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# The Underside of Order: Race in the Constitution of International Order

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**ABSTRACT** While there is increasing recognition of the role of race in shaping global politics, the extent to which the construction and operation of international order is entangled with race remains underexplored. In this article, I argue for the centrality of race and racialization in understanding the constitution of international order by theorizing the constitutive connections between race and international order and showing how the two can be examined as intertwined. I do this, first, by articulating conceptualizations of both international order and race that center on processes of regulation and regularization. Second, I bring these together to suggest that race be understood as a form of order that functions to reproduce a historically emergent form of hierarchy and domination across a range of spaces and contexts. Third, I operationalize these conceptualizations by outlining and historicizing some of the key features of this racialized and racializing international order, specifically coloniality, the racial state, and racial capitalism, and thereby illustrate important aspects of the persistence of this order. Centering race in the study of international order, I suggest, helps us better understand how racializing hierarchies and racialized inequalities persist in the present and are reproduced through structures and practices of international order.

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It has become commonplace to refer to the contemporary international order as the “liberal international order,” an order that is supposedly organized around consent, agreed-upon rules and institutions, and sovereign equality. However, despite important work showing that hierarchy remains an important feature of global politics,<sup>1</sup> the contemporary international order is still often viewed as largely benevolent,<sup>2</sup> even where its imperial roots are acknowledged.<sup>3</sup> Thus although the role of imperialism in constructing international order has not been forgotten, many still find it difficult to fully examine the consequences of this or to consider the ongoing significance of

1. Hobson and Sharman 2005; Lake 2009; Zarakol 2017.

2. Slaughter 2017.

3. Ikenberry 2020, 212; see also Alter 2021; Bull 2012; Bull and Watson 1984. There is an extensive literature on the linkages between liberalism and imperialism, and much disagreement on whether these linkages are contingent or necessary. Bell 2016; Mantena 2010; Mehta 1999; Muthu 2003; Pitts 2005.

racialized forms of order<sup>4</sup>—a phenomenon Debra Thompson refers to as “racial aphasia.”<sup>5</sup> Unlike amnesia, which refers to an unintentional forgetting or inability to remember, aphasia is “an obstruction of discourse, language and speech;”<sup>6</sup> not mere ignorance but “an occlusion of knowledge, ... a dismembering, a difficulty in speaking, ... a difficulty in comprehending what is [seen and] spoken.”<sup>7</sup> Despite the passage of ten years since Thompson diagnosed the field of international relations (IR) as suffering from this malady, many, though by no means all, still face difficulties in examining the role of race and racialization, particularly with respect to international order. While the discipline may no longer be silent on race—if it ever was<sup>8</sup>—a need to examine the consequences and effects of racialization on the practice of international order and our understanding of it remains. This means not merely exposing the fact that international order has been and remains both racialized and racializing, but exploring *how* this is the case and its implications for scholars of international order and IR more broadly.

Thus, I argue that race and processes of racialization have been and remain significantly entangled with the production and maintenance of international order. In making this claim, I develop and articulate conceptualizations of international order and race that highlight these entanglements. Bringing together process-oriented approaches to both race and order, I suggest that the work of race is to *regulate*—that is, to control, manage, and govern—and to *regularize*—or make appear natural or normal—a historically emergent and contingent set of relations marked by colonial-racial domination, sovereignty, and rule. These simultaneous processes of regulation and regularization are made possible by the construction of fluid categories of hierarchized difference that emerge out of a diverse array of ideational and material practices for understanding and governing the world. Race, therefore, functions as a *form of order*. Race and order are, moreover, co-constituted, as racializing discourses and practices work to create and maintain (the appearance of) order, while ordering processes conversely (re)produce modes and processes of racialization. Additionally, because the operation and institution of race is transnational,<sup>9</sup> and because it functions as a central node in a global system of racialized inequality, it shapes how order is imagined and created not only within singular domestic contexts but also across, beyond, and above them. Thus, where international order develops out of and through discourse and practice as a shifting set of interlocking systems across multiple scales,<sup>10</sup> it is constituted in part through processes of racialization. It is in this sense, then, that race and international order are co-constitutive.

4. For contrasting examples see Morefield 2022; Parmar 2018.

5. Thompson 2013.

6. Ibid., 135.

7. Stoler 2016, 128, emphasis removed.

8. Shilliam 2020; see also Hall 2012; Vitalis 2015.

9. da Silva 2007; Mills 2019; Thompson 2013.

10. Adler 2019.

However, I am not claiming that all forms of international order, historical or contemporary, are racialized or racializing. Nor is the claim that racialized difference is the only form of difference that affects the constitution and operation of international order; understandings of gender, sexuality, class, and so on also play a significant part (and also intersect with race in important ways).<sup>11</sup> What I argue is that the emergence and development of race as a powerful form of order in and through Western European colonialism has shaped and continues to affect the construction and operation of international order in consequential ways. In making this argument, my aim is not only to show that race remains an important feature of international politics or that the contemporary international order is marked by racialized and racializing forms of inequality. Rather, by examining and theorizing the co-constitution of race and international order, my aim is to demonstrate how and why this is the case, and in so doing provide some conceptual tools for exploring processes of racialization, their effects, and their entanglements with ordering processes.

While scholars have demonstrated the role of European imperialism and of race and racism in the formation and operation of the liberal international order, in particular its institutions and rules,<sup>12</sup> I provide an account of how and why processes of racialization remain central to the constitution of international order in the modern context, and the difference this makes. Race, I will suggest, emerges out of a specific set of contexts and experiences to instantiate a historically contingent form of hierarchy that renders certain European forms of being, knowledge, culture, and politics as superior to and sovereign over all others. Although this racialized hierarchy eventually came to encompass much, if not all, of the planet—in large part through the spread of European colonialism, the practices of racial state-making, and racial capitalism—it is neither the only form of hierarchy in global politics, nor the only possible way of constructing international order. Because race is historically emergent and contingent, it remains operative only when and where the processes that (re)produce it obtain and prevail. Such processes include the devaluation of certain forms of being and knowledge, processes that render certain people and places as expropriable and exploitable, and those that present some as the source and locus of order and others as its passive recipients, or worse, an ever-present threat. By both recognizing the centrality of race and racialization in the constitution and operation of international order, and analyzing its consequences and manifestations across various areas of global order and politics, we can go some way toward addressing the racial aphasia that continues to afflict the discipline.

In what follows, I first develop conceptualizations of both international order and race, focusing on processes of regulation and regularization. I then connect the two to suggest that race be understood as a form of order that functions to reproduce a historically emergent and globalized form of hierarchy and domination across a variety of spaces and contexts, and that race and international order should thus be

11. Collins 2009; Crenshaw 1991; Davis 1983; Lugones 2016.

12. For example, Acharya 2022; Anghie 2004; Búzás 2021; Pitts 2018.

studied as co-constitutive. Finally, I operationalize these conceptualizations by outlining and historicizing some of the key features of this racialized and racializing international order, specifically coloniality, the racial state, and racial capitalism, thereby illustrating important aspects of the persistence of this order, and offering a suggestive exploration of how processes of racialization and ordering can be studied.

