

Introduction

Politics does not reflect majorities, it constructs them.

Stuart Hall

We know, deep down, that something is wrong. Our material conditions – the pay in our pockets, the roof over our heads, the stuff that we buy, the services we rely on, the planet that sustains us – are getting worse. → “inevitable” collapse - Yurchak (2006) - similar feeling in end of USSR etc.

A friend, in the middle of a painful breakup, informs her letting agent that they’ll need to take her ex off the tenancy contract and put it in her name instead. They email back promptly: new name means new contract, which means an extra £300 a month in rent to keep up with market rates (and, supposedly, to compensate the landlord ‘for the disruption’). Just what you need in the midst of heartbreak. This is not unusual. Hardly a week goes by without hearing from someone saying that their landlord has hiked the rent; either they find the money somewhere or they move out. In April 2024, the average UK rent had increased by 8.9 per cent since the previous year¹ – far above the 3.4 per cent rate of headline inflation over the same period. Almost three million people, despite being in full-time work, are in problem debt, according to a report by StepChange, Britain’s largest debt advice service.² Housing costs more. Food costs more. Bills cost more.

Even the National Health Service, once a byword for British excellence, is on a downward trend. Since 2010, waiting lists have ballooned, and medical staff (tempted by better pay and conditions elsewhere) have left in droves.³ Navigating the corridors of a labyrinthine hospital just outside of London to find my sister after she'd had an episode of bad health, I learned that it **had received £140 million just ten years ago; and yet there were signs of dilapidation all around.** The paint was flaking, bits of ceiling crumbling from where water had intruded, the corners of steps hastily patched up with hazard tape from where they'd fallen into disrepair. The smell of chips permeated the air. I finally found my sister, wheezing into tubes: she was still on the same trolley that she was wheeled in on the day before. When staff turned up, they were **cheerful and efficient, but plainly overstretched.** There are too many people much sicker than my sister, and too few to treat them. I wonder who would have helped her go to the bathroom or plugged the loose cable of her nebuliser back in if I hadn't taken the day off work. But the mere fact that she was seen at all, that she eventually got a proper bed, and that she didn't come back with a secondary infection means this counts as a positive experience in the NHS.

On the way back home, outside the underground station, I saw a homeless woman with purpling bruises on her face, her arms stick-thin. Later that day, I watched a man scream obscenities at a younger woman, substance use problems written all over her. **London, the fifth-richest city in the world, teems with people who need the care of the state and aren't getting it.** Eight in ten primary school teachers in England say they've had to spend their own money to buy items for kids who are showing up to school hungry, or without proper clothing.⁴ Half of all young mothers report skipping meals to feed their children.⁵ Politicians cut ribbons at food banks, heap praise on charitable efforts and say little about the causes of hunger. Were they to speak, they might be expected to do something about it.

Thinking about how that guy in the park framed it - the scarcity.
- oh - also MaHei - The Capital Order.

As often by

Park guy → "charity begins at home"

→ what did he mean

- Food winners taking in 2nd Jobs to find supplies - my Aunt?

Happiness slumps. Year by year, the percentage of people (and especially, younger people) reporting that they experience some sort of anxiety ticks upwards, and all the self-care in the world is unable to make a dent.⁶ We can practise active listening and setting healthy boundaries all we like, but the ground on which we form connections with others feels increasingly unstable. We drift through jobs, relationships and crappy house-shares, while floating somewhere amongst perfumed clouds the world's billionaires add the equivalent of Italy's entire GDP to their wealth in just a single year.⁷

Anxiety is not merely an affliction of 'generation rent'. Even those with property to their names have reason to feel uneasy. Our population is ageing, but the joys of longer life are cut with the fear that we might not be looked after as we grow older and more frail.

There are more than five million unpaid carers in England and Wales;⁸ in the United States, about 14 per cent of the population provide unpaid care to the elderly.⁹ Women of my mum's age increasingly find themselves sandwiched between the care needs of their parents and those of their children or grandchildren. For anyone who isn't wildly rich, or so utterly destitute that even our atrophied welfare state is compelled to kick in, being cared for in old age is no sure thing. The NHS has a legal duty to cover care if you're diagnosed with cancer. Dementia? Good luck pal. Meanwhile billionaires pour money into reversing the signs of bodily ageing and trying to upload their consciousness into digital immortality.

