

# Retrogressive Modernity and the Effects of Coloniality in the Former Yugoslavia



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By

Šefik Tatlić

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# INTRODUCTION

The main task of this book is an investigation of the entanglement of capitalism and colonialism and the effects such entanglement has on the organization, perception, and articulation of politics and ideology. This work is, as such, based on some fundamental hypotheses or vantage points. The first one is that global capitalism is not, as it has been widely advertised in the post-Cold War era, a “deterritorialized,” “supra-territorial” or purely economic-centric form of order, but that it is a configuration of power relations, more precisely, a power system. The second one is that global capitalism is not a power system based on the “transcendence” of “old,” colonial mechanisms of rule and racist ideologies, but on their continuity and/or optimization. In the same terms, this analysis departs from a standpoint that global capitalism is, primarily, a colonial/imperial power system at the center of which are developed countries of capital that are maintaining their geopolitical power, and prosperity, on the basis of sustainment of the colonial division of the world and the deepening of already extreme discrepancies in the distribution of resources, wealth and privileges. It will be argued, therefore, that such a design of global power architecture is based on developed countries’ sustainment of the monopoly on the definition of concepts like reason, freedom, and progress, which are entailed in the concept of modernity that itself functions as an ideological framework in which, or through which, said concepts are exploited.

The third basic hypothesis or point of departure is based on an argument that the main matrices of the organization of rule, the developed world, i.e., the West, relies on in the reproduction of global capitalism are biopolitical and necropolitical paradigms that inform the processes of the organization of politics and ideology. It is hypothesized, therefore, that these two paradigms are entangled and that the nature of this entanglement can, maybe, be disclosed or understood better if observed from the vantage point of analysis of their effects in both developed countries and their periphery, which in this case refers to the post-socialist periphery of the West, more precisely, the space of the former Yugoslavia. So, if it is not sufficiently clear from the subtitle, this book focuses on a parallel investigation of the workings of biopolitical and necropolitical paradigms in *both* developed countries and in the space of the former Yugoslavia. It is hoped, therefore, that such a point of departure would, or could, contribute to a more informed understanding of the contemporary power

relations, i.e., understanding of the workings of capitalism in consort with colonial forms of logic, that is, forms of reasoning that stand behind the detrimental dominant systemic predicaments in the contemporary context. Simply put, the analysis of the workings of biopolitics and necropolitics in developed countries is applied to the analysis of their effects in the former Yugoslavia, and vice versa.

Although this work heavily relies on the investigation of either historical or contemporary, colonial experiences of non-occidental, developing countries, its main focus is, as mentioned, on developed countries and the space of former Yugoslavia as the main poles of a binary through the optics of which currently dominant ideological and epistemic matrices are analyzed. Speaking of the first of these poles, it should be mentioned that “the West,” or all countries that are considered as developed, do not necessarily have to be understood as synonyms for a colonial power structure due to the lack of colonial exploits by some of the smaller countries from this general register. Yet, when the West, or developed countries, are mentioned in this work, these are referred to as a synonym for major powers among developed countries, as a synonym for the West/developed countries *as* a power structure. The former Yugoslavia, on the other hand, is a provisional term that is meant to encompass or entail a plethora of common denominators that stand behind various social-political processes that marked modern histories of various actors in the region and/or that mark the history of the post-socialist transformation of the region into the capitalist democratic system(s). In terms of wider temporal coordinates, this analysis; along with the mentioned exploration of histories of colonial subjugation of developing countries (since 1492), focuses primarily on the post-Cold War era and/or, more specifically, the post-9/11 and post-2008 eras in the context of which the history of the present of global capitalism and the post-socialist era in the region of former Yugoslavia are tackled. Considering the term *post*-socialist, it should be mentioned that its usage in both Western and regional historiographical and/or ideological mainstreams sometimes carries an implication that said era marks the “final” end of socialism and/or that socialism, more precisely, leftist, materialist thinking, is supposed to be discarded as “obsolete.” References to the said term in this work should not, therefore, be understood as in line with such an implication; the term is used merely as a marker that points to a cluster of processes that took and are still taking place in the addressed time frame.

Speaking of history, the basic departing point of this analysis in this regard is that its “treatment” by developed countries in the post-Cold War era is marked by a logic that represents the history of the present as structurally uncorrelated with the history of the past. Based on an

observation that developed countries in the said era started to peddle the narrative about the “end of history,” which meant to represent liberal democracy and capitalist democratic order as the apex of historical development *and* an ultimate break with “old” ideological divisions, it will be argued this narrative was aimed primarily against the (possibilities of re-emergence) of left ideology, i.e. socialism/communism. This, alleged, break with “all ideologies,” which was coupled with the beginning of the proliferation of the neoliberal “post-ideological” ideology was, as it will be argued, conceived and applied as an instrument of the relegation of exclusively left ideology to the register of historical obsolescence, while reactionary, right-wing and, ultimately, Eurocentric colonial reasoning was re-inaugurated into an epistemic pillar of, allegedly, “post-ideological” neoliberal global capitalism. This “post-ideological” veneer will, therefore, be interpreted as an ideological framework within the coordinates of which it came to a grand re-enunciation of colonial and racist forms of logic under the aegis of alleged “confrontation with all forms of totalitarianism.” Since “totalitarian” traits are being assigned, for the most part, to leftist and anti-colonial struggles, it, as it will be argued, seems that the history of the present (the post-Cold War era, including the contemporary moment of the second decade of the 21st century) is being detached from those components of the history of the past that testify to the continuity of structural links between Eurocentric ideology and capitalism. These appear to be the links that developed countries are, observably, increasingly relying on within the processes of global expansion of capitalism and its forms of logic.

