



Article

Web Wide Warfare. Part 1: The Blue Shadow

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Abstract

Many tribalistic conflicts today are driven by, or at least influenced by, the structure and function of the internet and online systems and cultures. This first paper (of two focused upon this issue) identifies several salient driving factors which underpin one such conflict - the “culture wars” in their online expression, predominantly in the United States context. For purposes of simplicity, the categories of Red and Blue tribes are used to frame the discussion, with the focus here upon unpacking salient aspects of the Blue tribalism in the United States. The paper also argues that the poststructuralist foundations of Critical Futures Studies make that field more readily aligned with Blue tribe thinking, and that this may limit its capacity to help mediate in issues related to the tribal split. Critical Futurist Sohail Inayatullah’s Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) is employed to identify factors which span the litany, social/systems, worldview and mythic levels of the problematique.

Keywords

Tribalism, Media Bias, Culture Wars, Integral Theory, Taboos, Media Bubbles, Critical Futures Studies, Online Bullying

Introduction

The culture wars are normally considered to be underpinned by a confrontational binary. These can be seen in binaries such as liberal/conservative, left/right, socialist/capitalist, Democrat/Republican and so on. However, in this paper I shall avoid traditional nomenclature as much as possible because these terms are now heavily laden with projected meanings which vary according to one’s tribal affiliation.¹

The terms “conservative” and “liberal” have become problematic. The Political Compass (2019) profile test moves beyond the overly-simplistic left and right dichotomy by incorporating a vitally important vertical axis: libertarian versus authoritarian. History reveals that both right and left-wing political movements can become abusive or even destructive when they become authoritarian (Hicks, 2004; Peterson, 1999). If we keep the Political Compass map in mind, we can begin to move away from the overly-simplistic narratives of good versus evil. As long as the tribal mind insists that immorality predominantly exists within the other tribe, the capacity for introspection and the acknowledgment of problems within one’s own group is reduced.

Thus, for the purposes of simplicity I shall refer to the “Blue” (effectively left) and “Red” (right) tribes, unless a more specific clarification is required, following the dichotomy possibly first popularized by David Brooks (2001).

The focus here will be the Blue tribe, reflecting my research interest in the rise of “illiberalism,” which is Jonathan Haidt’s (2012) term to describe the way certain aspects of the liberal movement have become more moralistic, more authoritarian and less tolerant.

My prime intention is to address shortcomings and blind spots amongst Blue tribe thinking in regard to the tribal split, focusing on the American context. My sense is that traditionally “liberal” values (such as self-reflection, openness, engagement, justice and compassion) will be required to heal the culture wars. I will thus point to inherent inconsistencies within Blue tribe ideology and behavior which often violate the spirit of liberalism, and thus argue that reformation of the Blue tribe is vital at this time. Nonetheless, if such “liberal” values can find their way more readily into the Red tribe, it is probable that the resolution of the tribal split will be enhanced. As Jonathan Haidt

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(2012) has found with his research in moral psychology, both liberals and conservatives share a strong belief in the importance of justice and compassion, the most predominantly traditional liberal values.

What follows is thus not meant to be a balanced appraisal to determine which tribe is more right or wrong, but to identify multi-factored drivers of the online tribal split in the Blue tribe. Furthermore, there are already many critical analyses on the inherent problems within the Red tribe (e.g. Bauwens, 2017; Greenberg, 2019) across mainstream media, in our educational institutions and on social media. I do not have much new to add to those critiques, while I feel there is much of vital importance left unsaid in regard to issues within the Blue tribe. It is nonetheless true that a depth process, including employment of Causal Layered Analysis and shadow work, could be used to examine the broad demographic of the Red tribe (and its ideals and behaviors) in greater depth than is generally seen in most current critiques.

In the paper to follow this one (part 2)², I shall suggest possible solutions to the tribal split in general, involving depth work (psycho-spiritual introspection).

The Methodological Approach

This paper employs Inayatullah's (2018) Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) to analyze common limitations of Blue tribe thinking. The approach shall address the readily observable components of the problem (the litany), identify several systems and social issues, explore the role of worldviews, and finally unpack some of its mythological (narrative driven) and linguistic dimensions. It is often the case that causal factors span two or more of these levels. The process below will proceed *in general* through these levels; from the more obvious and superficial causes, through to the deeper systemic, worldview, mythic and psycho-spiritual levels. However, the levels may be interwoven at various junctures, where such overlaps occur. The purpose here is not to neatly lump causal factors into a rigid framework, but merely to use that framework to encourage a deeper analysis of the problem than one might typically encounter without CLA.

The focus will be on outlining the specific problems, their structures and causes. Because at the deeper levels of analysis, this paper (and part 2) delves into the psycho-spiritual aspects of the focus topic, I will also briefly employ the ideas and methods of Carl Jung (2014) and more current mindfulness practitioners like Leonard Jacobson (2009) and Eckhart Tolle (2009). I will not discuss the biological drivers of tribalism, which while arguably a valid aspect, are beyond the scope of this paper.

The Current Problem

The litany as identified in Inayatullah's (2018) Causal Layered Analysis is typically the surface-level of a problem; that which is readily observed, or typically surveyed by popular media or social media discourses.

If we examine the culture wars, the most common and superficial explanations for differences in truth claims can be reduced to just two explanations. Either the other party is "stupid," (unintelligent, uneducated, misinformed, brainwashed etc.) or they are "bad" (evil, unbelievers, atheists, greedy, sexually deviant, racists, bigots, fascists etc.). These are not so much attempts to understand or explain, but are instead projections at a dehumanized other. This is *ad hominem*, not critical.

The purpose for these shallow explanations is likely to be to gain power and control of a discourse by shaming and discrediting the other person or group. With *ad hominem* responses, the information or argument brought forward by the other party does not need to be heard or considered.

