

## CONSPIRACY AND MEME IN THE ALT-RIGHT

Notes on the Myth of Cultural Marxism

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### Abstract

The widespread idea of “cultural Marxism” among alt-right collectives takes on the shape of a dark and bewildering myth that works like a conspiracy theory. This article offers, in its first part, a journey through the genesis, structure and meaning of the myth, placing the focus on the misleading link between Marxism and postmodern philosophies, which is essential for the conspiracy theory to be operative. The second part investigates the path and reach of the phenomenon through social media: visual appropriationism, memes and anti-Marxist propaganda make up the symbolic ideology of right-wing populism.

### Keywords

cultural Marxism; postmodernism; populisms, far-right; social media.

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### 1. Cultural Marxism: a dark and bewildering myth

Among the devastating effects of the economic crisis of 2008, it is worth noting how the socio-political context in many countries on all continents came to have what we might call its “populist moment”. The erosion of the traditional spaces of political representation, the constant production of alienation by neoliberal reason and the lively use of social networks have revived a dormant regressive trend in contemporary (post)democracies. This trend is fronted by a surge of governments and parties whose most prominent figures are, among others, Viktor Orbán, Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro, some of whom were backed by the enigmatic-yet-overrated Steve Bannon, i.e. the ideologue for many of the most well-known strategies of “right-wing populism” and the lead architect for their tactical and strategic coordination on an international level. Naturally, each political experience of this type –be it in terms of the party, the government or the

institutions– responds to historical processes and social rhythms, as well as to very diverse ideologies and programmes. However, a somewhat fanatical and sinister worldview often emerges in their speeches: that of cultural Marxism<sup>3</sup>.

How can it be that such a ludicrous conspiracy theory permeates and inspires the behaviours, plans and programs of such diverse political parties and social movements? This phenomenon has been brewing, silently, for a long time, but we will pin it to one particular year, in an attempt to describe it: 1992<sup>4</sup>. This is when Michael Minnicino published the article "The Frankfurt School and 'Political Correctness'" in *Fidelio* magazine, a publication associated with the para-fascist think tank of the *LaRouche* movement. The text describes, in quasi-apocalyptic terms, the transition to the contemporary society of the masses as a return to an unsettling Dark Age, using such outdated and simplifying rhetoric that has become natural in neoconservative movements. He elaborates on a hypothetical era in which Beethoven's music, Rembrandt's painting or Plato's studies were the canon, and this era would have transitioned into a New Age where a very peculiar form of totalitarianism prevails, what he himself calls the "tyranny of ugliness", an extravagant way ("ugliness" would be both aesthetic and moral) of referring to the growing nihilism of late capitalism. This new worldview dreamt up by Minnicino would seek to undermine the foundations of the Judeo-Christian civilisation as a whole. With the victim clearly designated, the myth begins to take shape:

This conspiracy was decisive in planning and developing, as means of social manipulation, the vast new sister industries of radio, television, film, recorded music, advertising, and public opinion polling. The pervasive psychological hold of the media was purposely fostered to create the passivity and pessimism which afflict our populations today. So successful was this conspiracy, that it has become embedded in our culture<sup>5</sup>.

And further on:

The task of the Frankfurt School, then, was first, to undermine the Judeo-Christian legacy through an "abolition of culture" (*Aufhebung der Kultur* in Lukacs' German); and, second, to determine new cultural forms which would increase the alienation of population, thus creating a "new barbarism"<sup>6</sup>.

Just one element is missing: the enemy. And this is where the conspiracy theory is rounded off, by pointing out the names of philosophers such as Lukács, Adorno and Benjamin, related to a greater or lesser extent with the so-called Frankfurt School. The shadow of these authors would cast a long shadow –and we will discuss this later– over even the most representative figures of the French Theory (Michel Foucault), Structuralism (Roland Barthes), Deconstruction (Jacques Derrida) and other postmodern

movements which took hold in the United States from the 70s onwards. According to the conspiracy theory, the link between such diverse systems of thought and social analysis would be justified from the moment they all coincide in their eagerness to make their theories become dominant in the Western culture, through what the article calls "politically correct aesthetic trends". Here lies the root of the current problem of "political correctness" that is so playing into the hands of the alt-right in the populist diffusion of their cultural hegemony.

**REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS  
WELCOME HERE.**

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NO BORDER WALL.  
OUR CITIES  
STAND TALL.**



**MoveOn.ORG**  
CIVIC ACTION®

Campaign of the political action committee MoveOn.org

Source: <https://act.moveon.org/survey/immigrants-and-refugees-are-welcome>

The end of Western civilisation, new barbarism, the Bolshevikisation of society... There are many great evils that the conspiracy theory attributes to a very heterogeneous set of philosophers (not largely assimilable with each other) who, of course, had much more modest objectives than those mentioned above: in general, they set out to enrich social theory and understand the production processes of ideology and subjectivity in the era of monopolistic capitalism. How is it possible, then, that the Marxists of the Frankfurt School and the postmodernists of the 70s are mixed up in such a dark and confusing way? For the alt-right, the mechanism by which the conspiracy theory of "cultural Marxism" operates is highly worthwhile: it seeks to eliminate two rivals at once (i.e. Western Marxism and postmodern theories). With this in mind, what would happen if the link between these two objects of criticism were not only unclear but in fact considerably distorted? Apparently, it is indeed difficult to connect Marxist ideas with postmodern theories. Marxism (considering here Marx, Engels, Lenin, Gramsci and Lukács, among others) is focused on resolving the

contradictions of capitalist society through a deepening of the positive principles of the Enlightenment, namely rationalism, liberation from the alienation of an inhuman social order, educational and progressive elements of the new forms of political association, among others. Meanwhile, postmodern theories (such as those put forward by Foucault, Derrida, Vattimo, etc.), encourage a linguistic turn and a culturalist inflation of the theory which is committed to challenging the entire project of Modernity, the enlightened programme and the great narratives (both at the level of the subject, of historiography or of social transformation).

## 1.2. The non-existent chosen affinities between Marxism and Postmodernity

Our aim here is not to “dismantle” the conspiracy theory or demonstrate its “falsehood”, because the extent of its irrationality and implausibility – bordering on the absurd– would not hold up even in a superficial comparison with the textual sources of the authors under discussion. Instead, we seek to understand, in terms of the genesis and structure of the myth, the degree to which the link between Western Marxism and Postmodernism has been possible, what advantages it brings to the alt-right populist discourse and how it is currently being reproduced on social media.



