Empire, Popular Sovereignty, and the Problem of Self-and-Other-Determination

When W. E. B. Du Bois tackled the problem of democracy and empire in 1915, this debate was well-threaded but had yet to grapple with this couplet in his proposed terms.[1] The theme of despotic rule by democratic polities over other countries appears multiple times in the history of political thought. Athenians, for one, often thought of their democracy in terms of tyranny, referring nonpejoratively to the authority of the *dēmos* as "tyrannical and despotic," both vis-à-vis politicians who aimed to rule over it and with respect to other polities.[2] Nineteenth-century liberalism also grappled with these relationships, with Alexis de Tocqueville, for example, arguing that imperial projects could supply the virtue and glory that would ignite republican public-spiritedness.[3] John Stuart Mill and other reformist British liberals, in contrast, enlisted the self-evident backwardness of British colonial subjects as a standard against which to evaluate whether domestic groups deserved the extension of the franchise.[4] As noted in the Introduction, J. A. Hobson and Leonard T. Hobhouse's interest in the confluence of democratic and imperial forms of government was associated with their concern with the British polity's decay due to its sprawling empire, which they contrasted with the representative democratic promise of settler colonies.

---

[1] W. E. B. Du Bois, "The African Roots of War," *The Atlantic Monthly* 115, no. 5 (1915).

[2] Kinch Hoekstra, "Athenian Democracy and Popular Tyranny," in *Popular Sovereignty in Historical Perspective*, ed. Richard Bourke and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 17, 25–27, 38–42.

[3] Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 193–94.

[4] Ibid., 249.

Unlike his predecessors, Du Bois focused on the despotic linkage that western polities established with their colonies and internal others and its racial and material motivations, and argued for the reconceptualization of popular sovereignty and self-determination because of how this transformed the meaning and workings of democracy in the metropole. I recover Du Bois's notion of democratic despotism to conceptualize popular sovereignty, self-determination, and their interrelationship in the context of imperial and postcolonial racial capitalism – a central building block of this book's critical project.

I contextualize my reading of Du Bois in the discourses that prevailed among turn-of-the-century mass movements of labor enfranchisement in the west. These took place in the context of empire and thus infused popular sovereignty with affective attachments that supported and required the capitalist expropriation of the land and labor of imperial possessions. Because of this, I claim that it is analytically more accurate to understand the dominant iteration of western popular sovereignty as entailing *self-and-other-determination*, given its emergence in the context of imperial and racialized processes of enfranchisement.[5] Critical work has so far not scrutinized this feature of self-determination, because of its focus on postcolonial countries' deficits rather than on core countries' excessive self-determination. Yet the proposed analysis is potentially more productive to understanding continuing global domination as well as the rise of right-wing populism and its resentful global attachments at a time when peoples in wealthy countries are losing their imperial entitlements.

This chapter first contextualizes my account within the recent literature on empire. Then, I examine Du Bois's notion of democratic despotism in the context of evolving labor politics in the early twentieth century. After that, I conceptualize self-and-other-determination as an institutional form entangled with racism and capitalism and facilitated by racial affect. Fourth, I build on the work of Saidiya Hartman and Frantz Fanon to theorize how racial affective attachments that circulate and organize western democratic polities' relationship to the global mutate but persist after decolonization and into the neoliberal era. Lastly, I discuss implications for the literature on self-determination and the contemporary rise of right-wing populism.

[5] My point is not that every claim of popular sovereignty since the turn of the century fits this form, but that early twentieth-century white workers' enfranchisement was embedded in racial logics of empire, and that although groups that still profit from the imperial alliance have shrunk, collective attachments to exploitation abroad, led or facilitated by western governments, remain.

1.1 POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY, SELF-DETERMINATION, AND EMPIRE

Critical engagement with popular sovereignty in the literature on empire has predominantly – and importantly – attended to projects in the postcolonial world.[6] These scholars note that the Westphalian frame and its attendant view of decolonization as the incorporation of newly independent states into an international society leave much to be desired. This model overlooks projects of sovereignty that were decidedly anti-imperial, yet not necessarily national or statist.[7] It also leaves out the radical break in the thought of postcolonial statesmen with the Eurocentric society of states.[8] These accounts confirm that a Westphalian understanding of sovereignty disregards how, in an unjust world, background conditions are lacking for genuine self-determination.[9]

Yet these accounts of subaltern popular sovereignty and self-determination limit their criticism to the international system and omit theorizing specifically how the global hierarchies and injustices they identify are grounded in the *democratic* European and settler polities that sustained the imperial order and remain dominant today. In other words, a notion of imperial popular sovereignty is needed that encompasses a will to self-government entwined with an entitlement to govern others abroad. It is this facet of popular sovereignty and self-determination that co-constitutes the hierarchical international system *and* makes the claim of an expansion of the society of states in equal terms truly absurd. To the extent that western states' self-determination involves a claim both to govern themselves and dominate others, its very expansion is an inconsistent project; that is, a world of equally outwardly dominating states is impossible.[10] From the

---

[6] By the "postcolonial world" I mean formerly colonized and currently independent countries who formally detached themselves from colonizers, though a core claim of this chapter is that colonial relations with powerful western countries persist under different guises.