A typical means to achieve the same end is to simply label the second party as "other." They are left/right, white/black/yellow, liberal/conservative. In order to "win", no reference to the point being raised is required, simply the application of the label. A host of insulting terms are on offer if further denunciation is required: libtard, alt-right, Trumpanzee, SJW, snowflake, feminazi and so on.

One outcome of this dehumanisation is that there is reduced engagement with the other. Judgement destroys presence, empathy and the capacity to listen (Jacobson, 2009), and the labels above are all delimiting and prejudicial terms. The other party is never quite seen as real. The internet exacerbates this problem, as the other party is not physically present. Indeed, they are often merely an avatar or pseudonym. Their gender, age, face, body, voice and cultural characteristics may be unknown. And if the platform does permit such information (Facebook, Instagram,

Tinder etc.), they may still not be a genuine “friend,” but an acquaintance “friended” via cyberspace.

In this way, the narrative remains unchallenged; the focus not upon the question at hand, but upon how “bad” the person from the other group is. Their voice becomes a futile whisper unheard in a gale of mocking outrage and laughter. The approach is not restricted to social media. Media outlets often employ the same process (Chiu, 2019; Vertigan & Nelson, 2019).

Even the terms “right-winger,” and “left-winger” are often employed in a way that implies intrinsic immorality or stupidity, even though neither necessitate that connotation. Independent journalist Andy Ngo was described by many news outlets not as a journalist when attacked and beaten on a Portland street by Antifa members in July 2019. Instead, various Blue tribe media referred to him as a “conservative journalist,” “right-wing journalist,” “right-wing troll,” and “grifter” (Dickson, 2019). This reflects an internal narrative. Blue tribe media do not describe their own reporters as “left-wing” or “liberal” journalists, let alone “left-wing trolls.”

In such instances, the mere invoking of the name of the despised other is enough to situate them as a force of immorality or perhaps evil. In this way, their arguments can be ignored, or their abuse dismissed as unimportant.

Other labels carry more obviously moralistic judgment and are employed readily and loosely as ad hominem repudiation. These are essentially slurs: bigot, racist, sexist, fascist, Islamo-fascist, Nazi, Hitler, alt-right and so on. Terms like “homophobe” and “Islamophobe” are recent additions. Blogger and author Tim Ferris (2016) has coined the term “bigoteer” to describe a person who habitually calls others bigots in online discourse. The culture of bigoteering is now a dominant feature of Blue tribe culture.

Another key driver of online tribal drama, perhaps more a systemic issue, is that the media and social media now routinely use “clickbait” titles and provocative content to drive traffic. “Immigrants in Trump’s America now deported for running a red light,” read a Yahoo headline (linked to a Canadian web site) a few months after Trump’s election (Canada Free Press, 2017). Yet a reading of the article reveals that the man was an undocumented immigrant who was caught when arrested for running a red light. He was deported for the former infraction, not the latter. The issue had nothing to do with the American president. Below the article thousands of Red and Blue tribe commentators raged not only at each other, but notably at the media outlets.

The prime motivation for such clickbait journalism is presumably to increase advertising revenue. This has led to a dramatic decline in the veracity of both news headlines and of article content. Ad hominem attacks directed at tribal others are now routine. One result is the decline in media trust. Just 13 percent of Americans trusting media “a great deal” in September 2019 (Brenan, 2019).

Thus, the online culture wars are being impacted by discourse spaces mediated by the advent of the internet and its technological, cultural and economic imperatives.

The Collapse of the Discourse

We are in an age where dominant narratives are again breaking down (Rebel Wisdom, 2019a). The current dynamic represents a more complex challenge than in the mid-twentieth century when modernist/colonial narratives came under attack and lost favor with the rise of critical theory and post-colonial studies; eventually giving birth to postmodernism and poststructuralism³ (Rebel Wisdom, 2019a; Wilber, 2001). The confusion emerges because the modes of analysis (deconstruction, distancing, linguistic analysis and so on) are now distrusted by many (predominantly by the Red tribe), as those tools have mostly been developed in the Blue tribe-dominant spaces, and now commonly employed for the precise purpose of criticizing and disempowering the Red tribe. Underpinning this is a dispute regarding ontology: Red tribe thinking is often underpinned by religious imperatives, while Blue tribe thinking, following postmodern ideals, typically rejects grand narratives.

The discourse is now increasingly fractured and often incoherent. Obfuscation and misrepresentation of data and anecdote are typical features of the system, with the prime goal observably being maintenance of whatever narrative one wishes to push. Our institutions of public discourse – media, social media, educational institutions, and even the platforms of the tech giants (e.g. Google, Facebook, Yahoo) - are now almost uniformly broken in that they have lost public trust (Brenan, 2019), and this is understandably so given the almost daily uncovering of mistruths and obfuscations.

Our public institutions are in a state of socio-pathology. The tribal split and the culture wars have thus worsened concurrently with the collapse of institutional trust.

The Increased Progressive Presence in Media and Education

The postmodern and progressive movements have established great and increasing power in western universities and education systems, and their influence is clear in mainstream media, with many journalists graduating from that university system (Hicks, 2004; Wilber, in Rebel Wisdom, 2019a; Schmachtenberger, in Rebel Wisdom, 2019b).

In the universities in the west, the arts, humanities, education and social sciences are now typically dominated by progressivist ideology (Haidt, 2012; Rebel Wisdom, 2019b). There is an argument (typically put forward by Red tribe aligned sources) that it is becoming more difficult for students to be exposed to a variety of perspectives, including critiques of that liberal-progressive ideology. Faculties across the west have in recent decades seen a great increase in the ratio of liberal-to-conservative staff (Haidt, 2012, 2018). Conservatives are now reluctant to speak up according to Jonathan Haidt (2012, 2018), who argues that academics in general are increasingly intimidated by the prospect of student criticism, the latter encouraged by the proliferation of diversity bureaucrats and tribunals (Haidt, 2012, 2018).

