” (Losurdo 2016, 132). *Herrenvolk* Marxists, on the other hand, are less concerned with considering, or giving lip-service to, emancipatory liberation and are more interested in directly manipulating the machinations of power, in order to secure the already secured, or hoped for, privileges for their own “sacred space.” They would deploy an exclusionary logic that seeks liberation for a privileged in-group at the expense of a Schmittean “enemy,” thereby actively tailing reactionary narratives. While purporting to espouse internationalism, in reality *Herrenvolk* Marxism is a project which serves national chauvinism, and *Herrenvolk* Marxists instinctively refuse Lenin's assertion that

. . . internationalism on the part of oppressors or “great” nations, as they are called (though they are great only in their violence, only great as bullies), must consist not only in the observance of the formal equality of nations but even in an inequality of the oppressor nation, [and thus they have] not grasped the real proletarian attitude to the national question, [and are] still essentially petty bourgeois in [their] point of view [and are], therefore, sure to descend to the bourgeois point of view. (Lenin 2024, 279–280)

Perhaps the most (in)famous example of a *Herrenvolk* Marxist national question tailing social chauvinism was during the collapse of the Second International, whereby each “national” group of socialists tended to follow their own bourgeoisie at the time of World War I. This sidelining of the broader international liberatory project was a major blow and tied the working-class movements’ energies to the interests of their ruling classes. In seeking to place their respective nation above the economic question that transcended borders, they suffered from an analogous error of “workerist” policies which sought short-term improvements in conditions as opposed to the fundamental restructuring of the wage-labor relation. As highlighted by Lenin: “It is perfectly obvious that social-chauvinism’s basic ideological and political content fully coincides with the foundations of opportunism. It is *one and the same* tendency. . . . The idea of class collaboration is opportunism’s main feature” (Lenin 1974a, 242; emphasis in the original).

In a domestic national context, Browderism in the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) can be seen as a continuation of the above processes. Browderism was a *Herrenvolk* deviation developed by Earl Browder, general secretary of CPUSA in the 1930s and 1940s, who promoted American exceptionalism and class collaboration with the bourgeoisie, particularly when it came to considerations of race and gender. This was especially egregious when contrasted with later theorizations by then CPUSA member Claudia Jones, particularly her formulation of “triple oppression” theory. Here, prefiguring Losurdo’s observations in *Class Struggle*, Jones (2024) argued rightly that by also paying proper attention to aspects beyond class, communist parties would attract the most politically advanced aspects of the oppressed populations to their vanguard organizations. These arguments were downplayed and ignored by the CPUSA—and subsequently by the Communist Party of Great Britain—and the political effectiveness of these organizations have since suffered from it.

This strain of *Herrenvolk* Marxist collaboration can also be seen in the downplaying of national recognition struggles, and in the American argument that Jim Crow and civil rights struggles were inconsequential distractions, a stance advanced by Browder’s collaborative class position, which posited that Black Americans had already exercised self-determination by opting for chauvinistic integration into an era of post-World War II American exceptionalism (Haywood 1978).²

Moving on from the *Herrenvolk* Marxist misinterpretation of the national question, other elements of the struggle for recognition have also been championed at the expense of other considerations, also leading to the result of undermining all collective liberation struggles. Angela Davis, in *Women, Race, and Class*, describes the opportunistic women who sought greater emancipation for (white) women, at the expense of those fighting for liberation on the terms of race. Such women are “determined, it seems, to prevent further progress for Black people . . . if it meant that white women might not enjoy the immediate benefits of that progress” (Davis 1981, 71). This form of “white feminism” has

unfortunately persisted and transmogrified into the present day, and it continues to weaken collective struggles for liberation.

Equally, those aiming to fight discrimination against different expressions of gender or sexuality have also been co-opted and/or actively highlighted so as to prioritize their fight for recognition on the backs of others. Take, for example, the phenomenon of “homonationalism,” whereby selective acceptance of non-mainstream genders and sexualities is championed by those who otherwise would oppress groups of people on national, ethnic, race, or other lines (Puar 2007). As observed by Jasib Puar (2007, 338), “settler colonialism has a long history of articulating its violence through the protection of serviceable figures such as women and children, and now the homosexual.” The practice of homonationalism, pinkwashing, or “rainbow imperialism” (see Lahiri 2020) is carried out by nation-states at a propagandistic level (again, the Zionist project is exemplary here), but also, as with the strain of “white feminism” identified above, at an agentic and interpersonal level.