## Ordering International Relations

The question of order has been a perennial one in IR, and a wide variety of approaches exist for understanding it, from a focus on formal and informal institutions and rules to more open-ended approaches focusing on practice and process.<sup>13</sup> Recent years have also witnessed a renewed interest in the subject, particularly regarding its history as both a practical political issue and an intellectual one. Such work has illustrated its material and intellectual conditions of possibility, as well as the various forms that it takes. Thus, for example, Bentley Allan compellingly demonstrates the role of changes in scientific cosmologies in shaping international order through shifting understandings of state purpose.<sup>14</sup> In a similar argument, William Bain shows how theological conceptions of immanent versus imposed order make possible different arrangements and conceptions of international order.<sup>15</sup> Joanne Yao, meanwhile, argues that geographic imaginaries are also important for how they affect both the understandings of certain spaces and geographies, in particular colonial spaces, and the imagined universality or transposability of international organizations.<sup>16</sup> What these works, and others,<sup>17</sup> suggest is that international order ought to be examined with a consideration of conditions of possibility that enable it as an object of thought and set of practices. In line with these contributions, I expand on our understanding of the historical, social, and political conditions that shape and enable international order by demonstrating the role of another historically emergent set of discourses and practices, namely race, in shaping international order.

The ways we theorize international order necessarily shape the factors and dynamics we focus on and investigate. Thus, while more formalized conceptions of international order can be helpful for examining the structures, institutions, and/or rules that regulate and order interstate relations,<sup>18</sup> they may be less useful for exploring the dynamic entanglements between such structures, institutions, and rules and the discourses, practices, and processes that make them possible. Here Emanuel Adler's reconceptualization of international order as grounded in practice

13. For example, Adler 2019; Bull 2012; Hurrell 2008; Ikenberry 2011; Keohane 1984; Krasner 1983; Zürn 2018.

14. Allan 2018.

15. Bain 2020; see also Nexon 2009.

16. Yao 2022b.

17. For example, Kocs 2019; Sabaratnam 2023; Sluga 2021; Zarakol 2022.

18. For example, Ikenberry 2011; Keohane 1984; Krasner 1983; Waltz 1979.

is particularly informative, as he presents a processual and emergent conception of social order that underscores the fluidity and multiplicity of international *orders*.<sup>19</sup> The conception of international order I develop starts from these sorts of insights. My focus is therefore more on international *ordering* than order as a comparatively static state of being. Order, in such an approach, is constituted through *ongoing processes* that make possible certain forms of thought and action, and which give international politics a sense of regularity.

The term *order* is so common in the English language that its meaning is often taken for granted or assumed. Nonetheless, at its most basic level, order refers to a “sequence, disposition, or arrangement; [an] arranged or regulated condition.”<sup>20</sup> Order therefore suggests the presence of patterns and regularities: that things are arranged in a specific and not a random manner. Thus, to think or speak of order is to perceive a pattern or degree of regularity in the relations among things.<sup>21</sup> Order as a patterned arrangement also requires the perception of difference because it makes little sense to speak of order as existing between entirely identical things. Such difference, however, need not take a specific shape or form, and can be perceived along any number of axes, including time, space, and kind. Thus the perception of order also requires processes of differentiation. These processes can be passive, taking up differences already thought to be present—or active, constructing difference where none was previously recognized. Since order involves both perception and differentiation, orders are “processes rather than ‘things’.”<sup>22</sup> This suggests that order is not an inherent feature of reality but, in the words of Cedric Robinson, “a presumption concerning human existence [that] proceeds from looking at things.”<sup>23</sup> This does not mean that order is not “real,” that it is not seen, felt, or experienced. Instead, the appearance or experience of order results from ongoing human engagement with the world, making order both agential and historically grounded.

Because order emerges phenomenologically through human action and experience, it rests on the human ability to make choices as to which “ordered phenomena will be understood and acknowledged.”<sup>24</sup> Such choices, though they may be rationally founded, are still somewhat arbitrary, as other choices are always possible. This potential for arbitrariness in ordering is also imported through the connection between order and authority. Authority gives order its coherence and rationality—the choices that are made are ultimately guaranteed through reference to (an) authority.<sup>25</sup> Relations and forms of authority that shape both political action and legitimate decision making thus play a significant role in the constitution of

19. Adler 2019.

20. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, available at <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/132334>>.

21. Compare Bull 2012, 3.

22. Adler 2019, 47.

23. Robinson 2016, 38, emphasis removed.

24. *Ibid.*, 34.

25. *Ibid.*, 29–34.

international order.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, such relations of authority are themselves historically and socially constituted, emerging through previous social and political conflicts and contestations, further underscoring the dynamic, processual nature of order and ordering.

The connection between order and authority also highlights the interconnections between epistemic and governmental ordering processes. Order, according to Michel Foucault, is a relational concept. It is “the hidden network that determines the way [things] confront one another,” capturing the relations between them, including that which separates them or makes them distinct.<sup>27</sup> However, the relations (and differences) that order establishes are not pregiven. Rather, these are shaped and determined by “the fundamental codes of a culture—those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, the perception and construction of orders, including the objects within them, are historically and socially emergent. They are informed by the reigning modes of thought and paradigms that define the conditions of possibility of producing knowledge. Such paradigms, moreover, always exist in a specific time and space, are embedded in relations of power, and are governed with reference to an authority that oversees not only the sorts of relations which things can enter into but also who is authorized to speak and act. Bentley Allan, also drawing on Foucault, similarly points toward the simultaneity of epistemic and governmental ordering processes, illustrating how socially and historically contingent scientific cosmologies affect the constitution of international order.<sup>29</sup> Thus the scientific and political forms of order overlap significantly. The creation of both forms of order requires and relies on processes of perception and differentiation that enable the construction of the subjects and objects of that order, and both forms of ordering are embedded in relations of power and structures of authority that inform each other.

However, the construction of order need not involve direct or conscious attempts at ordering. The patterns and regularities that constitute order can emerge out of and be sustained by the practices of agents or subjects as they navigate and make sense of their environments, regardless of whether they are directed toward the creation or securing of order. Thus Adler proposes that international social orders be understood as *emerging* through a wide array of social and political practices, including “anchoring practices [that] configure, organize, arrange, and stabilize social life,” epistemic and normative practices that shape expectations and dispositions, and regulative practices that govern how things are done.<sup>30</sup> By emphasizing both practice and process in constituting social orders, as well as their emergent nature, my conceptualization of order shares important affinities with what Adler terms the “cognitive evolution” approach to international order.<sup>31</sup> Building on this approach, order and practice exist in

26. See also Viola 2020; Zürn 2018.

27. Foucault 2002, xxi.

28. Ibid., xxii.

29. Allan 2018.

30. Adler 2019, 127–28.

31. Adler 2019; see also Ish-Shalom, Kornprobst, and Pouliot 2021.

a reflexive relationship in which sets of practices produce the regularities of order. As these regularities become imbued with a (normative) sense of naturalness—expressed by sentiments such as “that’s the way things are done” or “that’s how the world works”—they encourage the reproduction of such practices, even if in slightly modified form. This, in turn, could be viewed as analogous to Pierre Bourdieu’s characterization of the relationship between structure and practice as a reflexive one in which practices shape and construct structures, which in turn shape and (re)create practices.<sup>32</sup> The reproduction of orders in this way occurs through the practical navigation of the world, and as such can take place through conscious efforts at understanding or through embodied subjectivities that do not always cross the threshold into consciousness. Bourdieu therefore describes this reflexive relationship between structure and practice, embodied in the habitus, as “history turned into nature.”<sup>33</sup>

But this is not to suggest that order cannot or is not also created and reproduced through direct or purposive efforts. It is just that conscious intention or purpose is not always required, and that much of the reproduction and maintenance of order takes place through such simple acts of being, thinking, and acting in the world. This is significant insofar as it broadens the range of thought and action that can be seen as doing ordering work. Additionally, because order emerges through practice, and because it is processual, orders are fluid and multiplicitous. However, as orders do not emerge out of nothing, but rather through intersubjective understandings and joint practices, this fluidity and multiplicity are somewhat bounded and constrained.