Part of the Red tribe argument is that administrators often bow to student pressure to deplatform heterodox opinion on campuses. Further, students who do not wish to hear uncomfortable or challenging ideas can now readily retreat to safe spaces (Haidt, 2018). The argument that free speech is declining has supporting evidence from recent surveys by the Knight Foundation (Free expression, 2016) and the Cato Institute (2017).

Sachs (There is no Campus Free Speech Crisis 2017) and Yglesias (2018) have argued that the “free speech crisis” is a myth, and largely driven by conservative media. However, Sachs has acknowledged that his referencing of older General Social Survey data sets from a period where the problem was less notable may have resulted in understatement of the problem (There is no Campus Free Speech Crisis, 2017). Another criticism has been the small sample size of the GSS data set which Sachs and Yglesias draw upon (The Skeptics are Wrong, 2018). A third issue is arguably that the “skeptics” argument fails to see that a key driver of free speech restriction on campuses is the failure of administrators to stand up to a small but vocal minority of radical left-leaning students (Skeptics are Wrong, 2018).

Thus there is some evidence that today’s university graduates are exposed predominantly to Blue tribe ideology, and that they are less likely to be exposed to the Red tribe worldview (or ideas which challenge the Blue tribe worldview). This may be exacerbating the tribal split.

Technology

The internet and social media are playing a great part in the current online tribal split. We can situate this as another systemic issue, but it impacts on deeper drivers within the human psyche.

The emergence of filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011) means that the internet tends to repeatedly keep feeding an individual the same kind of web content. The effect is to delimit a person’s field of experience and their exposure to other perspectives, narratives and ideas. Personalization software thus tends to perpetuate personal narratives, perspectives and biases. It also tends to trap netizens in communities who share their ideas and opinions. They may thus not get exposed to ideas, opinions and facts which contradict their own (Pariser, 2011). This is undoubtedly one of the main systemic drivers which has led to the development of the tribal split.

Increased anxiety and depression

Underpinning this situation is significant increases in anxiety and depression in those born after 1995, especially in girls. Haidt (2018) finds two causal factors: overprotective parenting (which diminishes resilience) and increased time spent on the internet. Further, the intersectionality which underpins much educational theory today (and which is now entering corporate policy) downplays personal responsibility, while situating the individual as part of greater oppressive historical forces over which they have little control (Haidt, 2018). Newport (2012) finds that a self-centered belief that “living one’s bliss” (focusing upon what one is passionate about) has generated unrealistic expectations (and thus anxiety) in the young, and he traces this back to 1980’s culture, with the Robin Williams movie *The Dead Poet’s Society* representing a seminal shift towards a more narcissistic culture.

Meanwhile Canadian psychologist Jordan Peterson has had great impact (especially with young men, but also many woman) with a self-help philosophy founded on personal responsibility and building a meaningful life (Rebel Wisdom, 2019a), an idea more aligned with Red-tribe thinking. Yet for this (and other reasons) Peterson has been

regularly attacked by many in the mainstream media and from the Blue tribe in general. He was recently disinvited from Cambridge University after student activists and staff protested his impending arrival (Marsh, 2019). Peterson (2018) argues that his rapid and unexpected success suggests that the young are thirsting for the rediscovery of meaning and purpose, as well as the acceptance of more personal responsibility (Peterson, 2018).

The situation suggests a kind of self-perpetuating problematique, where our institutions seek to address increased anxiety in the general public, while parenting, teaching and management styles may be exacerbating the issue. The internet is also populated by those emerging from our education systems and who then fill our public institutions, so this may be contributing to the development of netizens with a reduced capacity for personal responsibility and a desire to project blame and rage onto the world.

Introspection Diminishes

Mainstream media and our public institutions (including universities) have shown a reluctance to self-critique regarding their part in the culture wars. Thus, as mainstream media shrinks and public trust in it evaporates (Brenan, 2019), we are predominantly left with alternative media and independent journalists to critique mainstream narratives. Yet the virtual bubble in which the Blue tribe is now increasingly encased (Eady, Nagler, Guess, Zilinsky, & Tucker, 2019) means that many of their advocates are not adequately exposed to such critique. Haidt (2012) has found that liberals are less able to accurately predict genuine conservative responses to common issues than are conservatives able to guess liberal attitudes. This may be because left-leaning individuals are significantly less likely to follow political accounts outside their worldview than are conservatives (Eady et al., 2019). Indeed, the recent dramatic escalation in calls for increased censorship has mostly emerged from Blue tribe circles, with a common expression being that much of the content (or entire platforms) of alternative media and social media is dangerous and should either be avoided or banned (Haidt, 2012, 2018). The filter bubble is also heavily impacting Red tribe online habits, while conservative media and alternative/social media contains significant in-group bias (Eady et al., 2019; Haidt, 2012, 2018).

This hostility to beyond-tribe critique and an unwillingness to engage the other thus represents a systems-level driver of tribalism as well as a self-stultifying problematique. It increases likelihood that netizens do not have their worldview and ideas sufficiently challenged.

Dissidents retreat to the dark web

Rational, data-driven analyses of problems become difficult where the discourse punishes authors and actors who stray outside the approved storyline (Haidt, 2012, 2018). This issue is precisely what the postmodern politic set out to identify and correct many decades ago (Foucault, in Rabinow, 1984; Hicks, 2004), but it has now recreated similar problems (though the categories of the forbidden differ).

There are relatively few internal voices who are currently willing to speak up about the ideological hegemony in the institutions controlled by the Blue tribe (Hicks, 2004; Haidt, 2012, 2018). Dissent is very difficult in a system where dissidents are routinely dismissed as not merely wrong, but as morally repugnant: in short, evil (Kalmore & Mason, 2019). Professional and personal repercussions can be swift and fierce, and the potential for excommunication from the tribe and its emotional support, status-signifiers and financial structures is a genuine problem. Examples are numerous, but just a few include academics like Lawrence Summers (resigned as President of Harvard for suggesting that male dominance in STEM fields might reflect biological factors) (Finder, Healy, & Zernike, 2006); Jordan Peterson (disinvited from Cambridge university after a small number of students and faculty pressured administrators (Marsh 2019); and Alessandro Strumia (suspended from CERN for arguing male scientists were suffering from a promotion /system centred on gender ideology, not merit (BBC News, 2018).