[7] Manu Goswami, "Imaginary Futures and Colonial Internationalisms," *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 5 (2012): 1461–62, Karuna Mantena, "Popular Sovereignty and Anti-Colonialism," in *Popular Sovereignty in Historical Perspective*, ed. Richard Bourke and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 300–1, Inés Valdez, *Transnational Cosmopolitanism: Kant, Du Bois, and Justice as a Political Craft* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[8] Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 12.

[9] Catherine Lu, "Cosmopolitan Justice, Democracy and the World State," in *Institutional Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Luis Cabrera (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 234.

[10] Maria Mies (1998, 76) expresses this logical flaw more generally in her critique of Engels's strategy of extending "what is good to the ruling classes" to the whole of society

start, the relative equality of western states among each other sanctioned in Westphalia coexisted with their internal organization as democratic despotisms (i.e., domination of non-European states that was *popularly* embraced). This means that the political forms that brought western citizens together behind this despotic project must be critiqued and transformed if decolonization is to result in the end of domination. This is because wealthy polities' unreformed orientations and material sustenance continue to depend upon racial capitalist accumulation, which in turn requires the imperial organization of the globe.

   The entwined character of the US polity, on the one hand, and settler colonialism and external imperial aggression, on the other, has been more thoroughly addressed. Critical readings of figures ranging from J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, Thomas Paine, and Thomas Jefferson to Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, and Louis Hartz show that democracy and citizenship were shaped and dependent on imperial projects, cast the people as an agent of settler colonialism,[11] and required expanding slavery and expropriating Indigenous groups.[12] Moreover, the citizen subjects and the forms of belonging that emerged out of Jefferson's "empire of liberty" were shaped by the materialities and legalities of slavery and empire.[13] These engagements with texts, legal documents, and policy, however, still fall short of exposing the material base of popular sovereignty as a political form – that is, how popular sovereignty both depends on and disavows racial capitalist processes of accumulation reliant on empire. This chapter and the next tackle this very problem by revealing the seams joining together democracy, racial capitalism, and empire.[14]

---

   when she notes that "in a contradictory and exploitative relationship, the privileges of the exploiters can never become the privileges of all."

[11] Dahl, *Empire of the People: Settler Colonialism and the Foundations of Modern Democratic Thought*, 9–11.

[12] Rana, *The Two Faces of American Freedom*, 22.

[13] Anthony Bogues, *Empire of Liberty: Power, Desire, and Freedom* (Lebanon, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2010), 29.

[14] For reasons of space, I support Du Bois's conceptualization with an analysis of working-class discourse in the US case, while construing the analysis of affect within unequal global politics more broadly. Hence, despite the US focus of the analysis, the effort to bring working classes into the fold of empire through the promise of access to wealth was a more general facet of western politics, at play in British workers' feelings of superiority over Irish workers, the joining of the British working class in the celebration of imperial victories in South Africa, and the German social democratic embrace of colonization as a way to increase domestic forces of production and allow German families to overcome miserable conditions of living. See Karl Marx, "Confidential Communication. Letter to Ludwig Kugelmann on Bakunin, Vol. 3," in *The Karl Marx Library*, ed. Saul K. Padover

In this reconstruction, I single out the role of affective attachments in facilitating the embrace by the white working-class of narratives of imperial exploitation and the demands of this class for the distribution of this wealth among themselves. This embrace shaped popular sovereignty and produced an excessive form of self-determination, which I call "self-and-other-determination." To make sense of the material dimensions of this concept, the chapter explores the articulation between capitalism and racism. Scholars have argued that capitalism offered moderate concessions to white waged workers while more intensively exploiting and expropriating the labor, property, and bodies of racialized workers, who lacked the political resources available to citizen-workers.[15] I specify how these dynamics operated vis-à-vis external others and tainted popular sovereignty by turning white citizen-workers into beneficiaries of the imperial regime of outward despotism and preventing radical challenges to imperial capitalism. This is not to argue for an exclusively economistic notion of self-and-other-determination, in which racial capitalism is the primary and determinant force. Racial capitalism and European and white settler nationalisms were articulated transnationally, in the sense that domestic struggles for enfranchisement relied on transnational networks and beliefs in the racial superiority and global domination of "Anglo-Saxons" that were still prominent at the turn of the century.[16] Portable racial identifications created solidarity among transnationally located white populations but took particular local shapes.[17] Western polities' claims of popular sovereignty and their relation to the outside through claims of self-determination absorbed these transnational logics and embedded them in domestic political and economic regimes. In other words, it examines how racial ideas contained in the "ideological cement" of empire[18] became contingently entwined with ideas of self-governance and self-determination and articulated with capitalism.