Image taken from the website [ordenvenezuela.org](http://www.ordenvenezuela.org)

Source: <http://www.ordenvenezuela.org/2018/08/18/consecuencias-del-marxismo-cultural/>

On 19<sup>th</sup> April 2019, a now-famous debate took place at the Sony Center (Canada) called: "Happiness: Capitalism vs. Marxism" –between the Hegelian philosopher and psychoanalysis specialist Slavoj Žižek, and the liberal guru who has resurrected the myth of cultural Marxism, Jordan B. Peterson. One of the key moments of the discussion was when the Slovenian asked: "But where are these neo-Marxists?", and shortly after: "Can you name me one neo-Marxist?", two questions to which Peterson could but babble a response. Žižek was decisive in this regard: the link between Postmodernism and Marxism is false and biased, and what Peterson is fighting against would be, in the words of the Slovenian, "a hyper-moralisation which is, essentially, a silent admission of a defeat"<sup>7</sup>. Next, we would like to set out and comment on an interpretation of the place of postmodern philosophy in the context of social reproduction and cultural hegemony of late capitalism, with special attention to its dissociation from Marxism. As is well known, most of the problems that have traditionally been within the domain of political semantics have been transferred to the field of culture<sup>8</sup>. Does this shift leave intact the nature, approach and resolution of these issues? Our intuition says no, and this is one of the main motivations that will guide the rest of our article. Since events such as May '68 or the fall of the Soviet Union, the traditional claims of Marxism both on the side of "praxis" (class discourse, primacy of the party as a form of political organisation, strategies for taking state power, etc.) and of "theory" (objectivity, enlightened rationalism, traditional subjects of social action or, at least, the existence of something like subjects) have disappeared (or have been considerably minimised) and other types of demands and languages, more related to ethical or cultural issues –which sometimes, not always, can be defined as *subpolitics*– have arrived to take their place, profoundly refreshing the languages of social emancipation<sup>9</sup>. The situation is such that we talk today of "the age of indignation", of "victimhood", of "identity" or "culture wars", where there is "the belief that identity qualifies or disqualifies the writer's authority or legitimacy to discuss a given topic"<sup>10</sup> or it is said that the "politics of discontent" related to the war of identities has unleashed "the senseless rage of resentment"<sup>11</sup>.

This state of affairs has received a reaction from one of the most prominent Marxist thinkers in the English-speaking context, namely Terry Eagleton<sup>12</sup>. This author's critical analysis of many of the assumptions, developments and consequences of postmodern philosophy allows us to see how postmodernism cannot easily be considered a form of Marxism (in fact, thinkers like Michel Foucault and Ernesto Laclau were implicitly or explicitly anti-Marxist). Instead, postmodernism is the cultural logic of late capitalism, to use a famous expression by Fredric Jameson<sup>13</sup>. Their strange craftiness with the truth thus becomes apparent: the alt-right assumes that

the object of their criticism is Marxism, when in reality they are condemning –without realising– other, distinct ideologies. However, these ideologies have a system of social production and reproduction that the alt-right constantly defend: that of neoliberal capitalism.

In his research on the idea of culture, Terry Eagleton laments culture's "elusive" nature, at times impossible to capture because its radius spans so wide, and at other times far too narrow. The British philosopher diagnoses a *turn* in the notion of culture, one could even say a *change of sign*, which has a certain historical origin. We are referring to the traditional conception of culture that, according to Eagleton, consists of "wiping away" any trace of particularism by including the subjects within a truly universal and shared outlook. Quite the contrary: "Since the 1960s, however, the word "culture" [...] now means the affirmation of a specific identity –national, sexual, ethnic, regional– rather than the transcendence of it"<sup>14</sup>. This mutation is by no means innocent and it is, in fact, quite harmful from the point of view of political transformation: where culture used to function as a kind of shared grammar of practices and discourses that brought together the organisation of a community with universal aspirations, it has now become the ultimate flaming projectile of the contemporary political scene. From the perspective of a Marxist thinker, such as Eagleton, this is invariably upsetting: if once it was possible to speak of "oppressed nations" or "working classes" who would defend a particular universality against a common enemy, now each community is bound to become more like a faction. In turn, they must battle against other such groups, not so much for eminently political or economic reasons (although this does also apply), but for the "acknowledgment of their identity". With his usual acerbity, Eagleton attacks the defenders of identity politics in this way:

There is no 'cultural politics', in the sense of certain forms of politics which are specifically cultural. On the contrary, culture is not inherently political at all. There is nothing inherently political in singing a Breton love-song, staging an exhibition of African-American art or declaring oneself a lesbian. These things are not innately and eternally political; they become so only under specific historical conditions, usually of an unpleasant kind<sup>15</sup>.



Crossroad Musical Exhibition at the National Museum of African American History and Culture.  
 Source: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/new-exhibition-black-music-to-your-eyes-180960565/>

The problem is not fully accounted for by the exclusively formalistic (and also rigid, metaphysical, hypostasised) notion of culture that Eagleton decries. Yet it does show how the actual realisation of this idea would be truly negative for culture, because this idea is what allows and forces, precisely, a community of individuals (a “minority”) to go beyond their own particularistic interests and avoid considering the defence of the plurality and diversity of different cultures as beneficial *in itself*. This diversity often conceals underlying clashes, with no possible reconciliation (would “neoliberal culture” be compatible with the times, rhythms and practices of a culture that is not governed by strictly market-based criteria? There would be no place here for diversity, in a relativistic sense). It is important to note, in addition, that the reductionism to which postmodern thought is subjected, with its absolutisation of culture to the detriment of other, no less important realities (those which have no direct equivalent in “culture” *per se*) is expressed so intuitively by the British author: “[postmodernism] fails to see not only that not all political issues are cultural, but that not all cultural differences are political”<sup>16</sup>.

Eagleton's criticism of the postmodernists also explains capitalism's ability when it comes to absorbing cultural phenomena and including them in the processes of shaping subjectivities, until culture becomes a “second nature”. And it “also” explains, we say, because Eagleton not only puts capitalism in the spotlight, but also a left wing that seemed to be

transforming –unexpectedly– into its own cultural reflection. When asked about the legacy of the protest movements of the sixties (such as the events of May 1968, which last year had their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary), the British author replies: “[...] life-style and identity politics, which as the class struggle froze over in the mid-1970s surged increasingly to the fore”<sup>17</sup>. If, previously, culture would become the object of politicisation, it is now politics that must cave in (and perhaps be reduced, taking into account the acceptance of the liberal-capitalist framework by many of the so-called “post-Marxist” authors) to cultural demands that require, in addition, their primacy over other issues. All of this is crystallised in the 1980s, when postmodernism takes its first firm steps and, given the left's disenchantment with politics, they turns their gaze towards issues that are perhaps more accommodating, and surely less risky, i.e. issues such as culture. This interest in the cultural managed to colonise aspects of life that, by themselves, are impossible to understand in this way, perhaps because so much of the “leftist” academic intelligentsia could win battles here, in a way that was impossible over in the political arena. This is what Eagleton calls an “inflation of its own cultural concerns”<sup>18</sup>, which, whether they expected it or not, ended up sapping the left of its transformative power. Amid with the saturation of cultural problems invading the political scene, Eagleton is adamant:

The primary problems which we confront in the new millennium –war, famine, poverty, disease, debt, drugs, environmental pollution, the displacement of peoples– are not especially “cultural” at all. They are not primarily questions of value, symbolism, language, tradition, belonging or identity, least of all the arts<sup>19</sup>.