Other off-limits Blue-tribe narratives which are problematic include “rape culture” (Cox, 2007); the wage gap (Farrel & Gray, 2019); that racial imbalances in US police shootings predominantly reflect police racial prejudices (Johnson, Tress, Burkell, Taylor, & Cesario, 2019); and that white people are the most economically and educationally privileged social group in the US (Lopez, Ruiz, & Patten, 2017). Equivalent taboos in Red tribe media and online spaces typically include important current issues such as climate change, public healthcare and gun control.

The two tribes can thus become “brainwashed” by overexposure to narrow lines of thinking because of the

general absence of opposing perspectives and data. Most notably, in the absence of safe spaces for debate around issues that are effectively sacralized, dissent often shifts into other online spaces; which are then deemed taboo locales: the dark web. In this way, dissenting voices remain silenced (except to their own audience). This failure to permit healthy debate on many issues in our universities and in the mainstream media means that the marginalized shift their grievances to online media.

In such spaces, common feeds and updates tend to depict the other tribe only via its worst characteristics, with behaviours and comments often taken out of context or misrepresented (Rebel Wisdom, 2019a). When we encounter our tribal opponents, it is thus often in a space where the necessary rules of rational and healthy engagement tend to be absent, and the result is that civility often breaks down quickly.

Information and education systems which are quick to silence and punish dissidents are not likely to produce socially harmonious nor sustainable futures. We need respectful engagement from differing worldviews and a diversity of ideas if we are to truly embody the ideal of “diversity and inclusion” (Haidt, 2012).

Used Futures and The Futures of the University

Futures predicated upon poststructuralist theory are now in danger of pushing used futures, as poststructuralism is closely aligned with progressive and postmodern ideology. The mid-twentieth century world from whence poststructuralism emerged has changed, and dynamics amongst social groups are now far more complex. Policy makers, including those in governments, and in educational and corporate institutions will have to become much more nimble to fairly and adequately meet the needs of multiple stakeholders (Schwab, 2016). Klaus Schwab, executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, makes a related point when referring to “The Spirit of Davos.”

Boundaries between sectors and professions are artificial and are proving to be increasingly counterproductive. More than ever, it is essential to dissolve these barriers by engaging the power of networks to forge effective partnerships. Companies and organizations that fail to do this and do not walk the talk by building diverse teams will have a difficult time adjusting to the disruptions of the digital age. (Schwab, 2016)

Further, poststructuralist and postmodern ideals are predicated on several key narratives which I believe are becoming increasingly outmoded and outdated. Though it retains important distinctions and elements of truth, the Blue tribe position now often perpetuates inflexible and distorted maps of reality. Particularly problematic is its common employment of identity politics and intersectionality, as I shall expand upon, below. There is a tendency towards “illiberalism” in the Blue tribe (Haidt, 2012), which often divides the world into sacred (Blue) and oppressor (Red) tribes, typically with a preassigned and rigid narrative.⁴

Blue tribe-affiliated academic disciplines (or those which appear to be such) which fail to rectify this systemic and worldview problem may become increasingly less potent when attempting to resolve issues related to the tribal split; and that split may become our greatest social/political problem within short time. CFS and Blue tribe-aligned policy makers may thus find themselves in a weakened position for producing workable solutions to multiple present and future major disputes. Winning the trust of all stakeholders is crucial. How readily will Critical Futures Studies be welcomed in any attempt to resolve tribally divisive issues like the yellow vest protests in France, potential fragmentation of the European Union after Brexit or disputes regarding climate change?

The Used Futures of Critical Futures Studies?

Critical Futures Studies is itself commonly embedded within postmodern and poststructuralist narratives and is therefore implicitly more readily aligned with blue-tribe thinking. For example, Causal Layered Analysis (Inayatullah, 2018) employs a poststructural process, expressed as analytical methodology, which Inayatullah (1998) explicitly refers to as “poststructuralism as method.” The critical ideology and methodology of CFS therefore share some common roots with Blue tribe thinking. This is a problem in that criticism and distrust of postmodernism and poststructuralism are common themes in red-tribe discourses and those voices critical of blue-tribe thinking (e.g. Hicks, 2004; Wilber, in Rebel Wisdom, 2019a; Schmachtenberger, in Rebel Wisdom, 2019b). CFS may therefore be in a problematic position in respect to engaging the Red tribe and healing the tribal split

This is not a wholesale attack on CFS or critical theory in general. CFS retains a great capacity for important insights into futures (I am using such an approach here). Yet CFS (and the Blue tribe in general) now faces a dilemma in dealing with an increasingly tribalist world. What are the ideas and tools which can move us forward in this context? Who are the leaders capable of spanning the cultural divide without projecting their biases against the other tribe, thus alienating them? Red tribe leaders and advocates face the same problem.

If this emerging issue concretizes further, the impact of CFS may be increasingly restricted to just part of the human population; or to situations where such tribalism does not feature.

One simple process both Red and Blue tribes can adopt is increased honesty and transparency, as Schmachtenberger emphasizes (Rebel Wisdom, 2019b). That requires a great commitment to introspection and an advanced capacity for vulnerability. Yet tribalism exacerbates mistrust; and we have cultivated an ecology dominated by stereotypical images of untrustworthy, dishonest others.

In theory, CFS and especially Inayatullah's Causal Layered Analysis opens a space to readily acknowledge such issues. Yet the strong taboos which have emerged in the Blue tribe thinking which dominates many educational, government and corporate spaces (where CLA often operates) renders genuine transparency difficult; while the implicit nature of tribal worldview bias means that bias may remain unaddressed.