In the context of the approach to the analysis of colonial contemporaneity of the space of former Yugoslavia, the main hypothesis this work departs from is that catastrophes that befell the region during the end of socialism and in its aftermath were not, as the dominant view in the both the West and the addressed region implies, caused or “inspired” by the rejection, misunderstanding or disdain for the European or generally Western civilizational values and/or (capitalist) democratic system of governance. It will be argued, therefore, that dominant ideological preconceptions that led to the resurgence of archaisms, atavism, and (ethno)nationalisms were based on various forms of compliance with, and the readings of, the tenets and principles entailed in the Eurocentric civilizational register. This does not mean that developed countries can simply be regarded as “fully responsible” for said calamities; such a simplistic presumption is, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, exploited by many right/far-right agendas in the region that are blaming the West for their transgressions and that are sometimes even representing themselves as some, alleged, “anti-colonial” discourses. Previously mentioned compliance should be understood as a general disposition that

profoundly influenced and continues to influence post-socialist forms of understanding and organization of social-political order, political economy, ideological mainstreams, and so on. So, this analysis will focus on the detection of colonial and (auto)colonial matrices as directly connected with the process of establishment of capitalism, as well as the implementation and adoption of tenets of, primarily, Eurocentric civilizational narrative in the wider context of critique of contemporary forms of colonialism.

Concerning contemporary colonialism, it is; as it will be elaborated, analyzed through the optics of the analysis of the *coloniality of power* (as Anibal Quijano dubbed it), which, in general terms, refers to the modernization of once politically explicit colonialism into a slightly more insidious form that now permeates all the institutional, ideological and epistemic layers of, not just the West, but also many other non-occidental power regimes. In other words, although coloniality of power primarily remains developed countries' instrument of preservation of colonial division of the world and its central role in it, it should also be understood as a form of "blueprint" on which some non-occidental registers, in this case specifically post-socialist ideological discourses in former Yugoslavia, rely on in interpreting the meanings of reason, freedom and progress and the general signifier of modernity. These notions are, simply put, not interpreted in the region as extensions of Eurocentric civilizational ideology, but as "universal" notions that, supposedly, need to be relied on if the "full profile of the democratic order and prosperity" is to be reached.

The focus placed on the coloniality of power in this analysis is also connected with the hypothesis that the modernization of colonialism into coloniality facilitated an insidious change in the perception of colonialism by the colonized themselves. Unlike in the era of politically explicit colonialism in which white, Eurocentric dominance was being explicitly imposed, coloniality of power can be seen as a paradigm of exercise of colonial power in which autocoloniality; voluntary acceptance of colonialism, is dominant. In that sense, it seems that autocoloniality is being equated (in the region) with "democratic freedoms," the pursuits of which underlay the toppling of socialism and the establishment of capitalism. It could, in a cynical manner, be said that these "freedoms" have actually been achieved, but predominantly in the form of autocoloniality and subservience to the logic of capital. This is a short explanation as to why autocolonialism, more precisely, autocoloniality is today the dominant form of (re)production of compliant subjectivity, which especially applies to the "biologically white" European periphery, more specifically, the space of former Yugoslavia. By ways of explanation, and contrary to the maybe more common term "self-

colonization,” the term “autocoloniality,” which is relatively often used in this work, is preferred because “self-colonization” implies that such a disposition was chosen, understood, and/or explicitly accepted, which would additionally suggest that the colonial character of correlative power architecture was recognized as such, which tends not to be the case in former Yugoslavia. The prefix “auto,” on the other hand, implies that an amount of “automatism,” and/or unconsciousness is involved in the processes of creation and reproduction of autocolonial subjectivity, which still does not exclude that such a disposition is not, or could not, be freely chosen and accepted. Consumerism was, for instance, freely accepted as the dominant form of “social vitality,” while political and ideological forms of subservience and the disappearance of any geopolitical relevance of the region are, on the other hand, not so easily accepted. Additionally, the exploration of autocoloniality will also include an analysis of the issues of “racial inferiorization” and its acceptance, as well as denial, by populations in the region in the context of the implementation and perception of the colonial/racial hierarchy of values and classification.

As was mentioned and as will be argued, the main, operational modes of capitalism as a power regime are the biopolitical paradigm of rule (that organizes social differentiation between the forms of life reduced to biological traits) and the necropolitical paradigm of rule (that is employed as a means of disposal of those seen as disposable), through which racist forms of logic and Eurocentric colonial epistemology permeate. That being said, the analysis of coloniality in global terms, and autocoloniality in a peripheral context, is also an investigation of how the processes of subjectivization are organized within the confines of biopolitical and necropolitical paradigms. This is not only an analysis of mere compliance; allegedly “authentically free” subjects project towards power, but rather an analysis of how “whole” subjectivity, including its cognitive interiority and epistemic geometry, is being manufactured as such by workings of biopolitics and necropolitics. In that sense, and as will be observed, the effects of capitalism and coloniality in former Yugoslavia, as well as in developed countries, will be approached from a perspective that sees all spheres of existence as exposed to or colonized by the logic of capital and dominant ideological preconceptions.

All of this necessarily requires the involvement of a critical apparatus that focuses on the analysis of the post-Fordist mode of production and the conversion of the whole population (and its cognitive faculties) into the production for capital, as well as such an approach requires the employment of structuralist theoretical apparatus, especially regarding the analysis of the essential role ideology has in the processes of production of

the subject. Although this analysis is generally based on materialist forms of reasoning, it does not subscribe to a typical materialist (and/or Marxist) notion that capitalism exploits all of its victims in the same way. It will, therefore, be argued that this exploitation is deeply segregational, i.e., racist, and that the alleged economic prefix of neoliberal global capitalism is only a mask of various colonial matrices invested in its reproduction. Speaking in broad terms, this work is not a critique of any ideology. It is primarily a critique of imperial, that is, Eurocentric colonial ideology entangled with capitalism, its forms of logic, and its relations of production. More precisely, this is a critique of colonization of allegedly universal and “ideologically neutral” notions of reason, freedom, and progress, as entailed in the signifier modernity, and the critique of mobilization of these concepts into components of a power system that represents itself as the apex of civilizational development, i.e., “progress.”