## 2. Visual restoration and resignification in right-wing populism

Social media platforms have been used in attacks against those collectives and ideologies included within the aforementioned cultural Marxism. As Slavoj Žižek has noted:

There are the new digital media which enable people to form communities defined by specific ideological interests, communities where they can exchange news and opinions outside a unified public space and where conspiracy theories [...] can flourish without constraints<sup>20</sup>.

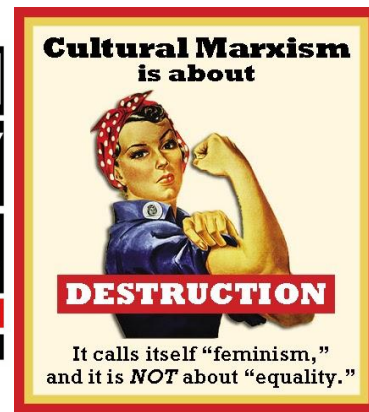
Many of the slogans launched on these platforms by the new populist right are appropriations, reformulations and aesthetic restorations of key images in the history of political representation: antifascist propaganda and the Rosie the Riveter icon, among others. The following pictures adhere to the mentioned aesthetic, and they attack the main enemies of the alt-right: communism, immigration and feminism.





**EUROPEAN  
IDENTITY  
MATTERS**  
**STOP MASS IMMIGRATION**  
**SMASH CULTURAL MARXISM**

Smash Cultural Marxism



Pictures and memes spread online, against cultural Marxism.

Sources: <https://experimentoaschoccidental.com/2016/04/11/marxismo-cultural-o-liberalismo-cultural/>  
<https://me.me/i/european-identity-matters-stop-massimmigration-smash-cultural-marxism-smash-cultural-3334187>  
<http://postcardsfromtraumaville.blogspot.com/2017/11/cultural-marxism-winning-against-odds.html>

Some of them have been designed to be included in manifestos and blogs on the Internet, an interactive framework where users access specific content in a quasi-instinctive way. These iconic representations have a similar effect and intention to *agitprop*, in how they influence public opinion and the collective imaginary. One example of restoration of this kind of visual code can be found in the image of Rosie the Riveter.

One of the standard-bearers for Vox, Spain's newest far-right party –and within Steve Bannon's orbit– is the architect Rocío Monasterio. Monasterio was Vox's candidate for the presidency of the Madrid region in 2019. Her political discourses are characterised by a profound attack against the feminist movement. Her party's Instagram account uploaded an image that had initially been published in the newspaper *El Mundo*, as part of an interview with the journalist Javier Negre, who is linked with the most conservative sectors of contemporary Spanish politics<sup>21</sup>. In this image, we see the iconic Rosie the Riveter as played by Monasterio.

## LA MUSA DE VOX CONTRA LAS 'FEMINAZIS'

ma las principales aristas de suaria contra «el terrorismo machista». Un grupo de ocho porta una pancarta con el mensaje *La violencia no tiene género*. Camina con doble cordón policial. En él, hay dos maltratadas que se manifiestan en contra de una Ley de Violencia de Género que no las ayudó a superar su calvario doméstico. «Ojalá engroséis la lista de asesinadas», les gritan algunas manifestantes. No perdonan que apelen a la protección de mujeres y hombres y agarren de las muñecas a una joven de ojos achinados. «De aquí no me voy», vocifera la mujer. Su nombre es Rocío Monasterio y desde entonces es la musa de Vox contra el «negocio de la ideología de género» que su

caza feminista y se presta a posar empujando a uno de los iconos del movimiento. Rosie, la *remachadora*, con un pañuelo rojo anudado al pelo y exhibiendo músculo. Sabe que es una provocación... y no será la única. En su despacho nos muestra orgullosa un cuadro de la abogada Concepción Arenal, una de las precursoras del feminismo español en el siglo XIX. «Mi tío bisabuelo compartía cartas con ella y a mí de niña mis padres me dieron a leer sus libros antes que *Caperucio Rojo*. En ellos defendía la igualdad de las mujeres». cuenta. «Sé que a la izquierda le molesta que la reivindique y recarde que em católica, pero soy feminista desde que tengo uso de razón.



Estoy con esas mujeres que verdaderamente lucharon por la libertad de todas. Hoy hay un cierto feminismo supremacista que impone el discurso de la ideología de género y pretende amordazarnos con su burda ideología». Aunque a sus activistas no le gusta llamarlas «feminazis» para no mezclarlo con el nazismo, aclara.

«La mujeres hoy en España hemos tenido las opciones de educarnos», continúa, «y aunque en temas como la maternidad tenemos que seguir luchando para no ser discriminadas, no necesitamos que el Estado nos trate como si fuéramos débiles. Debemos lograr las cosas por méritos propios. Por decir esto me llaman machista. Si fuera Vox machista yo no estaría aquí ni muchas mujeres que nos apoyan porque no quieren sentirse humilladas con políticas de cuotas o que nos lleven a una tele por ser una mujer», comenta Monasterio, que dice haber sido vetada en algunos platos por su discurso.

La exigencia de su partido al PP y Ciudadanos de una ley intrafamiliar que sustituya a la «fallida» Ley de Violencia de Género le ha obligado a conducir sus vacaciones en su refugio cántabro. Porque todos buscaban a la mujer que más ha defendido esa postura contra la «dictadura del feminismo». De una dictadura

Rocío Monasterio emulating Rosie the Riveter, in an interview by Javier Negre for *El Mundo*.