Yet international order is often thought of as involving more than the mere presence or perception of patterned regularity in the relations and interactions between states or societies because it functions as a form of *political* order. Political order adds a second dimension to the aforementioned ordering processes: regulation.<sup>34</sup> While politics comprises the struggle or contestation over the organization and institution of social relations, the political, as the “ontology of the social,”<sup>35</sup> involves the governing and regulation of such social relations to the extent that it ontologizes a specific and contingent social formation and the social relations that constitute it. When viewed in this way, political order, although often made to appear natural or fundamental, is inherently social. It emerges out of intersubjective understandings and practices, and through social conflict and contestation. The political, Robinson writes, “is an ordering principle, distinguishing the lawful or authorized order of things while itself being the origin of the regulation.”<sup>36</sup> Political order accordingly has a dual nature, as both descriptive

32. Bourdieu 1977.

33. Ibid., 78.

34. Order in the general sense might, nonetheless, be seen as always already political to the extent that it relies on perception, differentiation, and choices (backed by authority), which are inherently contestable and frequent sites of struggle.

35. Laclau and Mouffe 2014, xiv, emphasis removed.

36. Robinson 2016, 7.

(saying how things are) and normative (saying how things ought to be). The two elements are, moreover, intertwined and inform each other reflexively. Attempts at capturing the patterns and regularities that make up the perception of order reflexively produce an image of order that is itself the result of previous ordering work. As this image becomes imbued with a sense of normativity, subsequent ordering is directed toward shoring up and securing this order through regulation, which helps recreate the patterns and regularities that made possible the perception of order in the first place.

Political order, then, as both descriptive and normative, involves the recognition or perception of regularity as well as processes of *regulation* to help create, secure, and maintain this regularity and make it appear natural or normal. Processes of regulation comprise multiple efforts and activities, and include practices of governance, management, and control that function to keep things “in their place” and ensure the relative stability of the subjects and objects that are (to be) ordered. As such, regulation can and often does involve the creation and enforcement of rules and institutions, both formal and informal, but it need not be seen as limited to these. It also includes a diverse array of processes and practices, including the enforcement powers of the state and its security apparatuses, as well as the ensemble of processes and practices captured by the concept of governmentality, such as various technologies of power and discipline, and forms of knowledge.<sup>37</sup> These regulatory practices function as ordering processes to the extent that they are also *regularizing*, helping reproduce and secure the appearance and perception of regularity—making things appear regular or normal.

International order functions similarly, insofar as it is likewise imbued with a sense of normativity and involves the combination of regulatory and regularizing processes to construct, maintain, and normalize contingent sets of social relations and the global social formations of which they are a part. Approaching order in this way enables the articulation of a more expansive conception of international order that extends beyond a focus on the rules and institutions that shape the interactions and relations of states. Moreover, by treating international order as fluid and multiplicitous we can broaden the scope of our investigations beyond studies of the rise, fall, and operation of *the* international order, which tend to emphasize relative stability *or* radical change, and toward the shifting, dynamic, and overlapping processes that regulate and regularize global politics. This not only broadens the ranges and scales across which international ordering work is done and where it can be examined, but also enables more nuanced explorations of both continuity *and* change in international order.

Bringing this all together, international order can be conceptualized as the systems of regulation and regularization that constitute the subjects and objects of international politics, shape their actions, practices, and characteristics, and create and sustain the structures within which they exist and operate. Such systems are

37. Foucault 2009, 108–109; see also Dean 2010.



reflexive, constituting the subjects, objects, and structures of international politics, while being constitutive of them. Conceived as such, international order is emergent and processual, constituted *through* ordering discourses and practices, rather than being an inherent property of international politics. By emphasizing process or ordering, this conception extends our focus beyond the existence of patterns and regularities and toward an understanding of how such patterns and regularities are created and secured. Such a conception consequently moves beyond a narrower focus on the *what* of international order and into the *how*, enabling a deeper understanding of the foundations of international order. Also, when it is recognized that international order is something that must be continually enacted and reproduced, it cannot be seen as fully stable, as it is liable to shifts, however minor, through each re-enactment.

Moreover, because international order emerges through these social processes, it is also subject to forms of struggle and contestation that, in turn, have the potential to shape whether and how these systems of regulation and regularization are re-enacted. The structures that such systems (re)produce are thus simultaneously constraining—insofar as they limit action and possibilities—and productive or enabling—to the extent that they make certain things possible. Finally, international order so conceived is multiple and made up of a fluid and changing set of interlocking and overlapping systems that operate in and across different arenas, fields, and scales.<sup>38</sup> Yet this fluidity is bounded, as the systems that make up orders emerge out of historically and socially contingent discourses and practices, and therefore depend on material and discursive resources. These systems do not, however, exist in complete isolation, but shape and influence each other. In this way, international order is constituted and enacted across multiple scales, from the micro-foundations of subject-level discourse and practice, through the meso-level communities, institutions, and organizations, to the macro-level structures of international politics. What makes international order *international* is that it is not confined or limited to regulatory and regularizing systems within a single polity, state, or society but encompasses such systems as they operate across and beyond them.

This conception of international order is thus more expansive than, for example, “the settled rules and arrangements between states”<sup>39</sup> or “a pattern of activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of the society of states.”<sup>40</sup> By bringing together an emphasis on regularity with a focus on regulation, and by grounding both in a process-oriented approach that pays attention to the historical, social, and political contexts through which such regulating and regularizing processes emerge, this conception of international order builds a bridge between approaches that center on the conditions of possibility of international order(s) and those that examine the institutions, structures, and patterned practices of global politics.

38. The use of “international order” and “the international order” in the singular is not meant to suggest the existence of a single, overarching order. Rather, such phrases are meant to capture the convergence of multiple sets of interlocking and overlapping ordering systems.