(New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973 [1870]), Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*, 98–99, and Chapter 2.

[15] Michael C. Dawson, "Hidden in Plain Sight: A Note on Legitimation Crises and the Racial Order," *Critical Historical Studies* 3, no. 1 (2016): 149, Nancy Fraser, "Expropriation and Exploitation in Racialized Capitalism: A Reply to Michael Dawson," *Critical Historical Studies* 3, no. 1 (2016): 171–72.

[16] Anthony Pagden, *Peoples and Empires: A Short History of European Migration, Exploration, and Conquest, from Greece to the Present* (London: Modern Library, 2007), 136.

[17] Michael Hanchard, *The Spectre of Race* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 6–7, Kornel Chang, "Circulating Race and Empire: Transnational Labor Activism and the Politics of Anti-Asian Agitation in the Anglo-American Pacific World, 1880–1910," *The Journal of American History* 96, no. 3 (2009).

[18] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875–1914* (New York: Vintage, 1987), 70.

1.2 DU BOIS, DEMOCRATIC DESPOTISM, AND LABOR POLITICS

Du Bois's writings on imperialism during and after World War I introduce and develop the notion of "democratic despotism."[19] This concept describes how the color line and the particular affective attachments that "festered" alongside it were central for the development and consolidation of western democracies during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Instead of optimistically expecting the racially oppressive relations within the United States and between colonial countries and the colonized to be eventually taken over by the "irresistible tide" of democracy, Du Bois theorizes democratic despotism as a proper political form that operates alongside racial capitalism, whose existence depends on imperialism as a form of outward domination. This type of regime depends on collective attachments to the wealth extracted through imperial rule, which shows a despotic face toward colonial dominions.

Du Bois's essay "The African Roots of War," published in 1915 in *The Atlantic Monthly*, locates the European struggle for Africa at the core of the rivalries and jealousies that caused World War I. This intervention also clarifies the meaning of nationhood and popular sovereignty in the imperial age and the attachments that sustain a racial democracy. He opens the essay with the well-rehearsed progressive narrative of democratization and socialization:

Slowly, the divine right of the few to determine economic income and distribute the goods and services of the world has been questioned and curtailed. We called the process Revolution in the eighteenth century, advancing Democracy in the nineteenth, and Socialization of Wealth in the twentieth. But whatever we call it, the movement is the same: the dipping of more and grimier hands into the wealth-bag of the nation, until to-day only the ultra stubborn fail to see that democracy in determining income is the next inevitable step to Democracy in political power.[20]

Yet, this "tide of democracy" is not as irresistible as it seems, and the remaining realms of despotism in the west's imperial possessions or the race hatred and racial brutality in the United States are far from

---

[19] Tocqueville discusses "democratic despotism" in *Democracy in America* but is interested in how certain democratic rules make "even the most original minds and the most energetic of spirits" unable to "rise above the crowd." For Tocqueville, US citizens leave their state of dependency only long enough to choose their leaders and are content otherwise with obeying the ruler, because it is not a man or another class of people but "society itself" that directs them. See "Democracy in America," in *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003 [1835]), 806.

[20] Du Bois, "The African Roots of War," 708–9.

paradoxical. Du Bois terms this disjuncture "democratic despotism" and finds it easy to explain: "The white working man has been asked to share the spoil of exploiting 'ch**ks and n*****s.' It is no longer simply the merchant prince, or the aristocratic monopoly, or even the employing class that is *exploiting* the world: it is the nation; a new *democratic* nation composed of united capital and labor."[21]

Du Bois states that western *democracies* claim a right to dominion over the rest of the world that is facilitated by racism, and he implicates white labor as an actor that, while demanding incorporation into the people, does so with "a worldview that casts that-which-is-not-white (persons, lands, resources) as personal possessions that rightfully belong to those marked 'white.'"[22] Du Bois's interest in white dominion as an accessory to emancipation is not new. This form of thinking and acting in accordance "with the conviction that racialized others are their property" appears already in an 1890 essay on Jefferson Davis.[23] There he reflects on the Civil War as an instance of "a people fighting to be free in order that another people should not be free" and globalizes this trend by noting that western civilization represents "the advance of part of the world at the expense of the whole."[24] What interests me, however, is how in

---

[21] Ibid., 709, W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860–1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1998 [1934]), 634.

[22] Ella Myers, "Beyond the Psychological Wage: Du Bois on White Dominion," *Political Theory* 47, no. 1 (2019): 12. Conceptually, the affinity between Du Bois's essay and the Marxist critique of imperialism – notably that of Vladimir Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg – is evident even before his groundbreaking Marxist rereading of Reconstruction in the 1930s and his more explicit leftward turn in the post–World War II era (Eric Porter, *The Problem of the Future World: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Race Concept at Midcentury* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010)). Yet, in addition to worrying about the susceptibility of the working class to nationalism and imperialism like Lenin ("Opportunism, and the Collapse of the Second International," in *Lenin Collected Works, Vol. 21* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974 [1915])), and seeing imperialist competition and the drive to accumulation behind the "ransacking" of the planet like Luxemburg, ("The Accumulation of Capital: A Contribution to the Economic Theory of Imperialism," in *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg Volume II*, ed. Peter Hudis and Paul Le Blanc (London: Verso, 2015 [1913]), 258–59, 64), Du Bois adds racism and a theory of racial affect to the equation and theorizes the politics of this relationship by connecting democratic peoples to imperialism.