Source: <https://www.elmundo.es/cronica/2019/01/06/5c2f9122fdddfdd09b8b469a.html>

Choosing this particular icon was not an arbitrary decision. This image, which dates from the 1940s, has been classified in recent decades as an icon of the feminist movement for the emancipation of working women. However, this current meaning has in fact strayed considerably from its historical origin. The image was made by Joseph Howard Miller, as a commission by the American company Westinghouse Electric, to represent the women who worked in the factories, or those who joined them before their husbands were called up to fight in World War II<sup>22</sup>. The political intention of this representation was to make the labour market attractive to the domestic sector, one of the key manifestos of economic liberalism. This theory was fundamental for some members of the Chicago School, such as the sociologist Gary Becker<sup>23</sup>. After the war, many of these women were sacked, and had to return to their homes. Therefore, the strategy employed by Monasterio was not the appropriation of an icon from an opposing ideology like communism, as is the case of the *Smash Cultural Marxism* picture. Instead, the tactic here was the restoration of its previous meaning which had originally come from the development of economic liberalism and which, over time, has come to be linked with the feminist movement against the capitalist patriarchy.

In the aforementioned interview, Monasterio asserts that “we women don’t need the State to treat us like we are weak. We should achieve things on our own merits. For saying this, people call me sexist”<sup>24</sup>. Monasterio uses Rosie the Riveter to take the icon back to its origins: back to the discourse

of hard-work culture, within the capitalist framework. In the headline we can see her crusade against the “feminazis”, the terms used by the alt-right to refer to radical feminists. As we will see later on, the relationship between cultural Marxism and radicalism/violence/terrorism as established by right-wing populist movements –in this case the link between feminism and Nazism through the conceptual kinship of the “feminazi”– comes from their strategy of sowing fear to try and take control of the ideological discourse.

Bannon’s main aim in supporting Vox has been the coercion of Spain’s centre-right parties to lean further towards a more reactionary right<sup>25</sup>. The regional council of Andalusia has become the first institution where this political party, in collaboration with the two largest conservative parties (i.e. the People’s Party (PP) and Ciudadanos), has managed to use its influence to push against the feminist movement, which it has described on many occasions as being discriminatory against men. Vox’s support for Juan Manuel Moreno Bonilla, the PP candidate for president of the council of Andalusia, hinged on the drawing up of a framework to negotiate the revocation of the *Ley de Violencia de Género* (the ‘Gender-based Violence Bill’) in this region. Before the election, Vox distanced themselves from the PP, citing the war on cultural Marxism<sup>26</sup>. The first decision made by Francisco Serrano –Vox’s deputy in the council– was to request a list of the names of the people in Andalusia who work for institutions dedicated to combatting gender-based violence<sup>27</sup>.

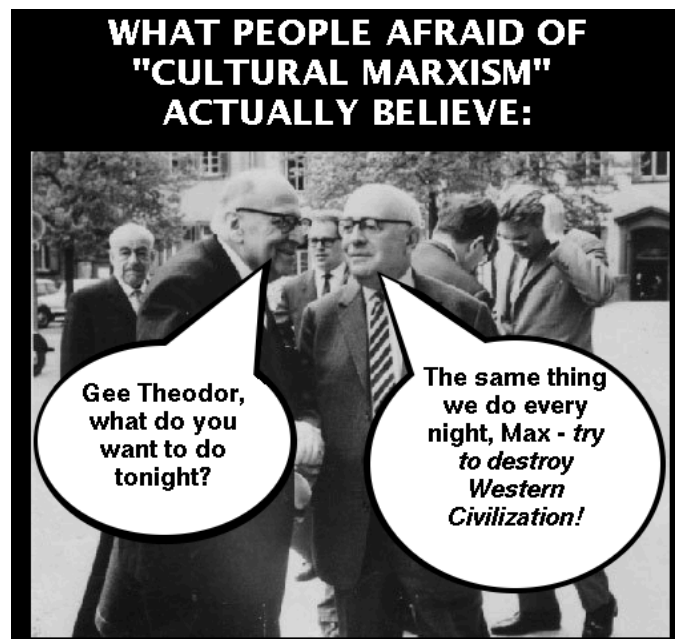
## 2.2. Memes and anti-Marxist illustrations within the visual ideology of social media

Paypal co-founder Peter Thiel is one of the main supporters of ‘hard-work culture’, and a fervent enemy of so-called cultural Marxism. Thiel, as well as creating the online payment platform, was the key investor in Facebook, making a contribution of \$500,000 when Mark Zuckerberg, Chris Hughes and Dustin Moskowitz launched their project in June 2004<sup>28</sup>. Thiel studied at Stanford University. Following his experience on campus he wrote, together with businessman David O. Sacks, the book *The Diversity Myth: Multiculturalism and Political Intolerance on Campus* in 1998<sup>29</sup>. Thiel and Sacks declared that the new thinking and structures of so-called multiculturalism –named by the authors as a doctrine of cultural Marxism– aim to transform the American university institution. Peter Thiel belongs to TheVanguard.Org, a platform created to put pressure on the MoveOn.org collective<sup>30</sup>.



Front picture on the MoveOn.org website

Despite the aura of conspiracy that hangs over cultural Marxism, used by right-wing populists to discredit left-wing cultural values within institutional and social spaces, the spread of this worldview through different channels feeds into its active construction and, as a result, leads to the further expansion of extremist values. While it is true that there are implausible origin stories for this conspiracy, like how Theodor Adorno wrote lyrics for The Beatles in order to set in motion a counterculture in the US in the 1960s<sup>31</sup>, the digital platforms of the world's far-right leaders are used to spread memes and illustrations with the aim of discrediting certain collectives.



Meme of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer.

Source: <https://knowyourmeme.com/photos/1000689-cultural-marxism>

One of the most well-known cases involves former Republican congressman Ron Paul<sup>32</sup>. Paul shared an illustration by meme-master Ben Garrison on his Twitter account, alongside these words:

Are you stunned by what has become of American culture? Well, it's not an accident. You've probably Heard of "Cultural Marxism," but do you know what it means? ... More here: [facebook.com/ronpaul/photos...](https://facebook.com/ronpaul/photos...)

Garrison 's illustration shows a group of people, highlighting their different races and religions (Judaism is in the foreground), united under the banner of communism which, in turn, reaches out and punches the most representative symbol of Western culture in the United States: Uncle Sam himself. The combination of entities represented in this illustration represents that strange, contradictory mishmash that the alt-right use to attack any identity that strays from the orbit of their own cultural identity. The tweet was removed immediately but its rapid diffusion, due to the popularity of the politician, made a large impact on social media and television news. What Paul did not delete was his statement on Facebook, which follows the same theoretical bases as Minnicino, Lind and Thiel on cultural Marxism. Ron Paul 's Facebook publication was accompanied by another picture that alludes to the aforementioned political correctness.