In recent years, we have seen other various combinations of oppressed groups seeking acceptance and/or benefits at the expense of others, which has given rise to the pejorative term “oppression Olympics,” and this is generally held to be a failure of identitarian politics alone. However, we can see similar ideological practices being carried out in the historical examples above, and by *Herrenvolk* Marxists today, whether they espouse economism and ignore the wider struggle for recognition altogether, or only hold up certain elements while ignoring or downplaying others. For example, some tendencies of Trotskyism will outright ignore the national question, but may still organize on an anti-racist basis; or some so-called “patriotic socialists”—a somewhat inconsistent, Strasserist, American reactionary movement we will discuss in more detail below—will chauvinistically overemphasize their own misguided interpretation of the national question while ignoring entirely the gender question (or worse, simply begin tailing reactionary configurations). Following Rockhill, we can now begin to imagine an “ideological field” of Western and *Herrenvolk* Marxism, in which we can locate these various tendencies—and chart the topography of where they may fall—so as to construct a stratigraphy of the wider landscape of the struggle for recognition (Foster and Rockhill 2025, 9).

The historical examples above should illustrate that, in the best of outcomes, these partial strategies will merely be self-defeating, and at their worst, they may result in the construction of their own imagined, and (presumably, aspirationally) real, *kibbutzim*.

These *Herrenvolk* Marxisms complete their “negative image” of liberalism by also ingesting its hermeneutical habits. Western liberals (and many self-professed “Marxists”) today may decide that a sovereign project in the Global South does not deserve their solidarity based on it not living up to some predetermined set of criteria, ignoring the specificities of its historical circumstances and its contemporaneous position in the world-system. Likewise, and inversely, *Herrenvolk* Marxists may not support some element of the struggle for recognition because they have their own set of preconceived determinants for what is “proper” and for what positions will comfortably slot into their idealized image of revolutionary activity. The most chauvinist and class reductionist *Herrenvolk* Marxists, those who wholly reify class, accept—or even champion!—the liberal rubric that “interprets class struggle in reductionist and vulgarly economic terms. Relying on the conceptual couplet liberty/equality, [liberalism] has assigned itself jealous, disinterested love of liberty and branded its opponents as vulgar, envious souls, motivated solely

by materialist interests . . .” (Losurdo 2016, 75). Both groups have their checklists and commit the sin of not placing their object of study in its “concrete historical realization” (Losurdo 2004, 78).

Ultimately, to escape these tar pits of liberal thought, we are arguing for a Losurdian move toward dialectics not as merely a philosophical exercise, but as a practice—a commitment to a kind of *craftwork*—that moves beyond the safe stability of analysis and into an indeterminate but active praxis. A similar proposition is introduced by Frantz Fanon (1986) in his anti-colonial attempt to rearticulate Hegel’s use of the term. Rather than a dialectic that acts upon us as absolute spirit, there are instead many materially contingent and indeterminate dialectics. This understanding, which is applied in Losurdo’s synthesis of the struggle for recognition, prioritizes the diversity of oppositional combat over an academic exercise which might only generate an intellectual artifact of stagnant unity.

Indeed, Losurdo unmasks one of our key ideological enemies as those “Marxists who misrepresent imperialism and the world-historical struggle against it” (Foster and Rockhill 2025, 10)—that is, those who deny the national liberation element within the struggle for recognition. However, we must expand this horizon to include those who misrepresent the *overall* struggle for human emancipation, those who ignore the broader understanding of the struggle for recognition, and commit what Losurdo refers to as a “[m]utilation of the class struggle” (Losurdo 2016, 104). Previously, Western Marxism had been a successful class compromise which hobbled Marxism’s revolutionary potential—and the self-destructive posturing of *Herrenvolk* Marxists has the potential to do the same.