39. Ikenberry 2011, 12.

40. Bull 2012, 8; see also Allan 2018, 5.

## Racialized/Racializing Order

While much of IR continues to elide the question of race, there have been renewed efforts in recent years to recenter the issue of race across a range of areas of international politics and approaches to IR.<sup>41</sup> However, as Roxanne Doty notes, “to study race in international relations we cannot begin by presuming that we know precisely what race is. Rather, we must examine the practices that construct and reconstruct race.”<sup>42</sup> This is particularly important as such practices are imbued with much social and political power, and given race’s floating and undecidable nature.<sup>43</sup> Because of this, care must be taken to avoid conceptualizing and working with race in a way that reifies understandings of race that falsely inscribe it in biology, and thereby naturalize racial categories or essentialize difference. Recognizing this, I approach race through a focus on process and practice. I see two central advantages to this approach. First, it shifts race away from a narrow attachment to forms of biological or phenotypical difference. Because physiological conceptions of race are primarily the result of nineteenth-century race science, conceptualizing race through practice enables a recognition of the historicity and fluidity of the race signifier by moving beyond a presumed or necessary attachment to the body.<sup>44</sup> This also has important implications for recognizing its role and effects in the present context, particularly given that recent histories of IR suggest that discussions and analyses of race fell off the disciplinary radar following the Second World War.<sup>45</sup> Second, this approach eschews treating race as a passive, natural, or constructed, feature of reality or as a relatively stabilized variable.<sup>46</sup> Instead, race is seen as something that is actively constructed and sustained in dynamic and shifting ways. The critical conceptualization of race I articulate here avoids these issues and pitfalls by accounting for *how* race is actively constituted and *what* gets constituted as race.<sup>47</sup> This conceptualization therefore considers and theorizes at every step not only what race is, but also the processes through which it is constituted and reproduced, as well as the work it does.

Thus, I suggest that race be understood as a colonially constituted assemblage of discourses and practices that function to simultaneously regulate and regularize historically emergent forms of domination and rule referred to as modernity/coloniality

41. For example, Anievas, Manchanda, and Shilliam 2015; Barder 2021; Búzás 2021; Freeman, Kim, and Lake 2022; Henderson 2013.

42. Doty 1993, 452–53.

43. Hall 2021; Hesse 2007.

44. For example, Omi and Winant 2015, 110–11. For a critique, see Hesse 2007.

45. See Hobson 2012; Vitalis 2015.

46. Treating the terms and categories of race as given runs the risk of accepting at face value the meanings and understandings of race, and thus of reifying such meanings, even where the aim is to critique these categories and/or racialized forms of inequality.

47. On the importance of paying attention to the *how* and *what* in the social construction of race, see Lentin 2020, 27–35; Hesse 2016.

and White sovereignty.<sup>48</sup> In other words, the modern construct of race assembles sets of “institutions, discourses, practices, desires, infrastructures, languages, technologies, sciences, economies, dreams, and cultural artifacts”<sup>49</sup> that function to regulate and regularize a historically contingent set of social and political relations that first emerge in and through the European conquest of the Americas / Abya Yala<sup>50</sup> and under which Whiteness and/or Europeanness is constituted and made sovereign over non-Whiteness/non-Europeanness.<sup>51</sup> Whiteness denotes an assemblage of discourses, practices, ways of knowing and being, and relations of power that emerges through modernity/coloniality and that render certain European forms of knowledge, being, culture, and politics as superior to and sovereign over all others.<sup>52</sup>

Race does this through the construction and delineation of forms or categories of hierarchized difference—variously attached to a fluid set of markers<sup>53</sup>—that are made to appear natural or pre-existing but are in fact constituted through practices and processes of colonial subjection/subjectification and articulated by colonial-racial discourses.<sup>54</sup> Through these processes, colonized non-White subjects are constituted as always already requiring regulation, control, and/or guidance. This process of subjectification is relational, in that colonized subjects are constituted as such *in and through their relations* with colonizing White or European subjects, to whom full or complete subjectivity (that is, self-ownership, -legislation, -rule, and reason) is granted. Racialized non-White or non-European subjects, by contrast, are dispossessed of such privileged forms of subjectivity and constituted as lacking, and as such, function as a constitutive outside for White/European subjects.<sup>55</sup> As Afropessimist

48. “Modernity/coloniality” refers to a form of domination and system of power that is marked by a racializing division of labor and the elevation of specific forms of being, knowledge, and culture over all others, and that functions as the necessary underside of modernity; see Lugones 2016; Mignolo 2011; Quijano 2000. “White sovereignty,” meanwhile, refers to reiterative processes and forms of colonial-racial violence through which Whiteness is constituted and rendered sovereign over non-Whiteness; see Hesse 2017, 2021.

49. Weheliye 2014, 3.

50. *Abya Yala*, from the language of the Kuna people of present-day Panama and Colombia, means “land in full maturity” or “living land” and has been adopted by Indigenous peoples and movements to refer to the entire continent. I use the term to acknowledge the past and present stewardship and sovereignty of Indigenous peoples over the continent’s land and territory.

51. Some trace the origins of race further back beyond the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: Carter 2008; Eliav-Feldon, Isaac, and Ziegler 2009; Heng 2018. My conceptualization of race, however, emphasizes modernity and Western European colonialism as the crucible in which race fully emerges; see Goldberg 2002; Hesse 2007; Quijano 2000; Wolfe 2016; Wynter 2003. The former accounts are, however, helpful in directing us toward important developments that made the emergence of race possible.

52. Compare Hesse 2007, 2017; Maldonado-Torres 2007; Mills 1999; Quijano 2000; Weheliye 2014. Although this emphasis on Whiteness might be read as somewhat reductive, overlooking the numerous categories that have become racialized, in making this claim I am not suggesting the White/non-White binary is totalizing or that these categories are used across all contexts. Rather, I am using these terms as analytical categories to capture how the historically contingent and fluid structure of international order is marked by the reign of Whiteness. The terms *White* and *Whiteness* are capitalized to underscore their use as analytical categories rather than empirical ones referring to forms of phenotypical difference.

53. Hall 2021.

54. Hesse 2007; Wolfe 2016.

55. Goldberg 2002; Hesse 2007.

scholars and those read alongside them have shown, the construction of the Human<sup>56</sup> as *the* rational political and economic subject depended on the construction of a fully abject or non-Human subject against which the humanity of the Human could be measured and secured.<sup>57</sup> These processes of subjectification are both regulatory and regularizing, insofar as they make possible and normalize the exercise of regulatory power and authority of Whiteness and White subjects over non-Whiteness and non-White subjects. Race, in this sense, should *not* be understood primarily as a doctrine or ideology, or as a form of prejudice. Instead, it is an inherently performative set of practices or processes that bring into being an ever-changing range of subjects and objects for regulation, and structures that serve to regulate them, which are subsequently regularized through the codifying language, theories, and doctrines of race.<sup>58</sup> This is reflected in the diverse array of racializing taxonomies and structures that shift within and across various temporal and spatial contexts.