Drought in southern Europe and further afield – including Morocco and Brazil – jacks up the price of tomatoes, olive oil and sugar. In 2022, temperatures soared above 40°C in the UK for the first time since records began. The next year saw the UK rack up its second highest temperature in our recorded history. The North Sea was on average several degrees warmer in 2024 than it had ever been before. We huff at each other and mumble platitudes about how mad it all is. When the rain pours down in sheets, ruining crops in the fields, we all make the same joke about how we could use a bit

seemed to be a bit of
inference to a bit of
it.

Jurcheck A. 2006 → of global warming. Even the art of British understatement becomes absurd in the face of a global existential crisis. 'Did you hear about so-and-so?' 'Yeah, they had to flee their hotel in Greece because of the wildfires.' Holiday ruined, what a shame. The ordinary, humdrum language of life struggles to contain an increasingly chaotic reality. Some things – like that there were more excess deaths in England during the hottest day of the summer in 2022 than there were British Forces personnel killed in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars combined – are simply not said at all.

And what about all those goods that we're burning the planet for? Clothes and phones, both designed to be replaced at the earliest opportunity. A top from Shein rips on the second wear, and I try not to think about the woman who sewed it. Technology connects us to more people than at any other point in human history, and yet loneliness hollows us out from the inside. For fun, I spend hours on an app that makes me hate myself. I watch a genocide¹⁰ unfold on infinite scroll, the shredded limbs of children following selfies and engagement announcements. My best friend swipes a catalogue of men that'll ghost her. Instagram, Hinge, TikTok, Twitter¹¹ – it's like trying to live on the empty calories of Skittles because they approximate the sweetness of fruit. Satisfaction is fleeting; fulfilment is elusive. This isn't social connection. Capitalism, in commodifying every second of our waking lives, has managed to come up with a form of leisure that's even more alienating than labour. We gaze at blue screens and yearn for the warmth of people. The sons and daughters of the Global North, dead-eyed and flat, scroll consumer products that will provide neither fulfilment nor joy.

Rough sleepers are curled up against storefronts, unsheltered and freezing on some of the most valuable real estate in the world. Rivers and coastlines are pumped full of human faeces, drinking water teems with microplastics and chemicals whose effects we don't understand, and there is no democratic lever to fix it. A full-time job no longer guarantees a life above the poverty line. In real

terms, we're getting paid less, squeezed more by rents, and are suffocated by a sense of societal decline.

Capitalism, says a certain sort of person, has lifted more people out of poverty than any other system ever. But for most people holding this book, our time is defined by inequality, insecurity, lack of community and information overload. These are collective conditions, but they leave us feeling atomised and abandoned. The silent question, for lots of people, is 'why are things like this?' In previous centuries, enough people asking that out loud might result in an uprising. Instead, we in the Global North are curiously deadened. So if the system is failing to result in making it better every year to be a human being – if we're not getting happier, or feeling that the trajectory we're on is a good one – why are we paralysed by inaction? That is the question that this book is trying to answer.

I'm not the first to attempt to grapple with this. Like a lot of people, the first politics books I read were all trying to explain the origins of the deeply unequal world that I lived in. I got my first copy of *The Communist Manifesto* when I was thirteen. It wasn't because I was particularly interested in German political theory, or had heard much about Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. I just spent a lot of time loitering in bookshops at that age, hoping to cultivate an aura of wistful intelligence and catch the eye of a boy who'd go for that kind of thing. None did. But slowly, my pocket money transformed into a bookshelf of political texts in my bedroom.