# CHAPTER ONE

## COLONIAL GLOBAL CAPITALISM

Many power systems that have existed throughout history, especially those that identified themselves (or were identified) as imperial or proto-imperial, have, of course, been colonial in terms of political reliance on territorial and cultural expansionism and in terms of the organization of their institutional and political structures. These structures were often organized along the lines of divisions between central, cosmopolitan core, and provincial, colonial territories to which a plethora of different statuses regarding levels of autonomy, or lack of the same, were assigned. A vast majority of imperial/colonial formations were oppressive towards the populations that found themselves on the path of their expansions, and many of said formations have represented themselves as harbingers of civilization and new (forms of) order, which were based on their definitions of reason/rationality, progress, freedom, and the purpose(s) of social-political order in general.

Nevertheless, the differences between Western and non-Western imperialisms/colonialisms (in the span of the last millennium) can be reduced to at least two major points of distinction. The conquests of non-Western imperialisms/colonialisms, although brutal, often led to the integration of conquered populations into consequent imperial structures, while Western imperialisms/colonialisms, in the vast majority of cases, were racist. The other major point of distinction is that non-Western imperialisms/colonialisms sought to impose openly subjective definitions of the “best” social-political order and/or historical course, while the paradigmatic Western imperialism/colonialism epistemologically conceptualized itself as a facilitator of, allegedly, “objectively best” social-political order able to lead humanity towards the “best version” of its historical development. This colonialism/imperialism did not position its pursuit/imposition of such “objectivity” *within* the wider confines of history; it has redefined history itself as a framework in which all confronted subjectivities are supposed to reach the Eurocentric, subjective definition of “civilized progress,” which was and remains to be represented as “objective.”

## 1.1 White modernity

Although neoliberal global capitalism today is represented by the West as an “ideologically neutral” system that “allows everyone” to embark on a path to prosperity, this system is structurally, ideologically, and epistemologically still a colonial power system. More precisely, the contemporary world is based on the colonial divide in which the West functions as the center of capitalism and in which other, non-occidental worlds are still, more or less implicitly, treated as “territories” that are, supposedly, “less civilized” than developed countries, which are still at the center of (neoliberal) global capitalism. Such a world was designed by European colonial powers, and it is still, in principle, controlled by the West as a power structure that determines how the entanglement of colonialism and capitalism is organized. The colonial experience of South America/ the Americas can serve as an example of how colonialism—that preceded and became synchronized with capitalism—was modeled. Prominent decolonial theorist Anibal Quijano argues:

With the conquest of the societies and the cultures which inhabit what today is called Latin America, began the constitution of a new world order, culminating, five hundred years later, in a global power covering the whole planet. This process implied a violent concentration of the world's resources under the control and for the benefit of a small European minority—and above all, of its ruling classes. (Quijano 2007, 168)

So, the neoliberal capitalist world is not marked only by developed countries' dominance over the circulation of capital and their privileged role in extracting the most benefits from vast discrepancies in the distribution of wealth and rights, nor only by the developed world's control over the way that material, i.e. power and production relations are organized, but by its monopoly on the definition of concepts of reason, freedom, and progress that, supposedly, offers the “best” model for progression of history. In other words, the control over how power and production relations are organized is also a control over how the temporality of the world and the perception of a movement of history are defined and (re)produced. The definition of rationality as an extension of Eurocentric (white) epistemology and the definition of freedom as the infinite process of accumulation of wealth (to the detriment of others) was part of a wider cluster of ideological reasoning in which progress itself was defined as a movement from subjective “irrationality” to “universal rationality;” the reproduction of which, as such, was represented as a

signifier of historical progression in general. As Arturo Escobar argues in this sense:

Modernity is a particular form of social organization that emerged and crystallized initially in north western Europe in the seventeenth century. Socially, modernity is characterized by institutions such as the nation-state and the bureaucratization of daily life based on the knowledge of experts; culturally, by orientations such as the belief in continual progress, the rationalization of culture, and the principles of individuality (versus the collective); and economically, by its links to various forms of capitalism. (Escobar 2004, 16)

It could, in these terms, be argued that these preconceptions are still playing a major role in the definition and organization of “progress,” i.e., dominant ideology that continues to dictate what it is or what it should be. Another name for a signifying framework that entails these preconceptions is modernity, one of the structural features of which is its colonial dimension that represents such subjective notions of progress as “objective,” “universally applicable,” and “ideologically neutral” visions of progress that are, supposedly, meant to be accepted by everyone. In other words, modernity, although being represented as a cluster of the “best,” “most optimal,” or “most rational” interpretations of the meaning of social-political orders and their historical missions, actually signifies only the continuation of Eurocentric epistemic monopoly on the definition of the meaning of historical progression. Speaking of the structure and basic preconceptions entailed in the notion of modernity, decolonial theorist Enrique Dussel observes the following:

[...] modernity implicitly contains a strong rational core that can be read as a “way out” for humanity from a state of regional and provincial immaturity. On the other hand, this same modernity carries out an irrational process that remains concealed even to itself. That is to say, given its secondary and mythical negative content, modernity can be read as the justification of an irrational praxis of violence. (Dussel 2000, 472)

So, modernity can (also) be understood as an epistemic framework that entails both irrational and rational impetuses in that sense in which irrationality employed by those who assigned to themselves a status of “harbingers of rationality” is deemed necessary if “rationality” is to be imposed on and/or enunciated by those regarded as others. In essence, this form of logic equates a particular, subjective definition of what is rational with what is supposedly objectively rational. It should be observed in this context that although the Enlightenment was articulated as based on

rationality, and advertised as a rational form of reckoning with previously dominant forms of irrationality, the post-*ancien régime*<sup>1</sup> it ushered in continued to entail said contradiction between rationality and irrationality at the core of its ideological conceptualizations of progress.