Hyperbolic and Inadequate Language

One notable feature and driver of the tribal split is that the language employed tends to be divisive and hyperbolic. Discussions tend to quickly become infused with extremist terminology. After the mid-2019 arrest of dissident journalist Julian Assange, for example, numerous mainstream media outlets aggressively denounced him. Australia's Fairfax media ran a headline which pronounced Assange's immediate excommunication from print media, declaring him to be "a monster not a journalist" (Knott, 2019). Professors at Canada's Wilfrid Laurier compared conservative psychologist Jordan Peterson to Adolf Hitler as they reprimanded a young teaching assistant for using a short video clip of Peterson on public TV (Artuso, 2018); while Peterson himself has compared far-left activists to Maoists (Lynskey, 2018). Democratic senator Alexandria Ocasio Cortez has regularly compared ICE detention centers to "concentration camps" (Morton, 2019). The fascist/Nazi meme is now perhaps the most pervasive metaphor and meme employed by the Blue tribe and mainstream media in describing the Red tribe. The slur is also regularly used by members of the Red tribe to describe their political opponents. Here we see a clear example of hyperbolic narratives being drawn from pasts that are rarely an accurate fit for what is emerging today.

Where language and description forgo accuracy and subtlety and replaces them with brutish hyperbole, not only does it dehumanize the people described, but important distinctions get lost. A further result is that it alienates those accused of being monstrous (regardless of fit), as well as the people who identify with the accused. It thus exacerbates the tribal divide. Such hyperbolic denunciation generates fear and mistrust, is divisive and fuels tribalism.

The problematic becomes problematic

Another linguistic issue is that the postmodern polity has now become dominant in education and much of the media, and this has greatly accelerated since the election of Donald Trump and the Brexit issue (Haidt, 2018; Murray, 2019). Even the term "dominant narrative" is now problematic. This is because the term "dominant narrative" is typically expressed within the context of the agendas of the postmodern narrative, which may include a conglomerate synthesis of progressive, postmodern and neo-Marxist ideology.

The rabbit hole tunnels yet deeper, for by implication the term "problematic" is now effectively rendered problematic. And if any word or phrase is identified with the postmodern process, it is "problematic." For "problematic" is now a signifier for that dominant ideology, and is a weaponized term. Deploying the term "problematic" in a given debate potentially situates the user within the Blue tribe, its affiliates and agendas for power and control, as has been noted by critics like Jordan Peterson, Jonathan Haidt (2018) and Ken Wilber (in Rebel Wisdom, 2019a).

This situation places the tribal split in a delicate situation. The tools and language which have been the mainstay of progressive power within our educational institutions, much of mainstream, the corporate world and the tech giants are no longer trusted by the Red tribe. This has implications for Critical Futures Studies, as has been argued

above, as many of its practitioners employ just such language and tools.

Marxists Abandon the Workers

Beyond more recent technology-related drivers of online tribalism, there are socio-political issues which have underpinned the development of the tribal split, going back long before the internet was dreamed of. Stephen Hicks (2004) has argued that in the United States and the west in general, the Marxists abandoned traditional concepts of Marxism after the disasters and horrors of that movement unfolded by the mid-twentieth-century. As the corpses piled higher in the Soviet Union, Mao's China, Pol Pot's Cambodia and Eastern Europe, Marxists came to see that their ideology contained an impossible self-contradiction – that Marxism often led not to utopian equality, justice and compassion for all, but to a dystopian hell where human dignity and human rights were sacrificed in the name of “equality.” Hicks (2004) has written of how many of the intellectuals of the Frankfurt School moved from Europe to the US at this time, where they abandoned traditional class-based Marxism and replaced it with identity politics, which ultimately morphed into intersectionality. Thus, the working class was abandoned, and social minorities and the “marginalized” became the focus of their work (Hicks, 2004).

Over time these ideals have in turn begun to create demographic and political affiliations which now mirror at least some of the problems that were the concerns of traditional Marxism (though arguably to lesser degree). A quick look at the demographic map the US after the 2016 election reveals that the large areas of Red (Republican) voters corresponded roughly to the areas of the US economically abandoned by the Blue-tribe coastal demographic after the mid-twentieth century (Hicks, 2004). In Britain, a similar pattern can be seen in the significant majority of British citizens outside the financial capital London who voted “leave” (CLA, 2016). It is reasonable to conclude that the recent rise of populist movements worldwide is in part driven by an emergent class divide, as a large number of Hilary Clinton's “deplorables” reject the social justice tenets of progressive ideology.

The self-betrayal of progressivism

The founding values of the “liberal” movement include justice, tolerance and compassion, freedom of speech, non-violence, support for the working classes and critique of corporate and capitalist greed (Haidt, 2012; Hicks, 2004). Yet if we turn our attention to current Blue tribe cultural institutions in the United States, such values are now regularly being contravened. The tech giants are covertly pushing progressive ideology via their algorithms (Murray, 2019), which is not consistent with the ideal of the open society. There is evidence that the mainstream media and education system are increasingly pro-censorship (Cato Institute, 2017; Haidt, 2012, 2018; Free Expression, 2016; Stevens, 2018). Universities are beginning to look like capital-generating factories, often charging exorbitant fees (especially in the US) to their predominantly left-leaning students; with much of the revenue required to fund the ever-expanding and increasingly left-wing faculty (Haidt, 2018). Administrative bloat has created a proliferation of diversity administrators and counselors, who are being paid (often) six-figure salaries even as they produce policy and research outcomes which are typically critical of capitalist greed (Haidt, 2018).

An argument can be made that the educated classes, mainstream media and tech giants are now more “illiberal” than liberal (Haidt, 2012, 2018). Even if one disputes this claim, the accusation is now a Red tribe meme, and will be hard to shake. Heterodox thought is fundamental to liberal societies, and the negotiation of foundational values has to be an ongoing aspect of any healthy liberal society. A failure to permit healthy dissent, even for the sake of a call to “the greater good,” potentially opens the doorway to dystopian futures, as we have seen with the more catastrophic attempts to build societies in such a way the mid-twentieth century.