I learned about something called *The Feminine Mystique*, pronouncing Betty Friedan's name wrong well into my twenties. I read *The Beauty Myth* – both furious at how a male-dominated society manipulates girls into starving themselves into ghostliness and quietly stung that I didn't have the willpower to do the same. I got my hands on the work of Frantz Fanon and considered the morality of political violence for the first time. I thought about the version of history I learned – that Britain had benignly administered

Will be interesting to see what the findings are
into this → paralysis is something I'm also concerned about.

an empire, until it didn't fancy having one any more – and contrasted it to the reality of bloody struggle. I encountered, for the first time, the idea that the race and gender identities that we're born into might be constructed in the interests of programming a profoundly unequal society.

And, though I didn't meet the sensitive scholar of my dreams at Palmers Green Bookshop, I did begin one of the political relationships which has defined my life. Instead of becoming someone's girlfriend, I became a Marxist.

When I got to university, there was no shortage of people interested in these ideas. And, returning to the works of Marx, I felt again the revelatory thrill of reading *The Communist Manifesto*. A slim, breathless pamphlet, *The Communist Manifesto* was intended to be passed from hand to hand amongst workers. In 1847, when it was written, Europe was in the throes of political revolution. But the upheavals that swept the continent were baby potatoes compared to what Marx and Engels predicted were coming down the line. There would be a proletarian revolution – the overthrow of the ownership class by the working class – and it would be caused by capitalism itself.

Marx and Engels came up with a model for understanding how history-defining change, like the French Revolution, happens in a society. Sorry to the Oxford debating nerds out there, but it's not a battle of bons mots in the marketplace of ideas. Instead, Marx and Engels theorised that social transformation happens when an economic class becomes strong enough, or big enough, to overthrow the one above it. Got a merchant class that's making money, but locked out of the aristocratic chambers of state power? Say goodbye to feudalism, and hello to liberal democracy. Political systems are a product of economic interests, not abstract ideas. Though individuals may change the course of history, it's only the distribution of class forces in a society that puts them in a position of opportunity to do so in the first place.

It's where it does me really
- economic interests
aren't separable from
abstract ideas - The economy is not abstract.

Marx and Engels understood their present moment of mid-nineteenth-century capitalism as being defined by the private ownership of the means of production (i.e. the resources needed to create goods and services). Rather than being geographically tied to landowners, workers sold their labour-power (i.e. their capacity to do work) to that ownership class, in return for wages. They moved to the new urban centres of industry, to labour in dark satanic mills. These workers, with nothing to sell but their time, were labelled the proletariat. The ownership class, meanwhile, was dubbed the bourgeoisie.

You don't need a doctorate in political theory to see that, despite writing in the early bloom of capitalism, Marx and Engels predicted much of the harvest. In the rich West, we live surrounded by the morbid symptoms of capitalist devastation. That's why we can't shake the feeling that something is deeply and profoundly wrong. Wasn't capitalism meant to catapult us, rich and optimistic, into a brighter future?

Perhaps you view all these problems as merely an unfortunate series of coincidences. Or maybe, like Marx and Engels, you connect the dots between the presence of extreme wealth for the very few and the process of impoverishment for everyone else.

Marx predicted globalisation, foreseeing that the insatiable need for new markets would see the bourgeoisie slip the surly bonds of their home nations and spread over the face of the earth. Corporations, international banking institutions and supply chains have made capitalism a planet-spanning and tightly interconnected system. He understood that the tendency of competition was monopoly, that smaller businesses would fail and that corporate giants would feast. In 1999, Amazon made up just 5 per cent of the American e-commerce market; by 2023 it was nearly 40 per cent.¹² And as Jeff Bezos' growing share of a growing e-retail sector became ever more dominant, high street stores shuttered and once thriving neighbourhoods became ghost towns. Capitalism has been ceaseless

- petit-bourgeoisie & impoverished? missing or irrelevant? is a summary given.
 where these figures?

in its drive to extract profit from the gifts of nature; now, even the human attention span is a product that can be parcelled up, bought and sold. Our personal information, online habits and meta-data are valuable commodities. Capitalism has, in the name of economic development, created ecological wastelands.