[23] Myers, "Beyond the Psychological Wage: Du Bois on White Dominion," 13–16.

[24] W. E. B. Du Bois, "Jefferson Davis as a Representative of Civilization," in *Against Racism: Unpublished Essays, Papers, Addresses, 1887–1961*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988 [1890]), 14. A domestic polity "characterized by simultaneous relations of equality and privilege: equality among whites, who are privileged in relation to those who are not white", Olson, *The Abolition of White Democracy*, xv, is also at the core of Du Bois's democratic thought. A

1915 Du Bois takes aim at central concepts of political theory and argues for their attunement to the *practice* of western imperial democracies. Du Bois, in other words, counters the deflection that characterizes canonical accounts of popular sovereignty and self-determination and casts them as imperial and excessive. This is because democratic despotism presupposes particular claims of popular sovereignty, which depend on excessive forms of self-determination that operate within imperial capitalism, whose operation and modes of exploitation/expropriation are filtered by racial hierarchy. Accordingly, material ambitions for violently extracted resources infuse the ties of solidarity among citizens in the metropole: "Such nations it is that *rule* the modern world. Their *national bond* is no mere sentimental patriotism, loyalty, or ancestor worship. It is the increased *wealth*, power, and luxury for *all classes* on a scale the world never saw before."[25]

Thus, wealth and luxury, as well as power over dominions abroad, are constitutive of the national bond or imagined community that holds western polities together. These polities are democratic – that is, "all classes" are bonded together and partake of the national wealth – but also *rule* beyond the confines of their territory. Moreover, the bond of those polities is not exclusively inward looking but depends on the pursuit of foreign dominions and the unprecedented levels of wealth and luxury that follow from it. In this sense, popular sovereignty and the determination of the fates of other peoples that imperial countries exploit become fused.

Du Bois's critique of material attachments reappears a decade later in his essay "Criteria of Negro Art," which claims that Americans possess a sense of "strength and accomplishment" but lack a conception of beauty.[26] For Du Bois, American goals are "tawdry and flamboyant," embodied in acquiring "the most powerful motor car," wearing the "most striking clothes," and giving "the richest dinners," rather than a world where "men create, … realize themselves [and] … enjoy life."[27]

---

related literature considers Du Bois's notion of the "wages of whiteness," or the *domestic* dynamics of appropriation of psychological and economic resources. See David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 2007 [1991]), Myers, "Beyond the Psychological Wage: Du Bois on White Dominion."

[25] Du Bois, "The African Roots of War," 709. See also Du Bois, "Jefferson Davis as a Representative of Civilization," 14, my emphasis.

[26] W. E. B. Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art," in *The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader*, ed. David Levering Lewis (New York: Penguin Classics, 1995 [1926]), 325.

[27] Ibid. There are echoes between this discussion and Andrew Douglas's (2015) illuminating reconstruction of Du Bois's critique of the competitive society.

Du Bois was tapping into a general transformation in culture that enticed Americans into the pleasures of consumption and indulgence and away from work as the path to happiness.[28] The myth of plenty that had characterized the United States was being transformed by the early 1900s into a focus on "personal satisfaction" and on places of pleasure such as department stores, theaters, restaurants, dance halls, and amusement parks, keeping pace with urbanization, commercialization, and secularization.[29] Pursuing material goods was the means to all that was "good" and to "personal salvation," even when, in the context of concentrated wealth, this pursuit was most often mere desire.[30] Criticisms of wealth accumulation as the occupation that absorbed the American people and of its unequal distribution were also voiced by others, including the progressive thinker Herbert Croly.[31]

This shift in culture was tightly connected to the transformation of discourses of labor enfranchisement in the late nineteenth century. In contrast to an earlier focus on producerism and cooperativism that identified wage labor as inherently exploitative, new labor narratives highlighted that wage work was not essentially problematic if it allowed for a high standard of living.[32] Rather than aiming to transform the social order, consumerist ideologies demanded higher wages, thus seeking to extract more resources while leaving the existing order intact. In the words of labor leader Samuel Gompers, "The conflict between the laborers and the capitalists is as to the quantity, the amount, of the wages the laborer shall receive for his part in production and the residue of profit which shall go to the capitalist."[33]

---

[28] William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 27.

[29] Ibid., 27–28.

[30] Ibid., 27–28, 35.

[31] *The Promise of American Life* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1909), 22–23.