In the contemporary era, particularly in Anglosphere Marxism, *Herrenvolk* Marxists have joined hands with the ruling classes to attack variations of gender and sexuality expression.³ In the United States, the so-called “patriotic socialist” American Communist Party (ACP) exemplifies this alliance, mimicking chauvinist talking points and political stances. Founders of the ACP have contributed to this discourse, including Haz Al-Din, who has claimed there has been a “decline in basic masculine virtues [and] the rise of a kind of effeminization, especially of men,” and Jackson Hinkle, who has unambiguously proclaimed “we need to protect our youth from trans terrorists and propagandists” (quoted in Owen 2024). These positions seem to be in service to Point 17 of ACP’s program, which states that it “[stands] for the cultivation and discovery of a national-continental American culture on the basis of the unique history, geography, and ethnic makeup of the American peoples.”⁴ However, what the ACP deems a “unified American historical, national, and cultural identity”⁵ seems to align with the same vision as the Trump regime—exemplified by the latter’s decision to eliminate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion provisions from both governmental and educational bodies. In 1913, Lenin issued a warning against similar kinds of *Herrenvolk* alliances when he wrote:

This bourgeois . . . tendency is all the more dangerous for its *being concealed* behind the slogan of “national culture.” It is under the guise of national culture . . . [that] the bourgeoisie of *all* nations, are doing their dirty and reactionary work. (Lenin 2024, 31; emphasis in the original)

These American *Herrenvolk* Marxist structures can also manifest themselves in more explicit collaborationist ways. For example, Al-Din (2023) has argued that it is necessary for Marxism to merge with the far-right philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Aleksandr

Dugin.⁶ Meanwhile, Hinkle has had a personal relationship with the US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard at least as far back as 2019 (Jones 2025). And even prior to the establishment of the ACP, a founding figure in the “patriotic socialist” movement, Caleb Maupin, spoke on a panel with Dugin at an “anti-globalization” conference in 2018, attended by many of the European New Right.⁷

In the United Kingdom, organizations such as the Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist) (CPGB-ML) also decry this aspect of the struggle for recognition by reductively and cynically characterizing all engagements with the topic as “. . . a manufactured ideological product purveyed by the bourgeoisie to sow confusion and disunity in the ranks of the working class” (*The Communists* 2019). Additionally, the Communist Party of Britain (CPB) has in recent years expressed transphobic views in various situations: in its *Morning Star* newspaper of February 18, 2020, it printed a comic in which a crocodile is invading a space reserved for newts, but the newts are assured by the crocodile that “I’m transitioning as [sic] a newt.” The newspaper later apologized for the printing of the cartoon after receiving complaints from financial backers, such as the large British trade union Unison (Snape 2020). Despite this apology, in its *Communist Women* article of November 2022, the narrative of “invasive predators” was again used in its argument that self-identification laws passed in Scotland would create “a loophole for dangerous men to change their legal identities to gain access to women and children.”⁸ These examples go so far in their tailing of reactionary ideas that they completely echo their supposed enemy’s baseless talking points and scare stories—as well as utilizing their same tactics of hiding behind obfuscatory legal arguments—all the while ignoring the reality that these communities are already targeted at higher rates of persecution and risk of violence. These positions contribute to the deep historical *Herrenvolk* Marxist stance taken against the inclusion of issues of race, sexual equality, gay rights, etc., especially when those issues were the primary grounds for capitulation to class compromise. These arguments are but a few examples of the positions taken across many (but not all) communist party organizations and publications in the Anglosphere.

Yet these stances are not devoid of philosophical foundations. One of the more troubling trends among *Herrenvolk* (and Western) Marxist organizers and political theorists alike is their interpretation of “the dialectic” (note the word *the*) as a discrete object that merely acts upon us rather than as an indeterminate tool to be wielded by organizers. This argument has grown out of conservative interpretations of Hegel—and, as Marx became colonized and misinterpreted within the Western academy, we also began to see this kind of oversimplification become endemic—particularly within the hegemony of the “New Left” and their contemporary outgrowths. However, this is not only a long 20th-century phenomenon. Losurdo gives us numerous historical examples of this kind of deficiency, referring to these stances as the aforementioned “mutilation of the class struggle” (Losurdo 2016, 101–117). Losurdo then encourages us to return to the roots of Marxist analysis and not succumb to either (a) the ossified logics of unity (common with conservative Hegelians and Heideggerians); or (b) the recolonization of radical rhetoric via the dispersion of meaningless and indecisive multiplicities (common with Foucauldians and other postmodern French theorists).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, those inoculated against this way of thinking seem to be the organic intellectuals engaged in actual national liberation struggles—those who directly apply the use-value of dialectics. This is enacted through the struggle for recognition, and