What Marx and Engels thought would happen was that, with the tendency amongst the bourgeoisie being for the big fish to gobble up the small fry, a greater percentage of wealth would end up concentrated in fewer hands. The middle classes would be squeezed out of assets and would join the ranks of the proletariat. Polarisation of economic classes would grow as the proletariat got bigger. But they got one massive thing wrong. They thought that, eventually, the proletariat would be pissed off enough to overthrow the bourgeoisie and seize the means of production for themselves. The engines of industry would be collectively, rather than privately, owned. In this way, they theorised, **capitalism produces its own gravediggers – it creates the very class of people that will end it.**

This – spoiler alert – did not happen. Though inequality today between those who own assets and those who don't is growing, and in the UK, property affordability is at its worst level since 1876,¹³ **revolution feels further away than ever.** Why? In essence, this is what *Minority Rule* is going to show: how culture, politics and unequal stakes in the economy combine to fragment, weaken and inhibit working-class power. We're not lumped with falling wages, a degraded environment and a generalised sense of hopelessness because humans spontaneously got worse at improving society. It's because **wealth concentrations warp politics and stunt our ability to shape society for the better.** Because **if you can't see the world clearly, you can't change it.** I'll show you **how the media and much of our political class collaborate to make identity-driven conflicts – the so-called 'culture wars' – the most prominent issues of the day.** We'll see how trivial non-events are blown up out of all proportion to fuel a **culture of distraction.** I'll examine the **tactic of weaponised**

has ref'd Fanon.
Marx, Hall,
Friedman
→ bringing back
in
Building on or bypassing
existing works →

Journalistic v. Theoretical voice → intervention is in
public / discourse

– persuasive text more than exploratory.

Summary → Racism, culture wars → "minority
grabs" against imagined "white working
class" in order to preserve status quo.

grievance, which manufactures a false conflict between class equality and racial justice, and breaks down the possibility of a united working-class movement. And finally, we'll look at how the most ardent defenders of predatory capitalism politically profit from the very problems they create, by shoehorning perceptions of a very real social decline into a narrative about racial demographics. All of these tactics are in the service of facilitating one of the biggest wealth grabs the world has ever seen.

Throughout this book, the idea of 'class consciousness' will crop up again and again. What I mean by this is how people think of their social status and economic conditions, who they feel themselves to have common cause with and who they perceive as their opponents. And what we'll see is that there are huge, ideology-producing machines which work to inhibit, splinter and weaken class consciousness based on economic status and steer resentment instead towards an extreme fixation on culture and identity. I'll show you how the left embraced an individualistic and competitive model of victimhood; how the media machine functions to pump out trivial outrage-bait; what makes the political class so obsessed with the pursuit of headlines; the way stoking of anti-immigration moral panics and the atrophying of working-class institutions like trade unions and council housing produced a right-wing shift in the political consensus; and how a manufactured demographic panic directs working-class anger horizontally and downwards rather than up at elites.

Media and politics work on cues and misdirection. Like a magician pointing the way they want us to look while the rabbit disappears, we have been encouraged to focus our anger on a new set of villains. Who are these villains? Just open a newspaper to find out. Our villains are asylum seekers (note: don't call them refugees, that makes them sound too human), coming to these shores on unsafe dinghies purely for the hell of it. They're the 'lefty lawyers' wielding human rights law to stop deportations. They're Just Stop Oil,

Insulate Britain or Extinction Rebellion – inconveniencing the public, winding everybody up by reminding us of climate devastation. Transgender people, who want nothing more than to lurk in toilets and cause distress. In fact, they're the woke more generally: 'wokies', 'tofu-eating wokerati', 'woke students', 'woke warriors' and the 'out of touch metropolitan elite'. These **nebulously defined individuals** range from diversity and inclusion managers to anyone who pipes up and makes you feel like a bit of a bigot. You can throw in Black Lives Matter too. Not black people, you understand, that would be racist: just those who protest when black people are killed by police.