In this conception of race, analytical priority resides in examining and understanding *racialization*. This term refers to the set of processes through which race is constituted as a social object or category and ascribed to certain assemblages—thereby marking them as raced and assigning them certain characteristics and subjectivities—as well as the various logics through which race is enacted and embodied.<sup>59</sup> Processes of racialization can be thought of and examined through a series of overlapping steps. First, various subjects are forced into a specific form of colonial relationship marked by dispossession, domination, exploitation, and differentiated or graded sovereignty. This step is necessary because it establishes the material conditions that race subsequently regulates and regularizes, but is not itself sufficient for racialization. Second, this relationship is regulated through the construction of various categories and forms of difference that are assigned to certain subjects and objects. By this means, racialized subjects/objects are rendered at once knowable and controllable through the assignment of a position—spatial, temporal, normative, and so on—in an imagined or constructed hierarchy. This occurs alongside and is

56. The Human is capitalized here to indicate that it refers to a socially constructed subject or figure, not to members of the human species.

57. Hartman 1997; Warren 2018; Wilderson 2010; Wynter 2003. Much of the Afropessimist literature argues that it is the figure of the “Black”—as a fully abject non-subject/non-being—that serves as the foundational constitutive outside for the Human. This literature offers one helpful avenue for exploring the constitutive outside of Whiteness and is particularly useful for understanding the role of the Atlantic trade in enslaved persons, gratuitous violence, social death, and anti-Blackness in constituting these figures and for understanding the operation of race in the United States and broader Atlantic contexts. The Afropessimist literature has, however, faced some criticism for an overemphasis on ontology that pre-emptively limits, or even disavows, the possibilities of resistance, care, and imagining things otherwise. Kline 2017; Sharpe 2016.

58. This is not to suggest that racialized and racializing doctrines, ideologies, and prejudices are insignificant or do not shape how race is understood or experienced. The important point is that priority is assigned to the practices and processes that constitute and make possible such doctrines, ideologies, and prejudices, which are then seen as emerging after the practice. Locke 1992, 20; Wolfe 2016, 10–11.

59. Hesse 2007, 655–57; Omi and Winant 2015, 109–112; see also Weheliye 2014. Processes of racialization construct *all* racialized subjectivities, not only those constituted as dominated or lacking full subjectivity, and thus also construct White and/or European subjectivities.

reflexively shaped by the development and proliferation of novel technologies of science and governmentality.<sup>60</sup> Perceived threats to the maintenance of such domination and rule are consequently mitigated through the creation of an ever-growing number of subjects/objects of and tools for knowledge and regulation. Finally, this relationship or form of rule is regularized by making it appear normal and/or necessary, in large part through discourses that render racialized subjectivities as natural or pre-existing.<sup>61</sup>

These processes of racialization were and are central to the reproduction and maintenance of modern colonial rule and coloniality. Examining and understanding processes of racialization thus calls for an attentiveness to the types of relations into which subjects and actors are entered, the tools and technologies through which these subjects are regulated, and the discourses that regularize these relations. To examine racialization, then, is to investigate how certain relations of domination and rule are established—such as through war, the conquering and control of territory, international commerce, and so on—and how they are institutionalized through various practices, discursive or material, such as differentiated legal categories of movement and belonging,<sup>62</sup> forms of dispossession and divisions of labor,<sup>63</sup> and gradated forms of sovereignty,<sup>64</sup> to name a few. However, it is important to recognize that processes of racialization do not depend on the ongoing presence of explicit or codified theories or categories of race but can continue in their absence and after their removal.<sup>65</sup> By prioritizing racialization and by questioning the necessity of a link between the theory and the practice of race, we reveal (and can study) systems of racialized domination operating and being reproduced in the absence of an explicit grounding in the language and theories of race.

Given the fluidity of race and racializing categories and processes, the ways that such categories and understandings get taken up is volatile and context dependent. Thus, who and what is rendered White, European, or even Human changes across time and space, and is *not* necessarily or always tied to forms of phenotypical difference, geographical location, or descent.<sup>66</sup> Rather, such determinations are made in relation to the perceived or imagined proximity of a subject or group to Whiteness and the norms, ideals, and ways of thinking, being, and acting that are annexed to it. How specifically different subjects, groups, and spaces are racialized is determined in large part through the sorts of relations into which different subjects or groups are (to be) placed and the material aims of colonial-racial states.<sup>67</sup> Thus, for instance, in settler colonial contexts where the primary aim is permanent access to

60. Goldberg 2002.

61. These steps do not necessarily proceed in a fully linear fashion. The latter two frequently operate in tandem, and they are often the focus in examining racialization.

62. El-Enany 2020; Tazzioli 2021.

63. Bhattacharyya 2018.

64. Grovogui 2002.

65. Locke 1992, 20–35.

66. Harris 1993; Roediger 2022.

67. Goldberg 2002; Wolfe 2016.

land and where ongoing Indigenous presence stands in the way of this, Indigenous peoples are racialized through logics and practices that aim to eliminate Indigenous presence through acts of genocide and policies that remove or dilute Indigeneity by forcibly assimilating Indigenous people, especially children, into White settler society.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, where the aim is access to labor, racialization often occurs through processes that are meant to enlarge a hyper-exploitable group of subjects, discourses that render such groups as “naturally” suited to laboring, and practices such as the “one-drop rule” (in the US context) that mark anyone with any African descent as subject to enslavement and outside the bounds of Whiteness.<sup>69</sup> These designations are also liable to shifts, such as when Nazi Germany cast Slavic peoples as outside of Whiteness to legitimate and regularize forms of exploitation and the “need” for German *Lebensraum*,<sup>70</sup> or where Muslims, and regions they are perceived to come from, are constructed as inherently threatening and/or in need of “corrective” intervention.<sup>71</sup>

These categories and understandings can, however, also be taken on in different ways and to differing extents by those whom they seek to oppress. Frantz Fanon, for example, famously writes of how racialized feelings and understandings of inferiority can be internalized by colonized peoples, and of the processes of fleeing and transferal whereby non-White people and groups seek to escape such understandings by either proving a proximity to Whiteness or transferring the stigma to others.<sup>72</sup> As Jasmine K. Gani demonstrates, such processes can also be observed among various states and governments where certain actors seek to contest stigmatizing images and perceptions by adopting certain styles, performances, discourses, and actions to demonstrate closeness to an imagined White (and masculine) ideal.<sup>73</sup> In such instances, racialized and racializing images and perceptions, and the racial order they uphold, are not themselves directly challenged. Instead, they are cast onto others or presented as inapplicable.<sup>74</sup> Racialized categories can, however, be adopted by oppressed peoples for liberatory ends. Achille Mbembe describes how Blackness is adopted as a declaration of identity to mark histories and practices of abolition, struggle, and resistance.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, the category of Indigeneity has been adopted by various Indigenous peoples and groups to advance emancipation and protect their rights.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, who is considered White—and conversely, who is deemed a threat to the racial order—depends on an imagined or performed investment in and proximity to the norms, ideals, practices, and discourses that uphold Whiteness and White colonial-racial rule.