[32] For republican cooperativist traditions in the US labor movement, see the work of Alex Gourevitch, *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth: Labor and Republican Liberty in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014). On the transformation of producerist narratives toward narratives focused on consumption, see the work of Helga Hallgrimsdottir and Cecilia Benoit, "From Wage Slaves to Wage Workers: Cultural Opportunity Structures and the Evolution of the Wage Demands of the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor, 1880–1900," *Social Forces* 85, no. 3 (2007), and Lawrence Glickman, "Inventing the 'American Standard of Living': Gender, Race and Working-Class Identity, 1880–1925," *Labor History* 34, no. 2–3 (1993). Finally, Paul Durrenberg and Dimitra Doukas (2008) highlight the persistence of counterhegemonic producerist narratives in particular locales after this shift.

[33] Samuel Gompers, "The Eight-Hour Work Day," *The Federationist* 4, no. 3 (1897): 47.

Wages were no longer the badge of slavery they represented within pro-ducerist republicanism but – according to George Gunton, an eight-hour pamphleteer – a "continual part of social progress."[34] These wages were supposed to lift the American worker beyond the standards of the "Irish Tenant farmer or the Russian serf, and could be determined only accord-ing to a level of consumption appropriate to the "American Standard of Living," which went beyond food and clothing to include "taxes, school books, furniture, papers, doctors' bills, [religious] contributions," as well as "vacations, recreational opportunities, [and] home ownership."[35] This trend followed from the expansion of imperialism and the rise in Europe and the United States of the bourgeois housewife, a figure who contributed to creating a family culture of consumption and luxury needs, which would be subsequently mimicked by the white working class.[36]

Du Bois's framework throws into relief that the desire to achieve the American Standard of Living that fueled demands for enfranchisement by white workers depended on the exploitation of faraway peoples,[37] and that rather than a simple add-on, it was a constitutive aspect of the collective bond. It was constitutive because the great wealth amassed by states was entangled with both democratic impulses and despotic ones. It was "democratic" both because this wealth was being shared among newly enfranchised groups and because the high standard of liv-ing avowedly served to preserve republican institutions and safeguard liberty and virtue, and maintained the physical, mental, and moral foundations of the masses that grounded institutions.[38] In this account, virtue was mistakenly equated with well-being, an equation that Black people "had excellent reasons for doubting," as James Baldwin would

---

[34] "The Economic and Social Importance of the Eight-Hour Movement," in *Eight-Hour Series*, ed. AFL (Washington, DC: American Federation of Labor, 1889), 8, cited in Glickman, "Inventing the 'American Standard of Living': Gender, Race and Working-Class Identity, 1880–1925," 223.

[35] This according to a labor advocate, Glickman, "Inventing the 'American Standard of Living': Gender, Race and Working-Class Identity, 1880–1925," 226.

[36] Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*, 100–1, Fraser and Jaeggi, *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*, 88.

[37] W. E. B. Du Bois, *Peace Is Dangerous*, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312) Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries (New York: National Guardian, 1951), 4.

[38] Symmes M. Jelley and et al., *The Voice of Labor: Plain Talk by Men of Intellect on Labor's Rights, Wrongs, Remedies and Prospects* (Chicago: A. B. Gehman & Co., 1887), 163, cited by Glickman, "Inventing the 'American Standard of Living': Gender, Race and Working-Class Identity, 1880–1925," 226.

note decades later.[39] Those virtues, "preached but not practiced," were merely additional means to subject Black groups and, Du Bois added, imperial subjects abroad.[40] In other words, the extraction of wealth distributed democratically among white citizens required despotic rule over nonwhite subjects.

1.3 SELF-AND-OTHER-DETERMINATION

In the proposed model, popular sovereignty is a collective right not exhausted by self-government but dependent on rule over avowedly inferior peoples, whose self-determination is denied and who are subject to expropriative working conditions within and outside the polity.[41] Thus popular sovereignty and self-determination are co-implicated. While external self-determination obtains (as western polities refuse to be ruled by outsiders) and internally popular sovereignty prevails (given the collective claims for inclusion and self-rule entailed in the working class demands described earlier), the rule of this collective also exceeds these boundaries. This excess encroaches on the self-determination of others by declaring a right to impose an external collective will over peoples; namely, *self-and-other-determination*. In other words, popular sovereignty for western countries means the "ownership of the earth for ever and ever;"[42] that is, the appropriation of others' resources, subject only to the demands of other western states.[43] Importantly, this claim to mastery, according to which a polity asserts its right to rule others, depends

---

[39] *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage International, 1993 [1963]), 22–23.

[40] Ibid., 23.

[41] Throughout the chapter, I use "exploitation" as entailing access to labor markets and the ability to sell labor, and "expropriation of labor" as depending on force and – if at all – attenuated access to labor markets and citizenship, even though these are not internally homogeneous categories and there are not always clear-cut distinctions between the two. Dawson, "Hidden in Plain Sight: A Note on Legitimation Crises and the Racial Order," 151, Fraser, "Expropriation and Exploitation in Racialized Capitalism: A Reply to Michael Dawson," 166–68, Emily Katzenstein, personal communication (2019).