Activists, whether protesting against climate change or racial injustice, are **routinely described as 'selfish', 'shrill', 'disruptive' and 'hypocritical'**. The feeling is that they've somehow hijacked your eyeballs, forcing you to pay attention – not to their cause but to them as individuals. They are too noisy, too visible, and demand an unfair share of attention. Their outsize presence in the attention economy is presented as evidence that progressive harpies wield too much power and influence (despite being on the losing side of every General Election between 2010 and 2024). **The overarching narrative is that, by virtue of their place in the attention economy and the hyper-visibility of their identities, these groups and individuals want to impose what this book will call 'Minority Rule'.**

Minority Rule is the paranoid fear that identity minorities and progressives are conniving to oppress majority populations. It's a meta-narrative, a big story told through countless speeches, TV segments, articles, videos, books, policy papers and social media posts. **It articulates the idea that the power of ordinary people has been curtailed, stolen or attacked by an elite minority.** But instead of that elite minority being defined in material terms (as in, the real ruling minority of hedge-fund managers, press barons, landlords, corporations and oligarchs), they're defined as a mishmash coalition of ethnic minorities, graduates, sexual and gender minorities,

- getting at the game theory as
Lawson, A. (2021)

environmental activists and people who live in cities and regularly drink frothy coffees. This isn't because anyone really thinks that these types of people are actually the driving force behind wealth inequality, but because these minorities are opposed to the cultural values and interests of those who've been dubbed 'the white working class'. This is the thesis of Douglas Murray (*The Madness of Crowds*), Matthew Goodwin (*The New Elite*) and pretty much anybody who writes for *The Spectator*. They're telling a story about institutional capture – you, the decent and silenced majority, have been oppressed by identity and political minorities who've seized control of the levers of culture. You are being ruled by minorities. ^{"them"}

The Minority Rule story – that majority interests are threatened by minorities – is used as political cover to justify authoritarian and antidemocratic measures that threaten everyone. The unpopularity of climate groups like Extinction Rebellion, Insulate Britain and Just Stop Oil has been used by the UK government to push through sweeping anti-protest legislation. Asylum seekers crossing the Channel are cited by leading Conservatives as a reason to leave the European Convention on Human Rights.¹⁴ Jair Bolsonaro's scaremongering about trans and gay people in Brazil served as a distraction while he used the courts and police to crush political dissent. And the permanent state of culture war in the US, with the Black Lives Matter movement, LGBTQ people and others being accused of imposing 'ideologies' like Critical Race Theory on the population, has culminated in five individuals on the Supreme Court overturning abortion rights for millions of women. Ah well: at least those judges weren't drag queens reading storybooks to children.

Minority Rule works to obscure, prop up and extend *actual* forms of minority rule. It directs working-class anger away from wealth and political inequalities, and towards identity minorities who've been made into scapegoats. Financial elites are missing from this big story (unless they're a corporation like Sainsbury's or Budweiser, who've done something 'woke' like support Black History Month or partner

with a trans influencer). The scaremongering of Minority Rule breaks down the power of the working class by fragmenting them into warring identity groups – white working class pitted against ethnic minorities, trans people against women, city against small town. By leveraging paranoia and resentment in media and politics, the ruling class use the Minority Rule story to fragment the economic majority (those of us who have to live off wages, and not asset wealth) into culturally opposed minority groups. Those who would otherwise see common cause with others of a similar class position are made to think of them as villains, and themselves as victims.

The explanation for how this occurred is a complicated one with deep roots. But bear with me.

In order to account for the failure of the status quo to deliver rising standards, it's important to look at how politics has changed over the last eighty-or-so years. Politics, in essence, has become a spectator sport. Party political membership has fallen, as has trade union membership. Big protests – against racism, austerity or climate change – flare up every few years. But the number of people consistently engaged in political activity is really quite small, and the number of people with the power to easily influence political results is even smaller.

Lyndon B. Johnson supposedly once said that the first rule of politics is learning how to count. And in a democracy like ours, people don't determine a government: places do. It doesn't matter if you win a seat by seven votes or 70,000; get enough constituencies, and baby, you're in government.