Intersectionality and Identity Politics

As neo-Marxism, progressivism and liberalism became entwined, identity politics morphed into intersectionality, with its victim and grievance-based consciousness (Haidt, 2018; Murray, 2019; Wilber in Rebel Wisdom, 2019a). Intersectionality can be seen as a more extreme form of identity politics, and it has been widely adopted either explicitly or implicitly in mainstream media and social media discourses, and in a wide range of institutions and academic disciplines (gender studies, black studies, race studies, LGTB studies etc.). Its effect has also now impacted almost all academic disciplines, history/classics, the sciences (including biology and physics) and even

engineering (Haidt, 2018).

Intersectionality is driven by rigid group narratives which are assigned to social groups, commonly irrespective of any narrative that individuals within those groups might choose. The ideology effectively creates a hierarchy of social victims, the most oppressed of whom are granted status within the system according to how much historical hardship they can claim. This oppression is validated by reference to their group affiliation and its assigned identity (Haidt, 2018; Murray, 2019). It is thus driven by collectivism, recreating in part the worldview of the traditional Marxists. Almost all universities and educational institutions in the west today are incorporating intersectionality into their policies, sometimes in ways which would have been seen as extreme just a few years ago. For example, Cambridge University is now introducing a mentoring system for “white” academic staff, who will be overseen by a tutor, a “person of colour.” The role of the tutor will be to inform the academic when overt or unconscious bias are perceived (Turner, 2019).

The backlash

Over time, resentment to intersectionality has emerged in those identified as “oppressors” in the system, and this forms a background to the culture wars. Many have argued that the election of Donald Trump and the rise of populist movements in the west are in part a function of this resentment towards intersectionality and progressivism (Murray, 2019; Rebel Wisdom, 2019a).

Further, it is not merely white people and heterosexual men who have complained. At his address commemorating Nelson Mandela’s 100th birthday, Barack Obama noted this emerging issue:

We’re able also to get inside the reality of people who are different from us so we can understand their point of view. Maybe we can change their minds but maybe they’ll change ours. And you can’t do this if you just out of hand disregard what your opponents have to say from the start. And you can’t do it if you insist that those who aren’t like you, because they’re white or because they’re male, that somehow there’s no way they can understand what I’m feeling, that somehow they lack the standing to speak on certain matters. (NPR, 2018)

Recently, a significant number of feminists have begun to protest claimed injustices which they perceive to have emerged from the increasing presence of “trans” women in what were formerly “women-only” domains, including women’s sport. Some feminists see the trans movement as threatening the progress that women have made from over a century of struggle for equality (Hay, 2019).

In a related issue, because of their success in economic and educational spheres, Asians are now increasingly being grouped as a privileged class within the intersectionality hierarchy; and they are now sometimes described as “white-aligned.” Evidence of rising dissatisfaction with intersectionality policies within the Asian communities is seen for example, in a group identifying themselves as Asian-America now suing Harvard university for perceived discrimination against their community in that university’s entrance process (Hartocollis, 2018).

Intersectionality can therefore be identified as a significant systemic factor in the emergence of the tribal split, and a key driver in its continued development. The Blue tribe tends to strongly support it, the Red tribe tends to resent it (Haidt, 2012). Identity politics concretizes group identification and facilitates the development of group-centred worldviews which often see other groups as oppressive or as threats to their status within the system. Increased negative perceptions and feelings towards other groups and races is thus likely. Further, an unexpected consequence has been an increased identitarianism in whites and males (Lopez, 2017). There is therefore strong reason to argue that intersectionality and identity politics drives victim and grievance consciousness in many groups, and may even facilitate racism and bigotry (Murray, 2019).

Thus, despite its initial intention to facilitate justice and compassion, there is an increasing concern that identity politics has become inherently divisive, as groups clamber for power and status within its structures. It is reasonable to assume that any attempt to heal the tribal split will need to address the issues that intersectionality and identity politics have helped exacerbate and engender.

Projection and The Diminution of Consciousness

Moving towards the psycho-spiritual dimensions of the tribal split, it can be noted that the effects of online bullying include reduced self-esteem, increased anxiety, depression and even risk of suicide (Khurana, Bleakley, Jordan, & Romer, 2015). Yet those engaging in the projection of anger and blame may also be damaging themselves in terms of their psychological and spiritual development.

Online conflicts and dramas are driven by mental projections. One way to examine this is to see these as an externalisation of the mind, or ego (Anthony, 2014; Tolle, 2009). The dark, destructive and shame-based thoughts and feelings which once typically remained invisible within human minds, now often play out in virtual space, because there are few immediate consequences for projecting abuse at virtual others.

In many spiritual and meditative discourses, it is stated that it the cognitive process of naming and judging constricts a deeper awareness of the nature of self, others and the world (Jacobson, 2009; Tolle, 2009; Wilber, 2001). A related constriction occurs when the mind becomes too full, too active, where there is no space for deeper, and more receptive modes of consciousness to flourish (Jacobson, 2009). The online battlefields of the culture wars are saturated with mental projections, the naming and shaming of objects and “others.” There is little time to cultivate reflective and meditative states of awareness in such spaces. Minds which habitually occupy such locales are likely stultifying their own capacity for mindful and spiritual insight, including a deeper awareness of both self and other.

In a sense, the development of the internet has therefore amplified the shadow; the human unconscious.

The Wounded Child and the Need for Healing

The tribal split can also be seen as a function of unresolved trauma, both personal and collective.

It is my perception that social justice activism in general needs to be driven by self-awareness and the traditional liberal values of love and compassion, the latter of which represent its founding values (Haidt, 2012). This is a requirement for facilitating healing of the wounded child (Bradshaw, 1990) and arguably the planet.