[42] W. E. B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (New York: Dover, 1999 [1920]), 18.

[43] This mutually respectful stance among western states is at the core of a second insight by Du Bois – that "Western solidarity" could be a particularly pernicious practice, given that it facilitated European powers' ability to pursue goals of territorial control and imperial domination (*WC*, 431). Notwithstanding the abundance of war among European powers, which Du Bois attributed to imperial conflict, European peace and cooperation – widely celebrated today in the subfield of international relations – was no obvious reason for celebration for the majority of the world population, which lived under their imperial yoke.

centrally on claims of racial superiority. The co-implication of despotic rule and racism is clear in *Black Reconstruction*:

The dark and vast sea of human labor in China and India, the South Seas and all Africa; in the West Indies and Central American and in the United States—that great majority of mankind, on whose industry and broken backs rest today the founding stones of modern industry—shares a common destiny; it is *despised and rejected by race and color*; paid a wage below the level of decent living; driven, beaten, poisoned and enslaved in all but name.[44]

These are the subjects who

spawn the world's *raw material and luxury*—cotton, wool, coffee, tea, cocoa, palm oil, fibers, spices, rubber, silks, lumber, copper, gold, diamonds, leather— how shall we end the list and where? All these are gathered up at prices lowest of the low, manufactured, transformed, and transported at fabulous gain; and the *resultant wealth is distributed and displayed and made the basis of world power* and universal dominion, and armed arrogance in London, Paris, Berlin and Rome, New York and Rio de Janeiro.[45]

The association between wealth, luxury, and power is not trivial. Rather, it implicates collective processes of decision making that dictate whom such power and wealth will benefit.[46] It is, according to Du Bois, "white labor" that insists on making "the majority of the world's laborers … the basis of a system of industry which ruined democracy."[47] Collective processes, moreover, rely on mutual identification and "shared" rule within western publics that perceive the world as bounty. Affect, in particular, plays a central role in organizing the circulation of feeling differentially across groups and thus stabilizing democratic despotism. I define affect as emotional attachments and self-conceptions melded with ways of seeing the colonized other in relation to the self – in ways that both justify and facilitate dominion.[48] Affective attachments have long been recognized as important in nation-building and democratic life, but Du Bois's conceptualization adds to standard notions an account of affect partitioned along racial lines, because it links citizens

---

[44] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860–1880*, 15, my emphasis.

[45] Ibid., 15–16, my emphasis.

[46] They also implicate nature in the form of raw materials extracted by racialized labor and imply a drastically different compensation for strenuous work performed close to nature and work that is performed away from it and alongside technology, as I argue in Chapter 4.

[47] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860–1880*, 30.

[48] Hagar Kotef's excellent book *The Colonizing Self* explores (wounded) attachments to the violence entailed in the acquisition of land by settler colonies, a project connecting to but distinct from the present focus on attachments to the material wealth made possible by imperial capitalism. Hagar Kotef, *The Colonizing Self: Or, Home and Homelessness in Israel/Palestine* (Duke University Press, 2020).

not only reciprocally to each other but also (nonreciprocally) to subjects in faraway lands in ways that are entwined with possessiveness enabled by imperial capitalism. Thus, collective affect contains a desire for material goods and, in the extreme, luxury – a gratification that is dependent on a racially-based lack of reciprocity and dehumanization of the colonized other, whose exploitation enables western consumption. These components make up Du Bois's account of the mechanics of democratic/global attachments within racial capitalism, in which love of humanity is precluded by nations' love of luxury that depends on the extreme exploitation of human beings who they regard as inhuman.[49]

Du Bois juxtaposes the love of humanity with the love of luxury and posits that the latter is incompatible with the former if desires for luxurious consumption and wealth are fulfilled by capitalist and imperial systems of expropriation supported by racial hatred. He restates this claim later by positing that the desire for the "American way of life" drives these political impulses. Such a way of life entails a comfortable home, enough suitable clothing and nourishment, and vacations and education for children, an ideal to which only about one-third of Americans have access and to which the rest aspire.[50] Desire for goods, luxurious or not, remains the motivating factor, alongside the "knowledge or fear" of those who enjoy these comforts that their standards will suffer if "social and industrial organization" were to change.[51] Politically, racial hatred allows for and rationalizes the coexistence of democratic feeling toward a smaller community and oppression internally and externally along racial/imperial lines. This hatred is not based on rational belief but is trained through world campaigns that comprise the slave trade and the attribution of every bestiality to Black people, because such feelings allow for profitable exploitation of these groups. This campaign

has unconsciously trained millions of honest, modern men into the belief that black folk are sub-human. This belief is not based on science, else it would be held as a postulate of the most tentative kind, ready at any time to be withdrawn in the face of facts; the belief is not based on history, for it is absolutely contradicted by Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, and Arabian experience; nor is the belief based on any careful survey of the social development of men of Negro blood to-day in Africa and America. It is simply *passionate, deep-seated heritage*, and as such can be *moved by neither argument nor fact*. Only faith in humanity will lead the world to rise above its present color prejudice.[52]

[49] Du Bois, "The African Roots of War," 712.
[50] Du Bois, *Peace Is Dangerous*, 4.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil*, 41, my emphasis.