It is, therefore, this form of contradictory logic that, speaking in broad terms, continues to stand behind the obvious double standards in the definition, perception, and application of the nominal tenets that, speaking in the contemporary context, stand behind the democratic norm. These double standards are not, therefore, seen by developed countries as contradictory, but as “rational,” as tokens of consistency in the commitment to such a subjective form of (ideological) logic. It could even be argued that it is in the interests of the West to be perceived as inconsistent in its commitment to “democratic values.” This is so because the perception of the actual deepening of colonial divisions, employment of racist forms of oppression, and the extreme rise of discrepancies among classes as “inconsistent” continues to imply that the capitalist democratic system’s basic design is, allegedly, acceptable and that its emergent forms are, allegedly, only glitches in its application. Hence, modernity is here, as well as in the continuation of this book, referred to, not exclusively in temporal terms; as in a fixed period in time (associated with the span from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries), but in terms of an epistemic framework or a paradigm that entails various ideological and epistemic forms of logic that determine how the progression of history is perceived and what is, i.e. should be, the purpose and course of said progression. Since ideas about a certain historical time are also ideas about the nature of connections between material and temporal reality, modernity can be seen as a notion through which Eurocentric epistemology places the reproduction of material reality it created in direct proportion to the (possibilities) of “reproduction” of history, i.e., flow of historical time itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Although this term is sometimes understood as referring to specifically the political and social system of the Kingdom of France, it is in this book used in the capacity that is (meant to) signify the monarchist political, social ideological system that was (among other factors like hereditary succession) based on the concept of “divine rule,” legitimacy extracted from the alleged “divine mandate.” Some of the specificities of the *ancien régime* could have been detected as present in non-occidental power systems, yet the usage of the term in this context primarily refers to the occidental (i.e. European) context. It refers to common denominators shared by European monarchist regimes of power that were based on the (absolute) power of the monarch, privileged statuses of the Church and nobility, and centralized administrative and judicial apparatuses that sustained (and were sustained by) feudal, serf-based systems in the Middle Ages and colonial systems (from 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards) coupled by mercantilism (from approx. 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards).

If power and production relations are, metaphorically put, seen as components of a gravitational core around which temporality (and its interpretation) revolves, modernity represents a signifier of material power's monopoly on the definition of both purpose and direction of said revolving, i.e., the meaning of, simply put, the passage of (historical) time. In other words, modernity, conservatively seen as a denotation of a contemporaneous moment of (linearly perceived) historical progression, is also an indication, or an implication that said progression depends on the unfolding of those norms that defined what contemporaneous moment meant or means. Developed countries do not (necessarily) have to represent themselves *explicitly* as the most developed part of humanity; they can "only" represent themselves as the avant-garde of "human progressivity," which is, of course, a token of reliance on merely a subjective definition of progress that is, nonetheless, implicitly imposed upon others as a "universal" blueprint of humanity's socio-political development. A rejection of such a blueprint is not, therefore, interpreted as a rejection of the West's interpretation of progress and capitalist relations of production, but as a "blasphemous" rejection of progress in general. All of this means that colonialism no longer has to be politically explicit in order to entangle itself with capitalism, which is a basic feature of what is referred to as the colonality of power.

## 1.2 The colonality of power

It is observable that one of the main matrices of representation of global capitalism relies on a suggestion, or a narrative, that this power system is not a power system at all. In the same vein, and even if said power prefix is acknowledged, the dominant ideology continues to imply that it is a power system whose oppressive mechanisms, architecture of power, and territorial organization are, allegedly, based on "ideologically and racially" neutral tenets. Such a narrative tends to emphasize the technocratic nature of capitalism and its power structures and, while denying that colonial principles play a crucial part in the reproduction of said structures, suggests that the proliferation of democracy and/or liberal paradigms has also facilitated a genuine transformation of capitalism itself.

Subscribers to certain aspects of this narrative don't necessarily have to come from the register of ideological mainstream at all, yet it is observable that some schools of thought even from the left have shown an inclination to perceive global capitalism as an oppressive power structure that has surpassed its earlier, colonial modes of exploitation and organization for the logic of capital to be proliferated globally. In their critique of Michael

Hardt's and Antonio Negri's seminal work *The Empire*, decolonial theoretician Castro-Gómez has observed that: "The general thesis of H/N is that both imperialism and colonialism have reached their end because they are both specifically modern devices of the exploitation of human labor, and today capital does not need these historical forms to reproduce itself" (Castro-Gómez 2007, 429). In contrast to the implications brought up by Negri and Hardt, it could be argued that it is exactly the continuation of imperialism and colonialism, along with the unbridled exercise of systemic racism, that has facilitated the modern development of capitalism. This is so because the Eurocentric notions of reason, freedom, and progress, as entailed in the notion of modernity, have become intertwined, or represented as, dependent exactly on the reproduction of capitalism and the democratic order that is subordinated to capitalism, not vice versa.