The perception that the unmet needs of the wounded child are a key driver of the online rage and projection witnessed in the tribal split is a mythic-level position. Inner child healing work is not compatible with much of today’s internet culture, including much social justice activism, the latter of which is often underpinned by the projection of anger and blame at the world and non-aligned groups (Murray, 2019; Barack Obama, in NPR, 2018). This potentially traps the individual in an emotionally immature state, with a reduced capacity for assuming the emotional responsibility that personal healing demands. When Greta Thunberg cried “You have stolen my dreams and my childhood!” at a United Nations gathering in September 2019, was she emoting the primordial cry of the wounded child, a projection well known to those who have engaged their own wounded child upon their own healing journey? Has the environmental movement and progressive culture appropriated Thunberg’s grief (and grief and pain in general) for political purposes?

In genuine healing work the “adult” learns to assume responsibility for such pain, to “re-parent” it (Bradshaw, 1990) and thus integrate that into a transformed adult. Such responsibility is very demanding. Great psychological maturity is required, which typically comes later in life. To expect a child like Thunberg to embody that may be unreasonable.

An impediment to healing

The politicization of personal and collective trauma for the purposes of political power has thus arguably reduced the potential for emotional responsibility and emotional healing.

Alternative medical practitioner Carolyn Myss (1998) has pointed out why it is that healing groups can retard personal healing. Myss finds that people can become dependent or even addicted to the healing process. The group may provide a person’s greatest source of both community and intimacy. In this sense, actual healing may represent the end of emotional intimacy and community, should the person then have no further need for the group’s healing function. At an unconscious level, healing may become undesirable.

This understanding may be applicable to social justice communities. It is reasonable to assume that the ultimate purpose of progressivism, intersectionality and social justice groups is to provide compassion and justice for the underprivileged and thus to heal their trauma, as Frances Lee (2018) has argued. Certainly, such collectives allow a

kind of intimate sharing of one's personal pain, as well as any sense of injustice associated with one's ethnicity or social position. Yet as argued above, it is also observably true that group identities based on victim-centred narratives have emerged from the social justice and progressive movements (Haidt, 2012, 2018; Wilber in Rebel Wisdom, 2019a).

Further, given that progressivism now economically drives and financially underpins many thousands of livelihoods and sustains the reputations of many academics and activists (Murray, 2019), there may be (mostly) unconscious resistance from such groups to greater societal healing. Even as time has gone on and western culture has seen significant social, economic and legal system improvements (Diamandis, 2012; Pinker, 2019), for many of the "sacred tribes of liberalism" (Haidt, 2012) grievances have continued to expand. Injustice is being identified in increasingly miniscule spaces; quite literally in the case of microaggressions (Nagai, 2017). This has likely impacted the tribal split, because many social justice activists have assumed this ideology and attitude, and taken it to the internet, en masse.

Further, mindfulness facilitators such as Tolle (2009), Jacobson (2009) and Anthony (2014) have noted that the mind (or ego) requires a steady stream of drama and conflict to ensure that its sense of existence is perpetuated. The deepening of mind into the present moment and the cognitive silence which follows typically provokes the fear of death and annihilation, as the self-identified mind feels its existence is threatened (Jacobson, 2009). This issue is well-known to many meditators and spiritual practitioners.

Within this understanding, the mind's addiction to online drama may thus help perpetuate the tribal split.

Globalism and Wilber's Macro-Historical Perspective

In the spiral dynamics approach (Beck, 2018) and Wilber's (2001) related Integral Theory, there are elements of both cyclical and linear/progress. Beck and Wilber's "green" level of consciousness expression has an approximate equivalence to what I term "the Blue tribe." They find that a current common expression of the progressive movement represents a regressive evolutionary phase, a movement from "green" back to "mean green." In such regressive phases, an upward collective shift in consciousnesses within a society later regresses to a lower fundamentalist expression. This occurs when those who follow the initial transformation fail to sustain that leap in consciousness. Instead, they may move into control and power modes as they attempt to institutionalize the new, transformational worldview. In this phase, there may be a return to authoritarianism and rigid conformity.

From Wilber and Beck's distanced perspective, the progressive movement's failure to fully honour its foundational values can be viewed with compassion and understanding. If this macrohistorical perspective based on spiral dynamics is correct, there will eventually come a shift where our typical consciousness structure will again expand towards a higher expression. The "green" will more thoroughly embody its higher qualities of caring and egalitarianism, and begin to shift towards the "yellow" where multiple realities can be more readily perceived and honoured. Healing of the cultural shift in this sense may come from forces presumably beyond immediate human control. Beck (2018) states that the spiral dynamics approach has lead him to conclude that there are spiritual or universal forces at work in the world (and beyond) which we humans can barely grasp with our limited minds.

The intractable dilemma of globalism today

The push for globalism has had a great impact on the tribal split. For globalism itself is underpinned not merely by economic interests, but by a seemingly contradictory progressive idealism. The latter includes multi-culturalism, diversity and intersectionality.

Clear contradictions have emerged within the progressive push for globalisation. It seeks to continue the internationalisation process of the classical Marxists (Hicks, 2004), yet it is seeking to achieve this while pushing the fragmentary grievance consciousness of identity politics and intersectionality. This suggests that today's globalist movement is implicitly underpinned by tribalism. That tribalism is not merely theoretical, but has observably facilitated the rise of ethnic and group identitarianism within both the Blue and the Red tribes, as argued above. The sacralization of "oppressed" social groups like ethnic minorities, women, LGBT, migrants and the disabled (Haidt, 2012, 2018), and the backlash by groups assigned "privileged" status (whites, men, Christians) has led to a concretization of multiple sub-global-level group identities (Haidt, 2012, 2018; Wilber, in Rebel Wisdom, 2019a). Further, tribalism is now apparent at a higher level in the progressive globalists' attachment to the Blue

tribe. The latter's preference for the ideology, sub-groups, media and information systems of the Blue tribe, and its rejection of the Red tribe, means that its very culture has likely become a key driver in the tribal split.