68. Wolfe 2006.

69. Wolfe 2016, 61–83; see also Allen 2012, vol. 2.

70. Gellately 2003.

71. Bayoumi 2006.

72. Fanon 2008.

73. Gani 2021.

74. See also Phillips 2017, 48.

75. Mbembe 2017; see also Kline 2017.

76. Lightfoot 2016.

## Racialization and the Constitution of International Order

The conceptualization of race I have outlined has significant implications for understanding the constitution of international order. As we have seen, the construction of order involves simultaneous epistemic and governmental processes. On the one hand, it involves the perception and/or production of categories of difference, and on the other, the subsequent regulation of these categories to maintain regularity. Race, as conceptualized here, thus has an inherent ordering function insofar as it simultaneously constructs, regulates, and regularizes categories and forms of difference through the assignment of specific positions within a hierarchy for the purpose of maintaining White colonial-racial domination and rule. These processes of racialization can take the form of representations that portray colonized populations as exotic, irrational, and violent,<sup>77</sup> divisions of labor that mark the labor of certain bodies as either free/waged or enslaved,<sup>78</sup> or the assignment of certain forms and ways of life as subject to inevitable disappearance and erasure,<sup>79</sup> to name a few. They hence bring order to the world through simultaneous regulation and regularization that ensure that everything and everyone is assigned to and kept in its “proper” place. Race could thus be thought of as a *form of order or ordering*, one which ensures the (re)production and continuation of a specific form of colonial domination and rule.<sup>80</sup> The specific form of colonial domination and rule that race—together with gender, sexuality, and class—helps constitute is one that is marked by White sovereignty as the “the rule of Europe and whiteness over non-Europe and nonwhiteness.”<sup>81</sup> Moreover, through the dual movements of regulation and regularization, race renders this reality as natural, given, or necessary, while supplying some of the tools to make it both knowable and controllable. Race, so conceptualized, functions less, or not solely, as a marker of identity tied to different types of bodies,<sup>82</sup> a tool for governing difference and diversity,<sup>83</sup> or a form of prejudice. Rather, these form parts of the ordering apparatus of race that works to uphold White sovereignty.

By directing attention to the significant entanglements between ordering and racializing processes, and by showing how these can be investigated through close consideration of the material and discursive practices that function to uphold and normalize an order of White sovereignty, the conceptualizations of race and order I have articulated here help us understand and analyze how international order

77. Said 2003.

78. Quijano 2000.

79. Wolfe 2006.

80. Race is certainly not the only significant form of ordering, and gender likewise is structured by and itself structures the modern order, such that domination is experienced as intersectional. Collins 2009; Crenshaw 1991; Davis 1983; Lugones 2016.

81. Hesse 2021, 87.

82. Omi and Winant 2015.

83. Lentin 2020.



remains both racialized and racializing across a range of contexts and areas. Thus, where international order is understood as the systems of regulation and regularization that constitute the subjects and objects of international politics, shape their actions, practices, and characteristics, and create and sustain the structures within which they exist and operate, *race is one of the systems through which international order is created and maintained*. International order and race can therefore be thought of as co-constituted. Race is produced in large part through ordering processes, while the re-enactment of these ordering processes in the attempt to construct and secure the patterned regularities of international politics reproduces race. Once these are viewed as co-constitutive, it is essential to note that the discourses, practices, and processes that create and sustain international order are frequently tied up with discourses, practices, and processes that create race as a modality through which social and political life can be organized and governed.

How are these connections to be operationalized and studied? The argument so far suggests that studying international order involves examining how regularity in international politics is created and maintained, or, more specifically, the systems of regulation and regularization which construct and secure this regularity. Studying such systems, in turn, means examining the discourses, practices, and processes that construct the subjects and objects of international politics—and assign them various meanings, values, places, and roles—and the structures within which they operate. Thus, to analyze the role of race in constituting international order is to examine how these discourses, practices, and processes draw on and/or reproduce racializing processes. This can be done in a few different ways, across several different areas. For example, we could examine how forms of state making and nation building render difference as a threat and use racialized categories to manage and control it, or how alternative forms of political organization and practices of sovereignty are systematically devalued and erased by making the adoption of European forms and styles a prerequisite for recognition. Alternatively, we might analyze how international law is used by various actors, through its differential application, to legitimate and uphold a global order marked by White sovereignty. Yet, to do so, it is also important to examine not only how such forms of racialized and racialized ordering came about and spread, but also how and in what forms they persist into the present, and how they are contested. In the following section, I do some of this by putting my conceptualizations to work, tracing in broad stokes how this racialized order came about and how it persists.

But first, I should clarify the scope conditions of my argument regarding the co-constitution of race and international order. To be clear, not all forms of international order are necessarily racialized or racializing in all circumstances or across all contexts. Racialized/racializing international order is neither totalizing nor transhistorical. Race, as I have suggested, emerges out of a particular historical juncture—the colonization of the Americas / Abya Yala—as a form of order to help institute and secure a particular form of colonialism marked by the domination and rule of Whiteness over non-Whiteness. It emerges here in large part as an attempt to reconcile practices of dispossession, domination, and exploitation with emergent



European discourses of equality and rights, fixity and improvement.<sup>84</sup> Although various forms of differentiation between human collectivities existed prior to this, as did forms of colonialism and imperialism, it is here that we first see the regulation and regularization of such domination through the discourses, practices, ideologies, and concept of race.<sup>85</sup> The practices and patterns of enslavement in places such as Ancient Rome or in the Greater Mediterranean and Middle East (prior to European colonization), while brutal and violent, were not grounded in or justified through a concept or ideology of race.<sup>86</sup> And while race is necessarily hierarchical, not all forms of hierarchy are raced, and numerous hierarchical orders have existed throughout human history.<sup>87</sup>

Thus, in arguing that international order has been and remains both racialized and racializing, I am making an argument about international order in and under a particular historical formation. Although it is possible to see certain similarities between this racialized order and other, nonracialized orders—in terms of the presence of hierarchy, practices of domination and exploitation, the construction of categories of difference, and so on—nonracialized orders lack processes of racialization that constitute and enact race as the domination, sovereignty, and rule of Whiteness over non-Whiteness. The determining factor is whether the hierarchies an order constructs and maintains are grounded in a specific and historically emergent form of hierarchy that renders certain European forms of being, knowledge, culture, society, and politics (that is, Whiteness) as the most advanced, developed, and superior. This does not preclude the presence or examination of various convergences between orders, or imply that previous forms and practices of ordering have not shaped this racialized/racializing order.<sup>88</sup> Nor does it preclude forms of racialized and racializing thought and action being taken up and deployed by non-White actors in the aftermath of colonial rule.<sup>89</sup> But by tracking how racialized and racializing forms of order developed and spread, and how they were and continue to be enacted and resisted, we can gain a fuller picture of the contemporary international order's development and better understand how and why global racialized inequalities and hierarchies persist.

### **Constituting—and Troubling—the International Order of White Sovereignty**

Recent work in IR has highlighted the diversity of international orders across time and space, adding to our understandings of the many forms international order can

84. Hesse 2007; Wolfe 2016, 8–9.

85. Quijano 2000, 539; Wolfe 2016, 6–10. Indeed, the fact that race is sometimes treated as a transhistorical object present wherever there is collective human differentiation “is a prime example of the ideological process whereby race has been naturalized” (Wolfe 2016, 7).