Picture used and subsequently deleted by Ron Paul on Twitter:



Source: <https://dailystormer.name/madlad-ron-paul-tweets-a-wyatt-mann-cartoon-blasting-jew-cultural-marxism/>

Picture used and not deleted by Ron Paul on Facebook:

# POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/ronpaul/photos/a.10150115112081686/10156754588246686/?type=3&theater>

Ben Garrison, who created the image used by Ron Paul, has become the most acclaimed illustrator of the US alt-right. Many of his illustrations, propagated on social media, focus on the influence of cultural Marxism within the academic field –an idea discussed by Peter Thiel in *The Diversity Myth*–, on its leniency in terms of immigration and its support of feminism. His pictures can be identified by the inclusion of a multitude of symbols of different political and social aspects that make up supposed cultural Marxism. These elements are always drawn as violent, to be pointed out and attacked:

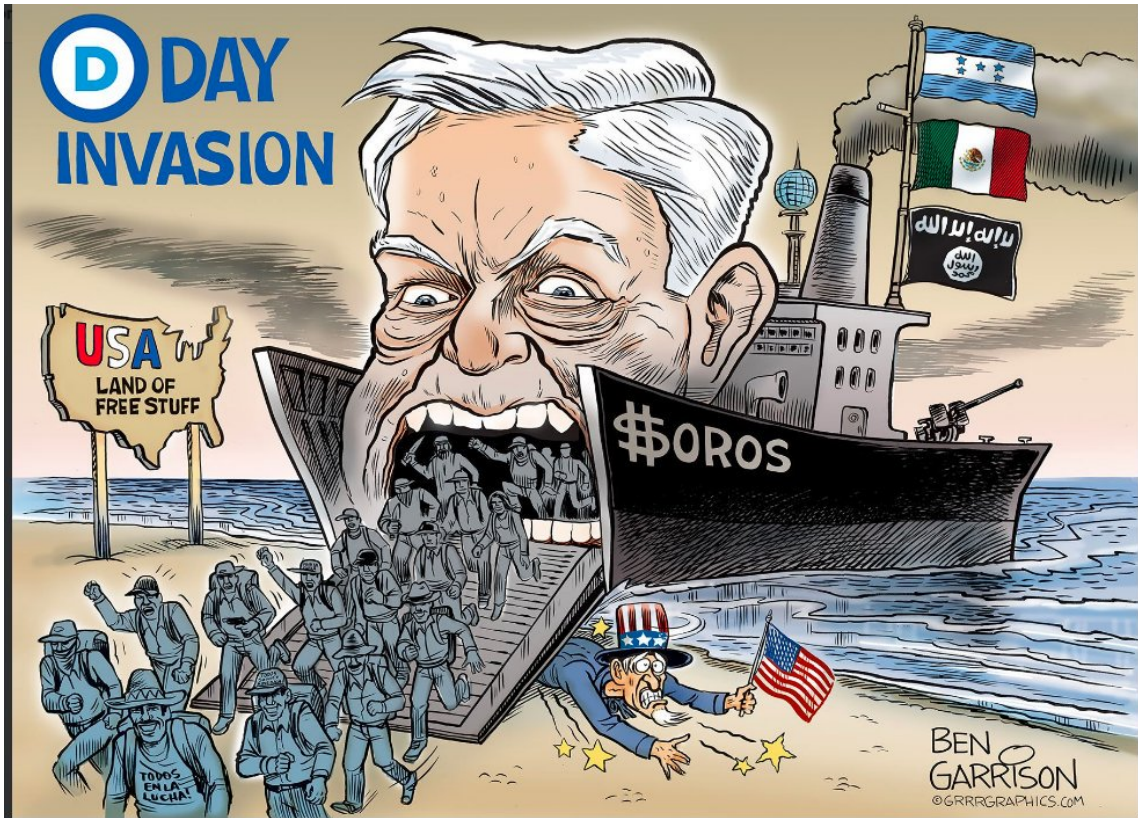


Source: <https://qrrrgraphics.com/sjw-university/>



Source: <https://qrrrgraphics.com/the-talk-on-campus/>

This last illustration brings together some of the icons outlined in the previous analysis on appropriation and visual resignification in order to set out a specific public opinion. Marx himself, swastikas, Jeremy Corbyn, the anarchist flags and numerous codes that refer to different cultures and political ideals are placed together, to identify the direct opposite to the supremacist Western culture that has to be defeated.



Source: <https://grrrgraphics.com/d-day-invasion/>



Source: <https://grrrgraphics.com/>



Other illustrations by Garrison, such as the two previous ones, focus on certain highly influential policies within the conspiracy theory of cultural Marxism: that is, the welcoming of immigrants by host countries, and feminism, with its unfounded halo of radicalism. In the first one we see Uncle Sam being crushed by a ship that features a portrait of the billionaire George Soros, the illustration thus clearly aims to appeal to the part of the US population who defend conservative values and so feel vilified. Soros, whose name features on the prow of the ship, has been singled out as an opposing figure to Steve Bannon; Soros is deemed the ideologist who finances groups linked to the worldwide democratic left. The ISIS flag and the Mexican flag are hoisted together on the ship that is bringing in immigrants. This illustration identifies a central point in Donald Trump's pledges: the curbing of illegal immigration from Mexico, and the construction of a wall that would be paid for by Mexico. The linking of radicalism/violence/terrorism with cultural Marxism is, once again, plain to see.

In the second illustration, a feminist woman tramples all over the symbols of justice, grasping a bundle of dollars in order to highlight, just as Vox have done in Spain, the public subsidies awarded to feminist collectives. According to the parties and groups linked to the alt-right, feminists use the umbrella of misogyny as a banner for their proclamations.

As some analysts have noted, social media played a decisive role in Jair Bolsonaro's presidential campaign<sup>33</sup>. His Twitter and Instagram accounts experienced a 90% increase in followers in just one year<sup>34</sup>. Whatsapp and these two digital platforms served to spread fake news about the Brazilian left mired in corruption scandals, as well as different anti-leftist proclamations in the form of memes, to address the supposed left-wing, progressive control over the institutions. In his first speech as president, Bolsonaro promised to face down the cultural Marxism so instilled in Brazilian society. According to him, "Brazil is beginning to break free from socialism, and political correctness"<sup>35</sup>. One of the former military officer's was to remove "communist" civil servants from public office; a controversial decision in line with the list of workers requested by Vox in Andalusia<sup>36</sup>.