It is reasonable to assume that a movement which seeks unification and global internationalism cannot succeed while its own ideology, worldview and consciousness structures are underpinned by tribalism. The broader thesis presented in this paper is that even as the progressive globalist movements' professed goal is an upward movement towards integration, its ideology and policies have facilitated fragmented group indentitarianism and tribalistic antagonism.

The proliferation of group indentitarianism in the Red and Blue tribes at this time suggests that human beings have an innate tendency to form group identity at micro and meso-level scales. These identities persist at smaller scales than that of the globalist movement, which champions larger entities like the European Union, ASEAN and the United Nations. Thus, from this angle the progressive the globalist movement may be seeking to sublimate nationalist and regional identity at the same time that it champions group identity in minorities and the disadvantaged. Whether this inherent contradiction is a workable dynamic remains unclear at this time.

The promotion of higher stages of consciousness is not an overt agenda of the progressive globalist movement. However, it can be argued that such a thrust is implicit, if the movement is taken within its context as being emergent of a global psycho-spiritual shift, most notable since the 1960s. Ken Wilber (in Rebel Wisdom, 2019a), suggests that for collective global consciousness to manifest, excessive attachment to sub-group identity has to be integrated (included) and transcended. Yet how likely is it that in the foreseeable future that those sub-groups of the Blue tribe will vote themselves out of existence (or at least to reduced power and attention) to sacrifice for the higher goal of unity – with the Red tribe? If they are not willing to do that, how can the Blue tribe expect those within the Red tribe to do the same?

In Integral Theory the conservative (orange) elements of western society are seen as a lower-level expression of consciousness evolution (Wilber, 2001), and it is for this reason that the higher-level "liberal" (green) expression must affirm and embody its true values, because it has responsibility to shift the planetary consciousness forward. Any regression into tribalism is thus self-stultifying.

Without a genuine acknowledgement of the self-contradictory drives within progressive globalism, and a concurrent shift in ideology, policy and mindset, the movement may fail.

Conclusion

This paper has taken a multi-factored approach in an attempt to deepen the understanding of what drives the online conflict known as the culture wars, with a predominant focus on the role of Blue tribe. These factors include readily observable drivers such as tribal differences in ideology; while the social and systemic analysis has referred to problems such as an emergent class divide, the advent of filter bubbles, and divisive ideological narratives present in media and education structures. Worldview and narrative talking points have included the behavioral/ideological contradictions within globalism and progressivism; most notably issues within intersectionality and identity politics and their concretization of group identity. The mythic level has drawn upon psycho-spiritual conceptions, including seeing the current conflict as being in part driven by the regression of liberal progressivism from "green meme" to "mean green" (Wilber, 2001). In turn, it has been argued that at the deeper level of consciousness structures, unresolved anger and trauma, both individual and collective, may underpin the aggressive online behavior seen in today's culture wars.

Given the multifaceted nature of the problems expressed within the culture wars, interventions attempting to reduce or heal the conflict will ideally need to address more than a single aspect of it. Intervening only at more superficial levels, such as the technological or educational, will likely fail to address the more essential psycho-spiritual dimensions of the problem.

Notes

- 1- A prime motivation for writing this paper is my concern that tribalism is making it difficult to freely express dissenting ideas. Within intellectual circles, critique of "Blue" tribalism often gets the critic labeled as "Red" tribe. I believe this is one reason why so few thinkers are willing to speak up about the problems

identified in this paper. For example, Jonathan Haidt (2018), who is widely referenced in this paper, is sometimes labeled as “Red tribe,” despite his focus being tribal healing. My sense is that this is because healing of this conflict requires acknowledgement of Blue tribe pathology, not merely Red, and the former is increasingly taboo in Blue tribe circles. My own thinking is more in line with Daniel Schmachtenberger’s (Rebel Wisdom, 2019), perhaps best situated as “yellow” in spiral dynamics.

My position is thus not an identification with Red tribalism. The first half of this paper deals with typically Red tribe talking points, but this is because in-group critique of Blue tribalism is not common. Such critique is typically out-group.

It may be noted that Red tribe thinking does not typically move into the shadow and meta perspectives, nor does it often valorise Blue tribe values, as is the case in my paper. I tend to disagree with numerous common Red tribe positions on gun control, climate change, abortion (partly), some religious ideals and so on; while I tend to find agreement with certain aspects of their criticisms of identity politics and media bias. Still, my relationship with knowing is fluid, not static and tribe centric.

In my own life I have greatly minimized both media and social media consumption because of this recurring politicization and weaponization of “news.” When I wear my academic and “media” hats in the western context I find innumerable barriers to open expression (just as I do in China, where I live, for different reasons) and I know many other thinkers who are also deeply worried about this. That is what concerns me enough to write these two papers on internet tribalism. Since I do not frequent Red tribe real world or online spaces, I do not regularly encounter opposition from that group (though I do occasionally). Finally, I personally prefer to engage such people and thinking, not eliminate it.

- 2- This second paper is available at the *Journal of Futures Studies* web site.
- 3- There is much debate on the meanings of the terms postmodernism and poststructuralism, but it is beyond the scope of this paper to address that. Different thinkers use the terms in different ways. However, for the purposes of simplicity, I represent poststructuralism as an aspect of the broader postmodern movement. The former, following Derrida and Foucault (in Rabinow, 1984), contains a deep suspicion of grand narrative, ultimate values and Anglo-western-centric thinking in general. Critics of poststructuralism and postmodernism (e.g. Wilber 2001; Peterson, 1999) tend to argue that they deny legitimate hierarchy, are amoral and quickly descend into moral relativism.
- 4- It is also true that the Red tribe similarly tends to see the Blue tribe as untrustworthy or even evil (Kalmore & Mason, 2019).

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