Younger people, by which I mean the under-forty-fives, are stacked up in electorally useless cities. If you live in a place like Tottenham, Manchester Gorton or Liverpool Walton, nobody cares about your vote. Sorry. It's a done deal, you live in one of the surest bets in the country. The Conservatives know you're not worth bothering with, and Labour can focus on people living in constituencies with tighter margins. The voters worth the most are

"Language of politics"

How long ago was this article written? pre-Gorton & Benton by-election?

if the Greens provide
somewhere for these
constituencies to go:

the ones who can be tempted from one party to another. That way, you're not just gaining a vote, you're taking one away from your closest rival. In football terms, you'd call that a six-pointer. Everybody else can go hang.

Where we experience politics most of the time, outside of the context of an election, is where we spend increasing amounts of our time: screens. We scroll endlessly, argue with relatives and strangers, share articles and videos, and post like our lives depend on it. Though polling shows trust in media falling, thanks to the twenty-four-hour news cycle and the dizzying speed of online content churn, we consume more of it than ever.

The image that we get of the world through the media is warped and distorted, like a hall of mirrors. Issues which are huge, such as the climate crisis or demographic ageing, are small in comparison to who's up and who's down this week in Westminster. Panels of pundits and talking heads aren't assembled to talk about why living standards are falling, but, rather, whether an Oxfam cartoon depicted a well-known children's author as a transphobe, whether *Fawlty Towers* is racist, and whether Prince Harry should be stripped of his titles after running off with Meghan Markle. The grotesque inflation of these trivial issues relative to the systemic and existential crises facing our society constitutes nothing less than reality manipulation. We are being robbed of our right to see the world around us clearly.

Attention, as well as being a commodity that can be monetised through digital platforms, is a psychological wage. We know this from when we are children: think of the heaven of basking in the glow of an attentive parent or teacher. To be recognised is to be told that you matter, that your life has worth and that you have a place in the world. There's nothing unhealthy about that. But our media and politics leverage the psychological wages of attention in a way that is utterly corrosive and warping. Though there is no shortage of content that flatters 'ordinary Brits' and 'hard-working Americans',

conversation with the
guy in the park
- the problem becomes
other people.
and fears of being
left behind.

this isn't to let us know that we're loved. It's more about telling us who is hated. The message of who is good, moral and decent is conveyed through repeated propagandising about who is deviant, dangerous and illegitimate. → c.f. Sedgwick - Epistemology of the Closet.

This is where identity politics, and how it has been weaponised against the very movements which generated it, comes in. Identity politics was originally formulated in the 1970s, during a wave of black radicalism, feminist consciousness-raising and trade union activism, as a way to incorporate feminist and anti-racist critiques of society into a wider anti-capitalist framework. It wasn't so much about individual identity – the question of 'who am I?' – but looking at how collective experiences of race, capital and gender form the basis of a movement against both material and social inequalities.

But this changed sharply from 1979 onwards, when Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan and their accomplices in billionaire-controlled media established a new political paradigm. Corporate profit was presented as one and the same as the public good. As the great cultural critic Stuart Hall wrote in his famous paper 'The Neoliberal Revolution', Thatcher's mission was 'to break trade union power – "the enemy within", as she put it'. Instead of promoting the values of cradle-to-grave welfarism, people were herded towards 'new, individualised, competitive solutions: "get on your bike", become self-employed or a share-holder, buy your council house, invest in the property-owning democracy'.¹⁵ A neoliberal consensus emerged across the West, and the idea that governments had responsibility for the distribution of wealth, the provision of essential services like water and energy, and the size of the financial sector relative to manufacturing, was laughed out of town. By the 1990s the grand ideological battles of history had supposedly ended, socialism was defeated and everyone (in the words of John Prescott) was middle class now. Talk of class politics, of workers struggling against the forces of capital, was as retro as pipe-smoking and

c.f. Roberts and
Jewclawson - Movement
→ Intersectionality

Religion as Doctrine vs. The Market as Doctrine.

donkey jackets. The power of government was dwarfed by the power of the markets.