Speaking of contemporary forms of colonialism, it should be observed that the modernization of Eurocentric colonialism was not based on the democratization of oppression, on equal exploitation of everyone, but on the reorganization/reformation of both explicit and implicit dimensions of racist oppression. In other words, the once politically explicit colonial order was, along with the modernization of capitalism, reorganized into an even more hegemonic power system through which colonial epistemology, like any other ideology, permeates implicitly. It could be argued, therefore, that it was this conversion that ushered in what is referred to as the coloniality of power. Coloniality (of power) is a term coined by (Anibal) Quijano who argues that: "Coloniality, then, is still the most general form of domination in the world today, once colonialism as an explicit political order was destroyed" (Quijano 2007, 170). This, in a nutshell, means that coloniality of power is a contemporary form of reproduction of colonialism that permeates all the iterations of contemporary capitalist power architecture. Additionally, this does not mean that coloniality of power is not exercised politically, as an integral part of the main political discourses of the First, but that it underpins differently contextualized political agendas pursued by major Western capitalist democracies. The coloniality of power is an internal logic; an underlying calculus that permeates through ideology, through cognitive preconceptions that determine how major ideological and institutional discourses are being organized; how capitalism functions, and how notions of reason and progress are organized. Coloniality of power has, therefore, been conflated with the notion of modernity. Regarding the relation between coloniality and modernity, decolonial theoretician Ramón Grosfoguel argues the following:

Coloniality is not equivalent to colonialism. It is not derivative from, or antecedent to, modernity. Coloniality and modernity constitute two sides of a single coin. The same way as the European industrial revolution was achieved on the shoulders of the coerced forms of labor in the periphery, the new identities, rights, laws, and institutions of modernity such as nation-states, citizenship and democracy were formed in a process of colonial interaction with, and domination/exploitation of, non-Western people. (Grosfoguel 2007, 218)

In this sense, although modernity is represented by the West as a supposedly neutral format of human development and historical progression, it entails coloniality at its core in the capacity of a “hardwired” set of instructions on how to organize political rule, social stratification, economic framework(s), and reproduction of dominant ideological matrices. Unlike in the era of politically explicit colonialism, when distinct demarcation lines between those “civilized” and “uncivilized” were openly reproduced, coloniality of power operates as a gesture of universal embracement of everybody, but only within the structural framework within which everyone’s potential has already been predetermined and conditioned. In other words, the coloniality of power consists of Eurocentric logic that keeps developed countries of capital as a white power structure at the center of global capitalism; that permeates the so-called economic forms of logic with racism, and that represents global capitalism as, allegedly, a “post-colonial” system. As Quijano puts it:

[...] In spite of the fact that political colonialism has been eliminated, the relationship between the European—also called ‘Western’—culture, and the others, continues to be one of colonial domination. It is not only a matter of the subordination of the other cultures to the European, in an external relation; we have also to do with a colonization of the other cultures, albeit in differing intensities and depths (Quijano 2007, 169).

Speaking in general terms, this means that other cultures are being interpreted as specific positions in the purely fictional and subjective hierarchy of value, i.e., “progress,” in which the West reigns supreme. As an example of the application of these intensities and depths of colonialism, those cultures, speaking in the context of Europe, that are in terms of civilization and religion “known” to developed countries — such as cultures of Eastern Europe in which Western Christianity is dominant and populations are white — are, more or less, integrated into Western transnational alliances. Still, these cultures and states are integrated only to the extent that ensures that the West of Europe stays superior in both geopolitical and cultural sense. Those European cultures and states that are

less known—such as those in which Eastern Christianity is dominant—are still pretty much exoticized and only partly integrated into the Western transnational alliances. And thirdly, those European cultures and states that are “unknown” to the West are not integrated at all and are simultaneously exoticized the most. Speaking in the global context, some non-European white and non-white democracies (like New Zealand, Australia, as well as Japan, South Korea, and Israel) can be seen as components of developed countries, i.e., the West, with varying degrees of influence within the same world’s hierarchy. Some non-European, non-Western protagonists, such as Saudi Arabia or the Gulf countries, can also be seen as “attached” to this world, but this is, one may argue, mostly due to their control of vast energy resources. Developing countries (Africa, parts of Asia, the Middle East, and parts of Central and South Americas), on the other hand, are interpreted as “territories” that are, either directly or through proxy regimes reduced to being pools of resource and cheap labor for the West, or in worse cases reduced to death worlds inhabited by racialized populations that are seen as disposable masses unworthy of being converted into commodities.

Although anti-colonial struggles in Africa, Central, and South America, and Asia from 1945 to the 1990s have yielded some great results in the form of indigenous takeover of control over (their) resources and means of production, it could be argued that the same results were achieved by, not only reliance on the combination of anti-colonial struggles with left ideology, but also by reliance on, or production of, socialist modernity. However, what the collapse of the USSR, the institutional socialist project, and generally the proper ideological division between left and right ideologies, ushered in was exactly the “great return” of prominence of Eurocentric epistemology, that is, capitalist modernity. It was this modernity that was, along with the global expansion of capitalism, adopted in the (vast majority of) non-occidental world as a “universal” and “objective” blueprint of a path towards freedom and prosperity, which led to the proliferation of many non-Western power systems, even those geopolitically confronted with the West, as reliant on Eurocentric epistemology. This, broadly speaking, meant that the possibilities of pursuing other non-capitalist social-political systems disappeared from non-Western imaginaries, that authentic ideological divisions (between leftist and reactionary registers) were distorted, and that Eurocentric modernity, entailing the conceptualizations of progress and the world itself, became a dominant ideological framework in global capitalism. These processes included the re-enunciation and normalization

of narratives that represent the material/political world as (primarily) “natural,” as an extension of “pre-political” reality.