with particular attention to articulations of categories like race and gender, as serious sites of generative oppositional combat within societies. Where *Herrenvolk* Marxists may reduce race and gender as merely backward ideas relegated to the superstructure, where class is the only expression of the “real,” we instead argue that this stance is wrapped up in an inaccurate conservative dialectics that Losurdo, through his method, also illustrates as woefully lacking. Losurdo urges us that this kind of contextualization is paramount:

[The concepts in question] need to be contextualized; it is necessary to take into account the ideological presuppositions that are embedded in the criteria, and focus upon the concrete social and political context of these positions, as well as of [the speaker’s] overall philosophical view. (Losurdo 2004, 95)

Universal Marxism

In response to the depredations and vagaries of Western Marxism outlined above, and moreover following the complete failures of any political projects that have been associated with these trends, Foster and Rockhill (2025), channeling Losurdo, have called for the rebirth of a “global” or “universal” Marxism to become dominant again in the academic and popular ideology of the Western left, doing away with the fully co-opted and self-undermining “imperial Marxism.”⁹

To rebuild a robust and effective Marxism, one which can respond to the multifarious and existential threats of capitalism, “Universal Marxism [must be] invested in critical scrutiny and precise materialist evaluation” (Foster and Rockhill 2025, 16). At the same time, it must also recognize imperialism as the principal contradiction, while once again recognizing the significance of the *real, existing* national question which stretches beyond utopianism, reductive economism, opportunism, and/or the Marxological abstractions that have plagued Western and *Herrenvolk* Marxism. This includes dealing with the messy reality of extending solidarity to nations actually attempting to build sovereign projects (whether or not they are explicitly socialist) in order to confront the world-system of imperialism and the resurfacing of an insurgent fascism.

However, as outlined above, the understanding of class struggle in terms of the Losurdian struggle for recognition is necessary, and we argue that a true “Universal Marxism” needs to go further than the national question and broaden the sites of struggle to include the additional questions highlighted by Losurdo—those of race and gender. Rockhill has identified how Western Marxism “emerged out of the social chauvinism . . . that turned up its nose at the extra-European anticolonial revolutions” (Foster and Rockhill 2025, 6), and we argue that so too did *Herrenvolk* Marxism dialectically emerge out of these racial and sexual chauvinisms *while also extending beyond them*. For effective responses, these categories all require precise historical materialist evaluation—revealing their places in relation to questions of (re)production—so as to properly inform our theory and praxis. As Losurdo (2016, 79) reminds us: “‘Humanism’ is ‘real’ insofar as it can identify and realize universality in specific struggles.” Likewise, we must remember the complexity and specificity of all articulations of struggle; we must always analyze and be alert to the reality that “there is no class struggle that cannot be instrumentalized by the dominant power and integrated into a general project of a conservative or reactionary stamp” (Losurdo 2016, 280).

These conclusions are not reserved for academic contexts only, but are instead borne out of living struggles. For a living, contemporary example of this kind of Marxism in practice, one need only turn to the recent passing of the 2022 Family Code in Cuba, written in consultation with the population, which secured rights for women, children, people with disabilities, LGBTQI+ groups, and more.¹⁰ The draft of the proposed amendments was published over a year before the vote was scheduled and nearly 80,000 town hall meetings were formed over the course of the year to allow for democratic input. Over 6 million Cubans (out of a total population of around 11 million) participated in these meetings, making over 300,000 suggestions to the proposal, which led to a modification of 48% of the original draft. The new law was passed by two-thirds of the Cuban voters with roughly 75% of the population turning out to vote. The new law allowed for a broader understanding of what a “family” could be, shifting the definitional familial framework from one of “custody” to one of “responsibility” (Conley 2022).