The big questions of how to run an economy, like whether there should be price controls on certain goods, or particular industries owned by the state, receded from political view. And in this context, identity politics left behind anti-capitalist values. The goal was no longer to overthrow an unjust and hierarchical system, but to be represented better within it.

While issues might involve activist or interest groups as they did before, such as Black Lives Matter, Extinction Rebellion or Stonewall, these groups are now dragged into a media battle between identities and their assigned values. The success of your cause isn't measured in policy wins – it's measured in airtime. Politics takes place within a competitive attention economy. So a news story about Sainsbury's supporting Black History Month is folded into a war between 'woke' graduates versus 'the white working class', the demand for trans equality is framed as trans activists versus women, and anything to do with anti-black racism (whether it's a protest about police violence, or statues of slavers) is BLM versus everybody else. Identity politics has come to describe the fight about how we see ourselves, rather than what kind of society we want to have.

This form of individualised and liberal (as in, perfectly comfortable with the existence of capitalism) identity politics has, to be fair, been somewhat successful. Though more diverse representation hasn't delivered the post-racial, post-bigotry utopia that some may have dreamed of (and certainly hasn't addressed issues like incarceration, wealth inequality, exploitation or state violence), it has resulted in profound cultural shifts. In a matter of decades, a great deal has changed in some aspects of the lived experience of identity minorities.

Racists can no longer be entirely confident that bandying around slurs in the workplace will be totally consequence-free; there is greater awareness and sensitivity around the language used to

can yes- assigned
like gender → externally
clashed.

describe minority identities; there has been a great deal of de-stigmatisation around same-sex relationships. The kinds of faces and identities visible in film, television, music and advertising are a lot more diverse in terms of race, gender and sexuality than they used to be. I don't want to belittle the emotional impact of this change for people who aren't used to seeing their identities presented in a positive light. As W. E. B. Du Bois pointed out, to only see yourself as a figure of 'crime or ridicule'¹⁶ is a form of oppression. While wealth inequalities grow ever wider, there has been – at least – some redistribution in the psychological wage of attention.

But this can be manipulated. Though identity minorities are objects of fear and derision, presented as an enemy within for wanting to impose Minority Rule, they're also given a degree of social prestige by being acknowledged as minorities. Recognised identity minorities like people of colour, some of those with disabilities or LGBTQ people get the consolation of attention. While this attention doesn't necessarily convert into justice or systemic change, it does at least establish a sense of public importance. That's not nothing in our information-saturated, discourse-obsessed attention economy. As a way of muddying the waters, dividing the working class and driving a backlash against some of the cultural gains made by minorities, right-wing elites have developed a strategy that I call the Minority Game.

The Minority Game involves minority identities being disparaged but also weaponised against one another. Women are simultaneously the sharp end of the spear in transphobic moral panics and characterised as censorious and finger-wagging in the wake of the #MeToo movement. During Jeremy Corbyn's tenure as Labour leader, antisemitism became the cause célèbre of the racist and reactionary right, who accused the socialist wing of politics of being an existential threat to Jewish people in the UK. The very same individuals who argued that accusations of racism are used to shut down free speech (see Melanie Phillips' claim that 'Islamophobia is a

fiction to shut down debate')¹⁷ also insisted that the left were an illegitimate political force, institutionally and irredeemably antisemitic because of their sympathy with Muslims and the Palestinian cause (see Melanie Phillips again: 'Jeremy Corbyn isn't the cause of left-wing Jew hate, he's the result of it').¹⁸ While identity minorities are presented as wielding illegitimate or disproportionate cultural power (moral panics around cancel culture spring from this central narrative), and should be mistrusted or ignored, the silent majority are bestowed the social capital that comes from identity politics. They're framed as being the 'real' victims of identity-based oppression.

This is encouraged by a media which wants you to identify with stock characters who participate in the culture war. Power dynamics are reversed, so that those with wealth, power and status are depicted as being bullied and terrorised by people without it. The newspaper columnist is a victim of social media users, the aristocrat pal of the Queen is a victim of an anti-racist lynch mob, the multi-millionaire novelist is besieged by transgender women. By being recognised as a victim, you can direct anger towards other individuals or groups. This is very useful for elites, who can dress themselves up as the downtrodden, or present themselves as speaking on their behalf.