### **1.3 Eurocentric nature-centrism**

Although European colonial conquests and correlated oppressions of non-white populations and cultures were being represented as procedures of “extraction” of those regarded as others from their, either present or construed, nature-centric epistemologies, Eurocentric epistemology itself remained heavily nature-centric in reactionary terms. This does not mean that said nature-centrism is being cultivated as the opposite of “culture,” but that it is perpetuated as an integral part of ideological culture, i.e., culture as an iteration of the dominant ideology. As such, said nature-centrism does not discard rational-scientific thinking; quite the opposite, it utilizes it as a means of imposing its interpretation of the influence the natural world has on the social/political world.

So, the Eurocentric glorification of “rational,” i.e., “scientifically rational” thought, which was mainstreamed as the tenet of colonial epistemology through the adoption of Enlightening ideas from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, and that propagated the need for abandonment of an idea that the natural world is an extension of some metaphysical reality or realities, was, simply put, hypocritical. This is so because Eurocentric epistemology assigned a surplus of “scientifically rational” characteristics to white Christians of European origin and because it interpreted these characteristics as if they were “naturally,” “racially” inherent to paradigmatic European whites, hence, as if said characteristics stemmed from the meta-physical, trans-material, and/or trans-political register. In terms of analysis of effects such reasoning had in the era of explicit colonialism, it could be argued that white European colonialists sought to eradicate the way non-European cultures organized their relationship between natural and meta-natural realities; to eradicate other imaginaries or pantheons if you will, in the name of imposition of their particular interpretation of said relationship, that is, themselves in the position of those who dictate how the world, including its natural and meta-natural dimensions are to be interpreted. Consequently, it meant that the natural world, as in the material/tangible world, was defined as the extension of a specifically white, European interpretation of said world’s supernatural, metaphysical, meta-material, or, more precisely, imaginary dimensions invested in its interpretations. Simply put, white colonialism has proclaimed that organized imaginaries of non-European types were “superstitions;” barriers to modern, rational development, while it has conflated its

superstitions and its power regime with rational, modern qualities. More precisely, Eurocentric epistemology colonized other imaginaries by imposing on them its definition of the relationship between natural and the meta-natural registers, i.e., between the material/political world and discourses invested in its interpretation.

The definition of the natural world as (some sort of) extension or embodiment of imaginaries invested into its interpretation is not, of course, exclusive to Eurocentric epistemology. What makes a difference in this sense is that said epistemology proclaimed that its subjective imaginary about the (possible shape of) the world was “(most) objective” or “most rational,” and that this “objectivity” and “rationality” don’t stem from power relations, i.e. dominance in these terms, but from “pre-political,” i.e. “natural” register. This does not mean that all interpretations of nature-centrism within the register of Eurocentric epistemology, especially in regard to its links with modernity, are the same. Some extreme iterations or specific “spin-offs” of said epistemology, like fascism or National Socialism, saw modernity (as they interpreted it) as detrimental to (white) nature-centrism, which provides an insight into the importance of nature-centrism in Eurocentric thought. Left green activist and scholar Peter Staudenmaier has, in this sense, observed: “The National Socialist ‘religion of nature,’ as one historian has described it, was a volatile admixture of primeval teutonic nature mysticism, pseudo-scientific ecology, irrationalist anti-humanism, and a mythology of racial salvation through a return to the land. Its predominant themes were ‘natural order,’ organicist holism and denigration of humanity [...]” (Biehl and Staudenmaier, 1995, 14). These were, as obvious, some of the roots of the ideological logic centered upon the concept of “blood and soil.” As the author argues: “This infamous phrase denoted a quasi-mystical connection between ‘blood’ (the race or *Volk*) and ‘soil’ (the land and the natural environment) specific to Germanic peoples and absent, for example, among Celts and Slavs” (Ibid., 17–18; italics in the original).

So, if National Socialism is seen as a specific form of continuation of Eurocentric colonialism, it could be argued that the specificity of this form was, among other reasons, manifested in the perception of modernity as something that tends to separate the “race” from “soil,” which, arguably, differed from other Western (colonial); let’s say more “cosmopolitan” perceptions of the same notion (like, maybe, in the case of French or British colonial projects). Still, alongside the presumption that these, other colonial perceptions saw modernity as a framework that allowed the representation of the separation of others from their soil (in terms of their control of land/territory) as a precondition for the introduction of (these)

others into modernity, nature-centric perception of the people as a configuration based on “blood” could be seen as shared by both of these Eurocentric “schools” of thought. Speaking of these differences in interpretation of modernity, they still, of course, exist in the register of what is referred to as Western civilization, and some of these, let’s say pastoral, interpretations of the term are still very much present in the ideological narrative of the paradigmatic far-right. Scholar Janet Biehl has, concerning the nature-centric tendencies among the “new” right, argued the following:

The so-called ‘New’ Right today appeals to themes reminiscent of the *völkisch* movement in pre-Nazi Germany. It, too, presents itself as offering an ‘ecological’ alternative to modern society. [...] Moreover, through the unbridled technology to which it gave rise, this modern universalism is said to have perpetrated not only the destruction of nature but an annihilation of the spirit; the destruction of nature, it is said, is life-threatening in the spiritual sense as well as the physical, since when people deny pristine nature, their access to their ‘authentic’ self is blocked. (Biehl and Staudenmaier, 1995, 34)