86. Fynn-Paul 2021; Scheidel 2011.

87. Mattern and Zarakol 2016; Zarakol 2017.

88. Phillips 2017, 49, for example, productively points to how the construction of imperial hierarchies often involves “the organization and institutionalization of broad hierarchies of cultural difference.” This need not, however, take the form of race or racialization.

89. Mamdani 2001.

take and has taken.<sup>90</sup> Many accounts of the contemporary or “liberal” international order’s development trace its origins to either the nineteenth century or after 1945.<sup>91</sup> Tracing the development of racialized international order, however, takes us back further than that. While it is impossible here to fully map out the history of race and its connections to the construction of international order over the last 500 years, there are several distinctive features of the form of colonialism out of which race developed that have important implications for examining race and international order in tandem: coloniality, the racial state, racial capitalism, and the connections among them.<sup>92</sup>

In a seminal article, Aníbal Quijano makes an important distinction between colonialism and coloniality. Analyzing a series of fundamental shifts that were brought about by European colonization of the Americas / Abya Yala, Quijano proposes a new model of power that has come to define modernity: the “coloniality of power.” This new model developed out of the convergence of two historical processes: first, “the codification of the differences between conquerors and conquered in the idea of ‘race’,” and second, “the constitution of a new structure of control of labor and its resources and products,” namely capitalism.<sup>93</sup> These two processes emerged in tandem as distinctions between waged and nonwaged/enslaved labor came to be articulated and codified in terms of race. Although these racializing distinctions first emerged to solidify and justify this division of labor and the economic domination of Whites/Europeans, as capitalism developed and spread through European colonialism this model of power took on other elements. Thus, by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the coloniality of power not only came to define a racializing division of labor but also incorporated control over subjectivity and knowledge.<sup>94</sup> As Europeans extended their hegemony beyond the Western hemisphere and into Africa, Asia, and the Pacific, they brought this model of power with them and adapted it.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, because the emergence and spread of coloniality are tied up with both capitalism and modernity, it is not temporally limited to periods of direct European rule. Thus, not only was this modality of power in many ways global—though neither totalizing nor uncontested—but also the orders it helped institute and secure (re)embedded race through the redeployment and adaptation of racializing classificatory schemas, and their accompanying regulatory practices and Eurocentric understandings of being and knowledge.

Linked to this is the rise and development of the modern state. The modern (nation-)state, which emerged and spread through colonialism, and in particular

90. Kang 2012; Phillips and Sharman 2015; Spruyt 2020; Zarakol 2022.

91. For example, Bull 2012; Buzan and Lawson 2015; Ikenberry 2011; Reus-Smit 2004; Sluga 2021.

92. There have, however, been a number of important works that trace the emergence and development of race over the *longue durée*: Fredrickson 2002; Goldberg 2002; Hannaford 1996; Wolfe 2016; Wynter 2003.

93. Quijano 2000, 533–34.

94. Lugones 2016; Maldonado-Torres 2007; Mignolo 2011; Wynter 2003.

95. Quijano 2000, 544.

through processes of internal colonization, took on an increasingly racialized and racializing character in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as it imposed race “upon otherness ... [in] the attempt to account for it, to know it, to control it”—to maintain social order in the face of growing heterogeneity.<sup>96</sup> However, the rise of the modern/racial state, and its attempts to create homogeneous societies internally, also had important effects for those seen as existing “outside” of it. And because the spaces and peoples outside the state were seen as threatening, and hence as objects of regulation and control, “colonialism, from the point of view of the state, was about policing, securing, and controlling the outside of the colonizing (European) state power.”<sup>97</sup> Central here was the enactment of various forms of colonial-racial, anti-Black, and anti-Indigenous violence, both domestically and internationally.<sup>98</sup> Seen in this light, the rise of modern/racial states, and the racializing form of colonialism in which they engaged, had significant implications for the construction of a racialized international order. As the existence and security of the racial state depend on regulating what exists outside of it through colonialism, its rise and spread play an important role in establishing a global order marked by the exercise of racializing regulatory power. It is here that we glimpse some of the entanglements between the domestic and international processes of racialized ordering, as the racial state requires a global racial order for its own security, while that order in turn functions to regularize forms of racialized exclusion and governance at the domestic level. To better understand the development of the modern international order, we should examine these entanglements and, as Thompson suggests, the role of race-making in them.<sup>99</sup>

Protecting and perpetuating the racial state also involved the construction of international institutions and organizations. As others have shown, many of the institutions and organizations of international order are also implicated in European colonialism.<sup>100</sup> For example, while the aftermath of the First World War represented a shift in the role of self-determination in international politics, this was not seen as applicable outside Europe or as extending to racial equality—despite important attempts by non-European states, especially Japan, to argue otherwise.<sup>101</sup> Thus the League of Nations and the mandate system were built around attempts to maintain forms of racialized imperial rule outside Europe.<sup>102</sup> Although the principle of self-determination was eventually globalized—in large part through the significant efforts of anti-colonialists<sup>103</sup>—forms of race and racial hierarchy continue to shape the post-Second World War international order. This

96. Goldberg 2002, 23; see also Mills 1999; Quijano 2000.

97. Goldberg 2002, 51.

98. Hartman 1997; Hesse 2017; Warren 2018; Sabaratnam 2023; Wilderson 2010; Wolfe 2006.

99. Thompson 2013.

100. Acharya 2022; Búzás 2021; Mazower 2013; Yao 2022a.

101. Füredi 1998; Lake and Reynolds 2008.

102. Locke 2012; Pedersen 2015.

103. Getachew 2019.

can be seen, on the one hand, in the failure to account for the linkages between the forms of colonialism that shaped the modern world order and race,<sup>104</sup> and on the other, in the erection of regimes to manage racialized difference and maintain racialized hierarchies.<sup>105</sup> It is also visible in the postwar international economic order of “embedded liberalism,” which rested on the exclusion of migrants from social and political membership and the commodification of their labor,<sup>106</sup> in the lack of reciprocity and patterns of paternalism that continue to characterize trade relations between the global North and South,<sup>107</sup> and in the economic structures and practices that uphold international economic inequality.<sup>108</sup> The perpetuation of such a racialized/racializing order in the postwar period, and the discourses and practices that enable it, has not gone uncontested or unchallenged.<sup>109</sup> Yet, when read through the experiences and perspectives of colonized peoples, the reordering of international politics that took place in the twentieth century is seen less as a fundamental change in the international order and more as a reworking that keeps in place racializing structures and maintains racialized hierarchy. Thus, scholars might further explore both how international institutions and organizations buttress and perpetuate forms of racialized order, and how this has been contested and resisted across a range of areas.