Thus, deep-seated passions, enabled by the history of dehumanizing exploitation and inherited by subsequent generations, underlie color prejudice. Du Bois traces the education of affect that creates a tragically narrow community to novelists and poets and the "uncanny welter of romance," alongside "the half knowledge of scientists, the pseudoscience of statesmen," which put white workers fully at the mercy of their beliefs and prejudices.[53] This curious and childish propaganda dominates the public sphere, such that millions of men who are otherwise good, earnest, and even intelligent believe almost religiously that white people are a peculiar and chosen people, whose great accomplishment of civilization "must be protected from the rest of the world by cheating, stealing, lying, and murder."[54]

Thus, racism truncates reciprocity and humanitarian feeling to allow for "cheating, stealing, lying, and murder" with the goal of satisfying deep-seated desires for luxury, wealth, and dominion. But not any humanitarianism will do, for western humanitarians and peace activists were notably reluctant to discuss colonial violence, making their humanitarianism either platitudinous or outright deceitful and complicit in sustaining racist narratives.[55] Du Bois singled out the religious hypocrisy of these groups for particular criticism, offering the example of their condemnation of the "'Blood-thirsty' Mwanga of Uganda," who had killed an English bishop due to their fear that his arrival meant English domination. This, Du Bois added, was very much what his coming meant, as the world and the bishop knew well, yet "the world was 'horrified'!"[56]

---

[53] W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Negro Mind Reaches Out," in *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Touchstone, 1997 [1925]), 407. This account echoes Benedict Anderson's well-known account of "imagined communities," although Ètienne Balibar's work is a more apt comparison, given both the role he grants to "language and race" in the formation of a "fictive ethnicity" and how he ties this construction to the circulation of discourse, education, and written and recording texts. See Ètienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991), 96–98. Regarding global narratives, this is the period in which the dream of "perpetual peace" was embedded in a tradition of "white supremacist arguments about peace and global order" that embraced a "global racial peace," which promised the abolition of war following the imperial unification of white nations. See Duncan Bell, "Before the Democratic Peace: Racial Utopianism, Empire, and the Abolition of War," *European Journal of International Relations* 20, no. 3 (2014): 649.

[54] Du Bois, "The Negro Mind Reaches Out," 407.

[55] W. E. B. Du Bois, *Color and Democracy: Colonies and Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945), 110, 11, Du Bois, "The African Roots of War," 714.

[56] Du Bois, "The African Roots of War," 714.

These excerpts reveal Du Bois's keen understanding of the involvement of the west in producing the very barbaric Black subject it intends to dominate. It does so both through narratives of humanitarianism that cover up the aims of domination behind religious missions and through violent interventions:

The Congo Free State … differed only in degree and concentration from the tale of all Africa in this rape of a continent already furiously mangled by the slave trade. That sinister traffic, on which the British Empire and the American Republic were largely built, cost black Africa no less than 100,000,000 souls, the wreckage of its political and social life, and left the continent in precisely that state of helplessness which invites aggression and exploitation. "Color" became in the world's thought synonymous with inferiority, "Negro" lost its capitalization, and Africa was another name for bestiality and barbarism.[57]

The very violence that characterized the slave trade established the conditions that would then be cited as "barbaric" to justify the western project of civilization via colonialism. For Du Bois, capitalism is never far away from racism; the world, he argues, invests in "color prejudice" because the color line pays dividends.[58] A similar assessment is present in Fanon, who claims that racism is preceded, made possible, and legitimized by military and economic oppression. In other words, while racism is a disposition of the mind, it is not merely a "psychological flaw": it is the "emotional, affective and sometimes intellectual unfolding" of the inferiorization required by economic domination and appears in the potentialities and latencies of the psychoaffective life that underlie economic relations under racial capitalism.[59] Therefore, it is "normal" for countries that live and draw their substance from peoples who are different to "inferiorize" these peoples. Even in his largely psychological works, Fanon is always clear that a primarily economic process is behind inferiorization, which is then "epidermalized" and internalized psychologically.[60] These psychoaffective relations pervert forms of political attention that may otherwise accompany exchanges between individuals or groups, and they prevent the establishment of solidarity, as Ange-Marie Hancock notes regarding the politics of disgust. Reciprocity and solidarity are replaced by hostility, which

---

[57] Ibid., 708, W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Development of a People," *International Journal of Ethics* 14, no. 3 (1904): 305.

[58] Du Bois, "The African Roots of War," 708.