When applied to the analysis of National Socialism, this argument stands, and it can be applied to an analysis of certain preconceptions harbored by the “New” Right. However, although contemporary far-right discourses (as well as Nazism did) do tend to position themselves as “anti-progressive,” “modern universalism” can be seen as a problem to these discourses only to an extent the “modern” is interpreted as a step beyond reactionary atavist forms of logic and to a degree “universalism” is interpreted as a step beyond racist thinking. So, these discourses are specific iterations of Eurocentric colonial epistemology, and this epistemology essentially needs to retain control over the meaning of “modern universalism” because such control allows it to represent its definitions of reason, progress, and freedom as, allegedly, “universal.” In other words, such control is what allows developed countries to perform themselves as the ultimate arbiter that determines what is “progressive” and what is not. Although “modern universalism” tends to be tackled by reactionary discourses, it could be argued that it is tackled only to the degree the concept is seen as a threat to nature-centric reactionary atavism and the idea that the material/political world is, allegedly, an extension of “pre-political,” “natural world.” In other words, Eurocentric epistemology, and by extension, coloniality of power need “modern universalism” in order to both “conceal” and exercise their core idea that human subjects and the material/political world are, supposedly, not politically and ideologically manufactured. Speaking of the reactionary tendency to,

paraphrasing Biehl, emphasize the importance of the need for the preservation of access to the authentic self, the argument is spot on. However, it can also be argued that modernity, under the terms of coloniality of power, is being used as an epistemic and ideological framework under the confines of which the “return to the authentic self” translates to the organization of political and ideological discourses as vectors of return to the “pre-political” world.

So, it is important in this context to observe the proliferation of nature-centric reasoning as connected with the proliferation of an anti-political vision of the world, which was practically a cornerstone of the transformation of the Eurocentric *ancien régime* into its modern iterations. It could be argued in this sense that the era of proliferation of “rational” thought, which underpinned the Enlightenment and the majority of its revolutions (save some of those that were anti-colonial), was an era in which antagonization of divine prerogative of rule did not lead to the end of colonialism (or slavery), but only to “scientifically” rational justification of racial and colonial matrices of rule that saw their peak in 19<sup>th</sup>-century colonialism. Although the methods of imposition of such modernity/rationality have changed—from the era when a “civilizational” agenda was explicitly employed against non-white “irrationality” to the contemporary era when it is being imposed under the aegis of “democratic” and/or “economic rationality”—Eurocentric modernity/rationality; i.e. its coloniality of power, has firmly stayed rooted in an idea that social-political order is, or should be, an extension of the “pre-political” register.

Differently put, Eurocentric modernity/rationality remains rooted in an idea that human subjectivities are not produced by *any* social-political power system and, consequently, that the most optimal; most “rational” power system is the one that is based on a translation of, allegedly intrinsic qualities, propensities or properties of humans from the “natural” into the political, i.e. material world. So, the further usage of the notion of nature-centrism in this book refers to such Eurocentric interpretation of the material/political world that sees the social-political world as an alleged “mirror” of supposed “natural balances,” which is only a euphemism for the sustainment of Eurocentric epistemology’s monopoly to interpret the content of the “pre-political” world. The Eurocentric notion of progress, as entailed in the signifier of modernity, can, therefore, be seen as reduced to progression in mirroring said “balances,” which are seen as upheld to the extent that the West’s dominance in the material/political world is sustained. Consequently, it all means that Eurocentric epistemology sees the social and political dimension of the material world as also a mirror of

their alleged “pre-social” roots, i.e., “races,” which exposes capitalism as a racist power system.

## 1.4 Racial character of global capitalism

Eurocentric definition of the notion of hierarchical verticality has, it could be argued, always been racist; the positions and the potentials of mobility in such a hierarchy have always depended primarily on racial prefixes, and the summit of this hierarchy was always reserved, primarily, for white Europeans of Christian descent. Such a layout, or the organization, of vertical hierarchy has been directly translated from the era of politically explicit colonialism into the contemporary capitalist regime and continues to be a pillar of all matrices of differentiation among humans. Differently put, while, at least a majority, of non-Eurocentric/non-white imperialisms (keeping in mind a slew of differences among them), exercised oppression as a result of military victories won on a battlefield and/or through the oppressive matrices yielded by the interlaced military, economic and cultural power—that is, *ex post facto* to these victories—Eurocentric imperialism/colonialism acted, it could be argued, entirely differently. It saw various nomenclatures of other, non-white, non-Christian, and non-European populations, i.e., as less worthy or undesirable, as “inferior” even *before* the (colonial) conquest began; before the application of colonial procedures themselves, and as a reason for the employment of said procedures in the first place. In other words, every conquering form of logic entails a momentum of defamation of those targeted by it, but in the case of European colonialism, such reasoning was not employed exclusively in practical or political terms; it manifested as a structural part of Eurocentric epistemology that deems perpetual, racial subjugation as an integral part of its systems of social classification.

As a consequence, and a demonstration of this, it is clear today that many non-European, non-white populations in developed countries, although nominally equal, are still far from being equal in terms of being able to represent and/or produce radically politically and ideologically different discourses. It is not that non-white parts of the population cannot come to positions of political power, but these positions in the vast majority of cases do not represent anti-capitalist or anti-colonialist agendas; these positions are only “biologically” non-white and politically often even more “white” than their white counterparts. In other words, it seems that these positions of power are dependent on the complicity of non-whites with the ideological agenda that requires allegiance to both the interests of capital and Eurocentric epistemology. Although currently

dominant poles of the ideological mainstream in developed countries, (neo)liberalism and (neo)conservatism, continue to represent contemporary global capitalism as a “post-colonial” and “post-racial” order and maintain that it is primarily economic factors that control the processes of inter-human differentiation, “race,” i.e. racism is a factor that *precedes* economically driven discrepancies (Tatlić, 2016). In other words, racism is entangled with capitalist relations of production in those terms in which those imperial structures that benefit from capitalism the most also use racist forms of logic in determining who will be exploited more, who will be exploited less, and who will benefit the most from such an arrangement. Racism does not merely constrain the vertical extent of social mobility—it usually forecloses the very possibility of any social mobility. The paradigmatic mechanisms of mobility under capitalism are neither meritocratic nor strictly class-based; indeed, they are not even meaningfully “social.” They are, at their core, racial.