The white working class are set up in competition with people of colour demanding racial justice, despite the fact that white working-class people are oppressed on the basis of their class. Anti-racists are accused by conservatives of marginalising the white working class by taking up media space and visibility. All the while, those in power get away with imposing the economic policies which have impoverished the working class in the first place. The working class, therefore, have their power as the majority of the labour market undermined, because they are presented as a minority group in society. And anti-racists are also undermined, for the very same reason that they're advocating for minority groups in society. This is

→ "media"

as having wants



as a singular entity - like "The West", "The Left"



Spivak - Subaltern

the purpose of the Minority Game: to lift language from the collective struggle of minority identity groups, make it impossible to organise politically around shared interests, and use the language of identity politics to undermine and attack progressive political projects.

This book isn't an academic examination of the forces that shape our society. It's a way of making sense of the work that I do. If I sound bitter about the state of contemporary journalism, it's because I'm a frustrated idealist. When I was a student, the likes of Naomi Klein, Gary Younge, Amy Goodman and Stuart Hall were the people who made sense of the world for me. These writers took their responsibilities to their audience seriously; they took the political repercussions of their work seriously. People need facts and analysis to be able to understand what's going on around them. Writing, at its best, is a profound act of consciousness-raising. But the fact that so many journalists view this duty as secondary to career advancement, that they are happy to act as the mouthpieces and outriders of elite interests, makes me feel physically ill. It's an abuse, and an abdication, of that sacred responsibility to arm your readers with the truth, so that they can wield it against power. The first step towards a better future comes from being able to see your present conditions with ruthless clarity.

Michel Foucault, turning a famous aphorism on its head, said that politics is war by other means.¹⁹ You're not trying to score points in a genteel debate. You're trying to win a war. It's not a surprise that Vladimir Lenin was obsessed with applying military thinking to political struggle – he understood that achieving the strategic objective of a working-class revolution involved drawing together a variety of interrelated tactics, such as the day-to-day activities of trade union organising, parliamentary manoeuvring and local agitation.

Other people, much more clever than me, are doing the work of thinking through tactics and strategy for the left. Instead, what I'm

cf. Working Revolution
historical → context
→ Lenin in

going to do in this book is dissect the right's political tactics for pursuing their strategic objective, which is basically preserving an economic system that is destroying your wellbeing, your community and the very planet you live on. In this book, I argue that the right's strategy is this: to subvert, diffuse and redirect class conflict – which, along with technology, is the most powerful engine of social transformation in our history – into culture war.

There are people who'll accuse me of just trying to make you angry. They'll read a couple of pages where I'm spelling out how the media is hoodwinking you, how politics is being poisoned, and how workers are being robbed of their wages, and suggest that I'm just as bad as someone who wants to blame migrants, or trans people, for all the world's ills. At the risk of playing into the image of the crude banshee they have in their heads, that's a load of bollocks. There's a big difference between being prodded and poked into a perpetual state of confused agitation on the basis of lies and being stirred to anger because of how the world really works. It used to be that elites wanted to keep populations apathetic and disengaged from politics. But in an age of media saturation, they've worked out that constant, misdirected rage is indistinguishable from paralysis. It's the quality of focus which turns anger into a catalyst of change.

Over the next seven chapters, I'm going to show you how the paranoid fantasy of Minority Rule upholds a *real* minority rule, by keeping us divided and competing against one another for attention. By examining media, politics and finally the economy, I'm going to explain how our perception of reality is manipulated to sustain a deeply unequal status quo. I'm going to examine how the weaknesses in progressive arguments about identity politics helped set up the traps created by the right in their mobilisation of the Minority Game. I'll look at how news and current affairs media has pumped bullshit into the public conversation, and what that's done to our political leadership. I'll break down how class and race have been presented as mutually exclusive categories, and how a

I hope the difference
is elaborated on
or described.