The academic Pablo Gallego has shown, in a study on social media, the expansion of Vox on several digital platforms<sup>37</sup>. A general election took place in Spain on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2019. Vox's interactions on Instagram, YouTube and Twitter dominated over the other political parties. Vox's Twitter account kicked off the day with a controversial picture that was debated at length: a still from *The Lord of the Rings* in which the character Aragorn is preparing for battle against an oncoming army. In the picture we see a mishmash of symbols representing all the sectors that the far-right were hoping to defeat that day. The Vox logo and the flag of Spain are superimposed onto the

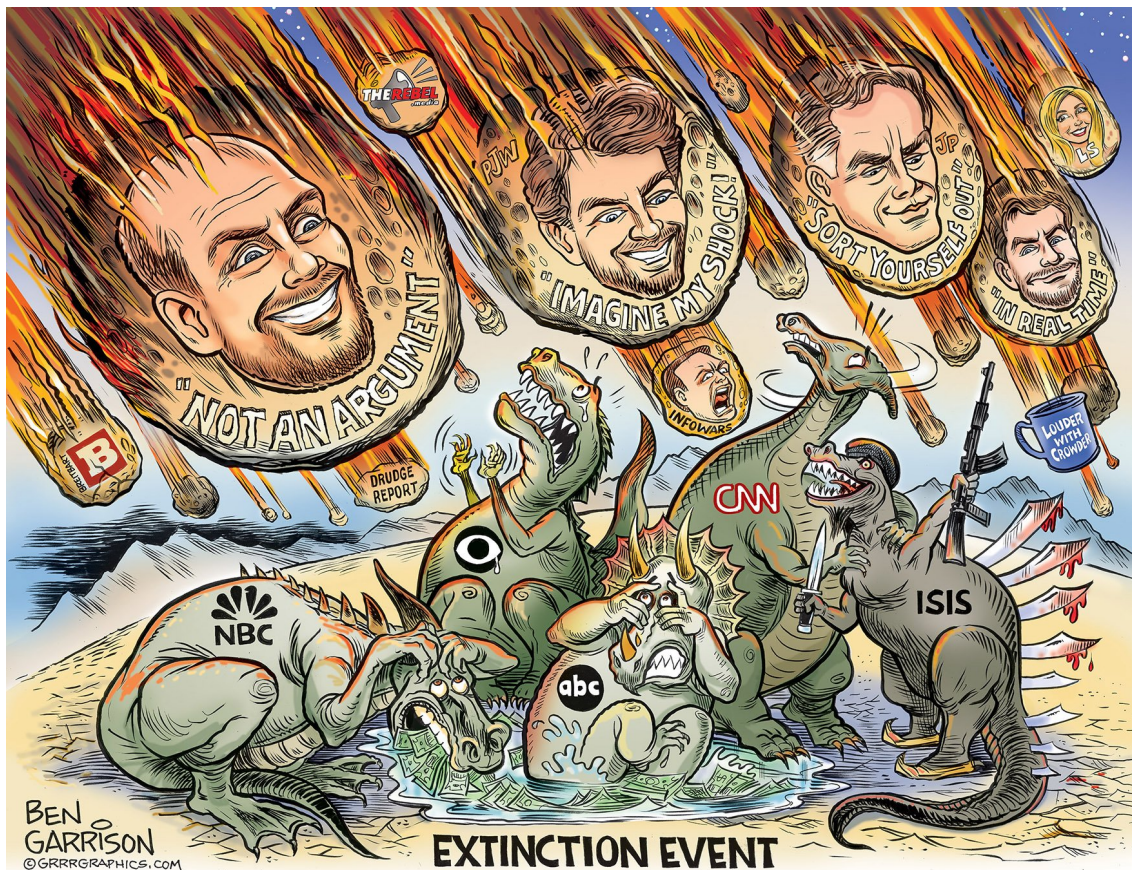
character, the latter of which taking the place of Uncle Sam from Ben Garrison's illustrations to appeal to the more conservative sectors. Meanwhile, the opposing army waves flags and symbols representing different groups within the conspiracy theory of cultural Marxism: feminism, the LGBTBIQ+ community, left-leaning media organisations, Spanish republicans, communists, anti-fascists, proponents of Catalanian independence and anarchists.



Picture shared by Vox on their Twitter account, 28th April 2019, accompanied by the text "Let the battle begin!"

Fuente: [https://twitter.com/vox\\_es/status/1122427641750011904?lang=es](https://twitter.com/vox_es/status/1122427641750011904?lang=es)

On Ben Garrison's website, we can see an illustration with a similar message and intention. The illustrator and meme-master depicts another conflictive scenario in the American context. In this case, a meteorite shower featuring Paul Joseph Watson and Jordan Peterson, among others, anticipates the extinction of the dinosaurs that represent the progressive US media, who in turn are protecting the terrorist group ISIS.



Source: <https://grrrgraphics.com/legacy-media-extinction-event/>

The relationship between terrorism and cultural Marxism, as established by right-wing populists, is one of the most widely-used premises in its attacks on leftist ideologies. For illustrators like Garrison, and ideologues like Lind, multiculturalism affords too many concessions to other cultures, even insinuating a supposed complicity between different types of terrorism and left-wing ideologies. By means of their strategy of fearmongering, the alt-right present themselves as the only ones who stand up to this kind of interference. The same situation exists in the attacks on feminism, where people like Rocío Monasterio stress the relationship between extremism and feminism. Similarly, the character of Aragorn faces the enemy represented by an evil army, portrayed with a multitude of political symbols. Any value identified within the spectrum of cultural Marxism always has a corresponding radical fringe that must be defeated. The following pictures have been obtained through a simple Google search of the term cultural Marxism. We see the same pattern of the representation of radicalism, linked to certain groups and collectives who must be defeated.



Source: <https://picswe.com/pics/cultural-marxism-meme-77.html>



Spource: <https://amityunderground.com/antisemitic-cultural-marxist-fraser-anning-alt-right-frankfurt-school-theodor-adorno-christchurch-shooting/>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Miguel Ángel Rego Robles is a PhD candidate at the Fine Arts Faculty, Universidad Complutense de Madrid (UCM), and an FPU grant holder at the Department for Science, Technology and Society at the Institute of Philosophy, CSIC. Office 3C8. His co-authorship of this article was possible thanks to an FPU contract (2015/03491) of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, and the project (FFI 2016-76364) of the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness.

<sup>2</sup> Alejandro Sánchez Berrocal is an FPU grant holder at the Institute of Philosophy, CSIC and at the National University of Distance Education (UNED). Theoria cum Praxi Group (TcP). Department of Theoretical Philosophy and Practical Philosophy. Office 3C12. His co-authorship of this article was possible thanks to an FPU contract (17/03632) of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, part of the activities of the PAIDESOC Project (FFI2017-82535-P) "El desván de la razón: Cultivo de las pasiones, identidades éticas y sociedades digitales".