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine has also expressed this rearticulation very clearly in 2022 when it wrote: “In the context of national liberation, the task of democratic and social struggle becomes an urgent one, including the freedom and equality of women and the achievement of their rights” (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine 2025, 662).

These fronts in the struggle for recognition are clearly where a revivifying fascism is building its mass base and, as such, a vibrant and effective mass culture of Universal Marxism in the West can only be built by becoming a vanguard on these issues. As Georgi Dimitrov reminds us:

... before the establishment of a fascist dictatorship, bourgeois governments usually pass through a number of preliminary stages and adopt a number of reactionary measures which directly facilitate the accession to power of fascism. Whoever does not fight the reactionary measures of the bourgeoisie and the growth of fascism at these preparatory stages *is not in a position to prevent the victory of fascism, but, on the contrary, facilitates that victory.* (Dimitrov 1978, 10; emphasis in the original)

To abandon these elements of the struggle will only result in the counter-productive *Herrenvolk* Marxism laid out above, and this is as much of a dead-end as Western Marxism has proven to be. Through a “negation of the negation” (of both Western Marxism and *Herrenvolk* Marxism) we must return to a Universal Marxism that fully encompasses the broad, materialist understanding of the struggle for recognition. As far back as 1848, Marx and Engels ended the second chapter of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* by asserting that “[t]he free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (Marx and Engels 1898, 43), and it is only upon this basis of “recognition” that a Universal Marxism, sufficient to meet the significant challenges that await us, must be built.

Notes

1. Of course, this is also something that Lenin himself observed as far back as 1916: “Whoever expects a ‘pure’ social revolution will never live to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without understanding what revolution is” (Lenin 1974b, 356).

2. Perhaps unsurprisingly (considering our claims of scalar class collaboration), this kind of Browderist hostility toward Black liberation in the United States was also a stance held by some Trotskyists. Take, for example, American Trotskyist Max Shachtman who, in 1933, claimed that “[t]he American Negroes do not constitute a nation separate and apart from the rest of the population of the country” (Shachtman 2003, 71). He also stated that “a ‘national revolution’ in the Black Belt is a reactionary utopia . . .” (101).
3. Again, we are not arguing that gender and sexuality, understood as aspects of the struggle for recognition, are autonomous and/or superior to a more economic understanding of class struggle. It should be understood that re-affirming stricter gender roles is a (mostly) right-wing project, informed by a concern with buffeting a declining rate of profit via a better regimented and more docile force for labor (re)production. Moreover, the fact that this is a major target and bugbear for the “Reactionary International” research consortium (see <https://reactionary.international/>) should highlight the importance of defending these populations, and should be seen more as an important data point than as a co-optation, which some cultural elements of corporate/diplomatic communities briefly championed as a form of “identity politics.”
4. See <https://acp.us/program>.
5. See <https://acp.us/program>.
6. Dugin in particular is part of a long philosophical tradition attempting to develop what scholars of the political right have termed “The Third Position” or what is also sometimes referred to as “red-brown alliances”—attempts at blending or obscuring far-right and far-left political philosophies, which adherents claim is in opposition to, and transcends, both communism and capitalism. Dugin’s *Fourth Political Theory* and his notion of neo-Eurasianism are within this lineage and have influenced the ACP directly. For example, the claim that there can even be a “unified American historical, national, and cultural identity” is borrowed directly from Dugin’s proposal that every “ethnos” has intrinsic and immutable characteristics tied to a specific geography. Even more telling is the fact that Dugin developed this idea specifically to combat proletarian internationalism. For more on the direct linkages between Dugin and American techno-politics, see Genovese (forthcoming).
7. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oods2wkTScY>.
8. See <https://communistparty.org.uk/app/uploads/2022/11/Communist-Women-November-2022.pdf>.
9. To further clarify, we are not using the term “universal” in any sense of an idealist, ahistorical, transcendental process that is removed from material antagonisms and contradictions. Rather, we are deploying the term as a signifier for a global Marxism; a term which has also been adopted and discussed by scholars like Losurdo, Rockhill, Foster, and others.
10. See <https://instituciones.sld.cu/fatesa/files/2022/09/MANUAL-PARA-LA-LECTURA-DEL-NUEVO-CÓDIGO-DE-LAS-FAMILIAS.pdf>.

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