Needless to say, it is racist forms of logic that rationalize vast discrepancies in the distribution of the world’s wealth and privileges by implying that developing countries, the “others,” are, supposedly, “racially incapable” of navigating “tumultuous waters of contemporary economy.” The same (racist) logic is what fuels, not just the sustenance of developing countries as a depository from which resources are extracted and/or a production facility designed to serve the needs of (primarily) developed countries, but also the matrices of the organization of differentiation (among humans) within global capitalism.

Regarding the historical development of racism into the main factor that governs the hierarchies of classification of humans, Quijano argues the following: “Coloniality of power was conceived together with America and Western Europe, and with the social category of ‘race’ as the key element of the social classification of colonized and colonizers” (Quijano 2007, 171). As the author further argues: “Unlike in any other previous experience of colonialism, the old ideas of superiority of the dominant, and the inferiority of dominated under European colonialism were mutated in a relationship of biologically and structurally superior and inferior” (Ibid.). Pseudo-sciences like eugenics, that were envisaged in the 19th century, were, therefore, only some of the formalized iterations of the epistemology of human differentiation that permeated through politically explicit colonialism and that today, in the era of coloniality of power, permeates capitalist hierarchies of exploitation. In simple terms, biologically prefixed “superiorities” and “inferiorities” imply that these characteristics are permanent, that is, unchangeable by political or any other means. Something like “race” does not exist; it is a mere construct,

but racism does exist, and it is in this sense important to argue that one of the defining characteristics of racism is exactly the production of “race” as something “real,” something allegedly tangible, i.e., something organic and/or biological. As Quijano explains:

The process of Eurocentricity of the new world power in the following centuries gave way to the imposition of such a ‘racial’ criteria to the new social classification of the world population on a global scale. So, in the first place, new social identities were produced all over the world: ‘whites’, ‘Indians’, ‘Negroes’, ‘yellows’, ‘olives’, using physiognomic traits of the peoples as external manifestations of their ‘racial’ nature. (Ibid.)

These categories were made up to support racist reasoning regarding social classification, but these were made up also in support of the reduction of the register of social classification itself to a register in which racial classification replaces the social (and political) prefixes of inter-human differentiation. Such reasoning, so-conceptualized matrix of differentiation, remains extremely rigid in the sustainment of such differentiation as “biological,” i.e., racial, as well as in retaining the monopoly of Eurocentric epistemology to assign traits of otherness to others. Nevertheless, such a matrix has also been made more flexible, “elastic,” in those terms in which it has included a far greater spectrum of registers, or idiosyncrasies, into categories to which various racial traits are being assigned.

## 1.5 The modernization of racism

The aforementioned “flexibility” of Eurocentric racism does not mean that it is less rigid; less oppressive or that it can be less racist; it points to its ability to “surpass” signifiers of difference typically associated with racism, such as skin color, and encompass a far bigger set of signifiers like ethnicity, religion, cultural idiosyncrasies and so on, and include these signifiers as a signifier of “races,” i.e. various sorts of “inferiorities” to the “civilizational superiority” of the West. In terms of the analysis of new forms of racism Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein have argued that: “It is a racism whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences, a racism which, at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others but ‘only’ the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions; in short, it is what P. A. Taguieff has rightly called a *differentialist racism*” (Balibar and Wallerstein 2011, 21; italics in the original).

This argument can be interpreted in terms that contemporary racism focuses on a wide plethora of ethnic, cultural, etc. differences, which, it could also be said, does not mean that the perception of said differences as stemming from the register of biology or has itself been surpassed. The authors argue: “What we see here is that biological or genetic naturalism is not the only means of naturalizing human behaviour and social affinities. At the cost of abandoning the hierarchical model (though the abandonment is more apparent than real, as we shall see), *culture can also function like a nature*, and it can in particular function as a way of locking individuals and groups a priori into a genealogy, into a determination that is immutable and intangible in origin” (Ibid. 22; italics in the original).

So, this (contemporary form of) racism can still be seen as biologically-based racism because it suggests that a wide plethora of differences (that may become emphasized by racist narratives) are biological, i.e., that they stem from “race.” This contemporary form of utilization of racism still implies that “cultural” differences are ingrained in “race” and “racially-prefixed” propensities are that certain cultural traits are “superior.” In other words, the nature-centric kernel of white racism, its intent to interpret and classify differences as if they originated from a “biological register,” is just another name for the racist power system’s intent to preserve control over the interpretation of what was, allegedly, “inscribed” into proto-subjectivities before they entered the material/political world. For instance, it could be said that the racist power system’s frustration by forms of subjectivity that—either discard their “original encoding” allegedly embedded in their biological origins (like LGBTQ+ subjectivities do) or do not have biological origins at all (as will be the case with AI and synthetic forms of life)—springs from a shattering of an implication that subjectivity is a mirror of its “naturally preordained” roles. A dread “race-mixing” provokes among racists can, in a similar sense, be seen as caused by a perception of such “mixing” as a reflection of “disturbances” in the “cohesion” of supposed “natural foundations of the social-political world.”

So, although the notion of “insurmountability” (of differences) is rigid in terms of the prevention of rejection of the notion of “race” and in terms of protection of racial privileges, the same notion also has an insidious property or a dimension connected with the aforementioned flexible feature of a contemporary form of (white) racism. Differently put, said notion is not only meant to signify the alleged existence of differences among cultures and leave it at that, but it also has a systemic and ideological function, which implies that those regarded as others are supposed to (try to) surmount their “inferiorities” or “deficiencies” by