<sup>3</sup> A brief introduction to this character: Steve Bannon (1953) was thrust into the spotlight following his advisory work for Donald Trump, and for holding the post of executive president of Breitbart News, a website dedicated to spreading conspiracy theories and false news stories, politically aligned with the far-right populism and white supremacist movements. In the last two years, he has dedicated his efforts, as a political strategist, to the grouping together of the new European right-wing factions around *The Movement*, a structure halfway between a think tank and a political marketing company. The term "alt-right", i.e. the "alternative right", is a heterogeneous label with multiple meanings. It emerged in the United States, and the term encompasses those groups with neo-conservative tendencies as defined by their opposition to the political agenda of the liberal left (political correctness, multiculturalism, globalism, etc.). The alt-right is decidedly identity-based in terms of character, which distances it from the classic right. It is mostly made up of young people who actively use social networks and alternative forums to share their propaganda. Regarding the label of "cultural Marxism", the scope and dissemination of the idea has gone beyond the spheres of alt-right propaganda in social networks and has inspired, in fact, mass murders such as that committed by Breivik (in whose manifesto the terms "cultural Marxism" or "cultural Marxist" appear almost 650 times), or at the Christchurch Mosque in New Zealand. Its somewhat frivolous range of meaning, from more mainstream and apparently innocuous stances, to fanatic and murderous positions and actions, accounts for its notoriety but also the inherent danger of the concept.

<sup>4</sup> A brief but precise characterisation of the ideological processes, characters and institutions involved in them, which led to the aforementioned article, can be seen in Wood, A. "The American Roots of a Right-Wing Conspiracy", in *Commune*. Digital access: <https://communemag.com/the-american-roots-of-a-right-wing-conspiracy/> (Last consulted: 25/04/2019). Another more wide-reaching but equally concise analysis can be found at Wilson, J. (2015) "«Cultural Marxism»: a uniting theory for rightwingers who love to play the victim". *The Guardian*. Digital access: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/19/cultural-marxism-a-uniting-theory-for-rightwingers-who-love-to-play-the-victim> (Last consulted: 03/05/2019).



<sup>5</sup> Minnicino, M. (1992) "The Frankfurt School and «Political Correctness»", in *Fidelio*, vol. 1, nº 1, Digital access: [https://archive.schillerinstitute.com/fid\\_91-96/921\\_frankfurt.html](https://archive.schillerinstitute.com/fid_91-96/921_frankfurt.html) (Last consulted: 06/05/2019).

<sup>6</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>7</sup> The extract to which we refer can be seen at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wsz6ijXWS3A> (Last consulted: 30/04/2019). On several occasions, the Slovenian philosopher has offered lucid analysis of the conspiracy theory (as with the Nazis' anti-Semitism of the 1930s) about cultural Marxism. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=veBoQJogOAK> (Last consulted: 06/05/2019) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JyAu350IchA> (Last consulted: 06/05/2019). The same claims used by Žižek against Peterson apply to the undercover "Straight White Guy" ("*Un Tío Blanco Hetero*"), a YouTuber whose popularity in Spain is proportional to his misinformation regarding the issues he deals with, almost always with false, second-hand arguments. In this video, like so many others on the far right, he associates the origins of "political correctness" with Marxism-Leninism: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bBWeZe1CCwc> (Last consulted: 13/05/2019).

<sup>8</sup> We treat this distinction in a broad and flexible sense, without considering that both dimensions are incompatible and opaque, but rather the opposite.

<sup>9</sup> It is literally impossible - for reasons of space - to condense this issue any further without completely distorting it. On this matter, we refer to the work of Boltanski, L and Chapiello, E (2017). *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Verso. In this sense, an already classic text on Marxism is that of the historian Meiksins Wood, E. (1986) *The Retreat from Class*. London: Verso. Also fundamental is the prologue of Hennessy, R. and Ingraham, C. (1997) "Reclaiming Anticapitalist Feminism" (pp. 1-14), in R. Hennessy and C. Ingraham (eds.) *Materialist Feminism*. New York: Routledge.

<sup>10</sup> De Lora, P. (2017) "Filosofar en tiempos de victimismo identitario: notas sobre el «caso Rebecca Tuvel»", in *Revista de Libros*, Digital access: <https://www.revistadelibros.com/discusion/filosofar-en-tiempos-de-victimismo-identitariornotas-sobre-el-caso-rebecca-tuvel> (Last consulted: 06/05/2019).

<sup>11</sup> Pardo, J. L. (February 2018) "El insensato furor del resentimiento", *Letras Libres*. Digital access: <http://www.letraslibres.com/espana-mexico/revista/el-insensato-furor-del-resentimiento> (Last consulted: 06/05/2019).

<sup>12</sup> There are almost infinite ways to approach a question that is as heterogeneous and multifarious as the one under discussion here. The justification for having chosen this author is twofold: 1) he is among the thinkers who has studied the intersection between Marxism and culture with the greatest degree of rigour and dedication, and 2) the way he deals with the idea of "Culture", as well as treating postmodernism as a functional worldview on capitalism, is especially valuable for any approach that seeks to detach Marxism from postmodernism. This link is central to the ongoing propagation of the conspiracy theory of "cultural Marxism", because it needs it to establish itself as such, and thus function properly.

<sup>13</sup> This American theoretician takes a crucial approach: i.e. he does not consider postmodernism as a "fashion", "style" or "movement", among others, but as the cultural logic of late capitalism, whose conceptualisation and criticism demands a "genuinely dialectical attempt to think our present of time in History", see Jameson, F. (1991: 46). *Postmodernism. Or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London: Verso. Through the analysis of postmodern art, Jameson concludes that the notion of schizophrenia, taken from Lacan, not in a psychopathological or psychoanalytic sense, but with claims of social theory, is crucial to understanding our time: confusion and temporary disorientation (absence of a meaningful link between past, present and future events), fragility of personal identity, suppression of historical consciousness, proliferation of "differences" in a world increasingly and paradoxically homogeneous, and so on. This postmodern ethos would be strengthened by the process of globalisation from the 1990s onwards, where the progressive (and apparent) destruction of hierarchies in the main social, cultural and intellectual spheres would have resulted in an "equalisation of all human subjects depending on their post-individualistic consciousness", Jameson, F. (2012: 46) *El postmodernismo revisado*. Madrid: Abada.

<sup>14</sup> Eagleton, T. (2000) *The Idea of Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 40.

<sup>15</sup> Eagleton, *Ibid.*, p. 116.