This order, however, is also reproduced through the structures and processes of racial capitalism. The notion of racial capitalism points toward the modalities through which race is re-enacted in the service of capital to enable dispossession, extraction, and exploitation on a global scale. A burgeoning literature, building in part on the insights of Cedric Robinson and the Black radical tradition,<sup>110</sup> has compellingly shown how historical and contemporary racialized inequalities and forms of exploitation are linked to global capitalism.<sup>111</sup> Robinson argues that capitalist divisions of labor are fundamentally racializing, suggesting that “race became largely the rationalization for the domination, exploitation, and/or extermination of non-‘Europeans’.”<sup>112</sup> According to his account, these racializing processes were brought by Europeans to their colonies as these early forms of capitalism spread. Although he is sometimes read as suggesting that these racialized differences pre-existed capitalism,<sup>113</sup> we could instead read Robinson as arguing that capitalism functioned to racialize forms of difference in the service of exploitation and extraction.<sup>114</sup> In this reading, as capitalism developed and spread across the

104. Acharya 2022.

105. Búzás 2021; see also Reus-Smit 2018.

106. Goodman and Pepinsky 2021; see also Bhabra and Holmwood 2018.

107. Singh 2017.

108. Lockwood 2021.

109. Acharya 2022; Ba 2023; Getachew 2019.

110. Robinson 2000; see also Cox 1948; Du Bois 2022; James 1989, 2012.

111. E.g., Bhattacharyya 2018; Fraser 2016; Gilmore 2022; Ince 2022; Koshy et al. 2022; Rutazibwa 2020; Tilley and Shilliam 2018; see also Gruffydd Jones 2008.

112. Robinson 2000, 27.

113. Kelley 2017; Táíwò and Bright 2020.

114. Go 2021.

planet, in large part through European colonial endeavors, distinctions between classes of capitalist subjects were made legible, controllable, and natural in part through processes of racialization.

The racial capitalism literature has faced some criticism for its potential Atlantic-centrism.<sup>115</sup> Compounding this somewhat narrow focus is that, by focusing on histories and places where divisions of labor are explicitly racialized and subsequently universalizing this experience, it allows the concept of racial capitalism to be read as applicable or relevant in such contexts only.<sup>116</sup> However, if we approach race as an analytical concept that points toward how forms of difference *become racialized* in part through capitalist processes of extraction and exploitation, the applicability of racial capitalism to a wider range of contexts in analyzing the persistence of a racialized international order becomes apparent. Onur Ulas Ince does this in his analysis of John Crawford's "capital theory of race" in the context of Crawford's advocacy for British settler colonialism on the Indian subcontinent. Even though Ince's focus is on a specific historical case and thinker, he demonstrates how a form of racial capitalism, or what he terms "'capitalist racialization' as a particular mode of elaborating social difference into racial categories," was made operative in the South Asian context.<sup>117</sup> In so doing, Ince's account helps illustrate how the conceptual grids—and the material practices these enabled—used to facilitate the spread of capitalism across a range of contexts beyond the Atlantic world were also entangled with various forms of racialization. In other words, although the incorporation of different peoples and regions into the global capitalist system took divergent forms and pathways, they converged to some extent through the incorporation of variously racializing discourses and practices.

This then has significant implications for the order of global capitalism, and hence for international order writ large. Capitalism incorporates both an economic and a political order, insofar as the forms of accumulation necessary to its functioning and perpetuation as an economic system require a political framework that secures property rights, enforces contracts, and settles disputes.<sup>118</sup> Race, from this vantage point, is produced at the intersection of the two as processes of racialization enable and justify the construction and maintenance of forms of status distinction, constructing differently exploitable and expropriable subjects and spaces.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, as capitalism requires limitless expansion for accumulation to proceed apace, its outlook and scope are necessarily globalized. In striving to be global, the capitalist economic and political order remains a central set of systems out of which international order emerges. Racial capitalism thus functions in part to instantiate and reproduce an international order of White sovereignty in which forms of colonial-racial violence and dispossession are continually re-enacted and secured

115. Jenkins and Leroy 2021.

116. Walzer 2020.

117. Ince 2022, 148.

118. Fraser 2016; Bhattacharyya 2018.

119. Fraser 2016, 170.

across numerous areas of social, political, and economic life. While the literature on capitalism and the liberal international order in international political economy is by no means completely silent on race,<sup>120</sup> further analysis of capitalism's historical and contemporary entanglements with processes of racialization would go some way toward elaborating the mutual constitution of race and international order.

## Conclusion

Presenting the contemporary international order as a liberal, rules-based order marked by consent and sovereign equality can mask how this order is marked by race as a historically emergent form of order(ing) that renders the forms of being, knowledge, culture, society, and politics annexed to Whiteness as sovereign over all others. While the field of IR has begun recognizing the role and effects of race in international politics and on international orders, respectively, racial aphasia—manifesting as a difficulty in fully comprehending and examining the extent and depth of racialization—has yet to be fully overcome. Further exploring how the contemporary international order remains both racialized and racializing, as I have demonstrated here, would be an important step in this direction. Recognizing and examining the role that processes of racialization play in the constitution of international order gives us greater insight into the nature, operation, and reproduction of a specific, historically emergent form of hierarchy that continues to mark global politics. It also better equips us to comprehend how and why certain forms of racialized inequality persist in a supposedly liberal order that boasts of the absence of imperialism, colonialism, and White supremacy.

The argument I have made here regarding the co-constitution of race and international order, and the conceptualizations I have offered in so doing, aim to provide some of the conceptual tools for exploring this further by bringing important work on social, political, and international order together with some of the literature on race and coloniality, thereby illuminating this literature's utility for thinking through questions of order, hierarchy, and inequality that often trouble IR scholars. As I have shown, many of the building blocks are already available, whether it be process-oriented approaches to international order that can be fruitfully brought together with approaches to studying racialization; the works that have explored how ideas of race and the practices of racialization have developed, traveled, shifted, and been put to use across a range of contexts; or the growing body of literature on hierarchy, which has already problematized the presumptions of anarchy and sovereign equality, and which provides important tools for examining the ongoing presence of various hierarchies and the differences and convergences between them. What remains, then, is for these tools to be deployed across the

120. For example, Dannreuther and Kessler 2017; Johnson 2023; Papamichail 2023.

breadth of the discipline such that an attentiveness to race and racialization comes to characterize studies of international order and global politics more broadly.

Given the scope of the international order, the fluidity of race, and the depth of its entanglements with order, there are several ways these entanglements might be explored further. First, scholars could explore how the mutual constitution of race and international order manifests across different contexts—geographic, historical, or substantive—highlighting continuities and discontinuities between them. Second, future research might analyze how the racialized and racializing hierarchies this international order (re)produces intersect with and are compounded by other forms of hierarchy in world politics, such as gendered, sexuality-, and class-based hierarchies. Third, scholars might examine how racialized and racializing orders have been navigated, contested, and resisted by a range of actors across different contexts, building on work that has sought to recover the voices and perspectives of those who tried to reimagine and rebuild international order on more equitable terms.<sup>121</sup> Finally, connected to this, further work could consider what we might learn from alternative forms and modes of ordering, building on the literature on the diversity of historical orders,<sup>122</sup> or works in the political theory and global justice literatures that seek to push beyond the bounds of the presently imaginable.<sup>123</sup> Through these avenues of research, we can gain a fuller understanding of the ongoing role and effects of racialization in global ordering processes, and perhaps even international order more broadly.

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121. For example, Ba 2023; Getachew 2019.

122. For example, Kang 2012; Phillips and Sharman 2015; Spruyt 2020; Zarakol 2022.

123. For example, Bell 2019; Iton 2008; Makalani 2017.



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