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- <sup>16</sup> Eagleton, *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- <sup>17</sup> Eagleton, *Ibid.*, p. 119.
- <sup>18</sup> Eagleton, *Ibid.*, p. 120.
- <sup>19</sup> Eagleton, *Ibid.*, p. 123.
- <sup>20</sup> The Radical Revolution [The Radical Revolution] (8<sup>th</sup> February 2019) Slavoj Zizek - Jordan Peterson & Alt-Right Conspiracy Theories. [Video archive]. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZnToAMaLsw> (Last consulted: 30/04/2019)
- <sup>21</sup> Negre, J. (January 6, 2019) Rocío Monasterio. La Musa de Vox contra las `feminazis`. *El Mundo*. Retrieved from <https://www.elmundo.es/cronica/2019/01/06/5c2f9122fdddf09b8b469a.html> (Last visit: 30/04/2019)
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- <sup>24</sup> Negre, J. (06/01/ 2019) "Rocío Monasterio. La Musa de Vox contra las `feminazis`". *El Mundo*. Retrieved from: <https://www.elmundo.es/cronica/2019/01/06/5c2f9122fdddf09b8b469a.html> (Last consulted: 30/04/2019)
- <sup>25</sup> Monzón, I. (27<sup>th</sup> March 2019) Bannon travels to Spain to advise Abascal. «Vox ha logrado empujar al centro derecha al populismo». Retrieved from: <https://www.larazon.es/bannon-viaja-a-espana-para-asesorar-a-abascal-vox-ha-logrado-empujar-al-centro-derecha-al-populismo-GM22591214> (Last consulted: 07/08/2019)
- <sup>26</sup> "VOX hace lo que nunca hizo el PP: cuestionar el Marxismo cultural, afirma F.J. Contreras" (2nd January 2019). *LaContraTV*. Retrieved from: <https://www.lacontra.tv/vox-hace-lo-que-nunca-hizo-el-pp-cuestionar-el-Marxismo-cultural-afirma-f-j-contreras> (Last consulted: 30/04/2019)  
Another sector attacked by Vox ideologues in the council of Andalusia is ecology. As Greenpeace.org reports, the Environmental board in Andalusia has ceased to exist under the new government of the PP and Ciudadanos, supported by Vox. Retrieved from: <https://es.greenpeace.org/es/noticias/se-disuelve-la-consejeria-de-medio-ambiente-en-andalucia/> (Last consulted: 30/04/2019)  
The proposal to limit traffic in the centre of Madrid –known as Madrid Central– has become another policy to be attacked by José Manuel Menéndez, member for Vox in the Andalusian government. Menéndez, J. M (15<sup>th</sup> December, 2018) "Madrid Central es Marxismo Cultural". *El Correo de Madrid*. Retrieved from: <https://www.elcorreodemadrid.com/madrid/146654703/Madrid-Central-es-Marxismo-Cultural.-Por-Jose-Manuel-Menendez-.html> (Last consulted: 30/04/2019)
- <sup>27</sup> Saiz, E. (24th February 2019) "Vox pide a la Junta andaluza los nombres de trabajadores contra la violencia de género". *El País*. Retrieved from: [https://elpais.com/sociedad/2019/02/22/actualidad/1550840170\\_396252.html](https://elpais.com/sociedad/2019/02/22/actualidad/1550840170_396252.html) (Last visit: 30/04/2019)
- <sup>28</sup> Hodgkinson, T. (16<sup>th</sup> January 2008) With friends like these... *The Guardian*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2008/jan/14/facebook> (Last consulted 30/04/2019)
- <sup>29</sup> Thiel, Peter; O. Sacks, David (1998). *The Diversity Myth: Multiculturalism and Political Intolerance on Campus*. California: Independent Institute.
- <sup>30</sup> MoveOn.org is a platform that defends social justice and political progressivism. In the image chosen by the platform, we see the mutual inclusion of different cultures as one of its hallmarks.

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<sup>31</sup> Gerard, D. (23<sup>rd</sup> October 2016) "Theodor Adorno wrote all the Beatles' songs as a Cultural Marxist assault on America. Possibly". Retrieved from <https://rocknerd.co.uk/2016/10/13/theodor-adorno-of-the-frankfurt-school-wrote-all-the-beatles-songs-as-a-cultural-marxist-assault-on-america-possibly/comment-page-1/> (Last consulted: 30/04/2019)

<sup>32</sup> Riotta, C. (2<sup>nd</sup> July 2018) "Ron Paul tweets then deletes racist cartoon about cultural Marxism amid backlash". *The Independent*. Retrieved from: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/ron-paul-racism-republican-party-racist-tweet-cultural-Marxism-libertarian-a8427781.html> (last consulted: 30/04/2019)

<sup>33</sup> Belli, L. (December 5, 2018) "WhatsApp skewed Brazilian election, proving social media's danger to democracy". *The Conversation*. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/whatsapp-skewed-brazilian-election-proving-social-medias-danger-to-democracy-106476> (Last consulted: 30/04/2019)

<sup>34</sup> Brazil's Bolsonaro, the 'social media candidate' (4<sup>th</sup> October 2018). BBC Monitoring. Retrieved from: <https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c2009tkb> (Last consulted: 30/04/2019)

<sup>35</sup> Benites, A.; Galarraga Gortázar, N.; Della Coletta, R. (2nd January 2019) "Bolsonaro: O Brasil começa a se libertar do socialismo, e do politicamente correto". *El País*. Retrieved from [https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2019/01/01/politica/1546380630\\_050685.html](https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2019/01/01/politica/1546380630_050685.html) (Last consulted: 30/04/2019)

<sup>36</sup> "Bolsonaro anuncia una purga de funcionarios "comunistas" en Brasil" (3rd January 2019). *La Vanguardia*. Retrieved from: <https://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional/20190103/453922519522/bolsonaro-purga-funcionarios-comunistas-brasil.html> (Last consulted: 30/04/2019)  
See "Bolsonaro escreve que combater Marxismo é solução para melhorar educação no Brasil" (December 31, 2018). *O Globo*. Retrieved from: <https://oglobo.globo.com/sociedade/bolsonaro-escreve-que-combater-Marxismo-solucao-para-melhorar-educacao-no-brasil-23336992> (Last consulted: 30/04/2019) "One of the motives to get Brazil out of the bottom of the world education rankings is to combat the Marxist waste that was installed in educational institutions. Together with the Minister of Education we will evolve towards the formation of citizens, and not political militants".

<sup>37</sup> Analysis of interaction data of the political parties on social media, by platform, during the two-week campaign of the 2019 Spanish general election. Twitter thread by Pablo Gallego (<https://twitter.com/PabGallego/status/1121748622872338432>) (Last consulted: 30/04/2019)