[59] Frantz Fanon, "Racism and Culture," *Presence Africaine: Cultural Journal of the Negro World* 8/10 (June–November 1956): 127–29.

[60] *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986 [1952]), 12–13.

mediates political (non)relations that are monologic and based on dispositional (rather than contextualized or situational) judgments about members of the targeted group.[61]

These affective attachments also contain a thwarted view of others' emancipation. This view explains how aggressive western imperialism came paradoxically to be accompanied by the fear of violent colonial rebellions and, in the interwar era, a deep anxiety about the west's military and political supremacy. This is because vast returns "seduce the conscience" so that even resistance to oppression provokes surprise and indignation in "the best people."[62] In other words, given the forms of attachment outlined earlier, emancipatory efforts are seen as revanchist threats that confirm the barbarism of colonial others, rather than as an intelligible claim to self-determination. Because of how jealousies and hatreds continuously fester along the color line, laborers feel the need to fight the Chinese to prevent them from taking our bread and butter, and "keep Negroes in their places," lest they take our jobs. In other words, the expectation is that, without white men throttling colored men; China, India, and Africa "will do to Europe what Europe has done and seeks to do to them."[63]

Differently put, the western right to wealth attained through the dominion-cum-expropriation-cum-"civilization" of racially inferior peoples makes subaltern emancipatory claims against the status quo either unintelligible (because they are inconsistent with racist accounts of colonial peoples) or threatening (because, when taken as equivalent to western claims, they suggest dominion and plunder). Not only is love of humanity out of the question when love of luxury – obtained through expropriation – prevails but luxury also contains a desire for excessive, superfluous wealth, a form of unending accumulation that cannot make sense of notions of mutuality, reciprocity, and distribution of resources across the color line.

In sum, racism and capitalism are closely entwined, and not just because racism degrades certain groups and makes them available for exploitation and expropriation, as the racial capitalism literature notes. Du Bois further grounds the entwinement between racism and capitalism in politics proper; that is, the result of political subjects' materialist attachments to comfort

---

[61] Ange-Marie Hancock, *The Politics of Disgust: The Public Identity of the Welfare Queen* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 11, 12, 17.

[62] Du Bois, "The Development of a People," 303.

[63] Du Bois, "The African Roots of War," 711–12.

and luxury is despotic rule accompanied by hostility and nonreciprocity toward those whose expropriation makes access to these goods possible.

Notably, these despotic dynamics are pictured neither as antithetical nor separable from processes of democratization in western countries in the early twentieth century. Instead, claims of popular sovereignty, which demanded political and socioeconomic enfranchisement of the white working class, were molded to partake *democratically* of the wealth and luxury made possible by empire, which despotically determined other peoples' fates. Du Bois theorizes the democratic bargain of the white working class of imperial countries and the racialized imagined community thus brought into existence to sustain these arrangements. The self-determination implied in this structure allowed the metropole to determine both its own affairs and set expropriative conditions abroad: self-and-other-determination. The "other" in this construction represents three conceptual features of this political relationship. In the first place, "other" conveys excess; a collective determines not only itself – as per ideal standard accounts of self-determination – but also external others. Second, "other" conveys that the excessive rule by this collective is based on racist affective attachments that *other* those ruled. Finally, the inclusion of "other" alongside the "self" of self-determination refers to the need for the toil of these others to produce the wealth that is held in common and distributed, making possible a *self*-determining community.

The notion of self-and-other-determination puts in question standard divisions of labor in political theory between democratic theory and global justice by theorizing the entanglements between popular sovereignty and racial capitalist accumulation enabled by empire. Moreover, the possessive and affective character of the attachments that sustain this entanglement suggests that the mere fact of decolonization cannot have singlehandedly transformed the entanglement between the national bond and global affective attachments of western polities, a point I examine next.

1.4 EXCESS AND THE QUESTION OF SELF-DETERMINATION IN POSTCOLONIAL TIMES

If, as argued earlier, western polities were constituted alongside the racial capitalist dynamics that organized that imperial world, the formal granting of sovereignty to postcolonial countries cannot, by the stroke of a pen, erase the affective inclinations of western citizens toward wealth

and luxury and their disregard of the means for obtaining them. If these attachments remain in place – which, in the absence of public acknowledgment, the transformation of western imagined communities, and changes in production and consumption patterns, they should – we can expect the political economic formations at the international level that link and relink former empires and formerly colonized countries to each other to transform, rather than overcome, past hierarchies. Fanon's work is particularly perceptive about moments of transition, noting that racism survives and thrives despite seemingly epochal transformations that partially liberate men and allow groups to circulate.[64] For Fanon, the survival of racism does require an adjustment to work along "perfected means of production" rather than brutal exploitation. For this reason racism must take on shades and change physiognomy, and work through camouflaged techniques for exploiting men, thus following the fate of the cultural whole that inspired it.[65] Just like racism, the colonial structures of extraction that racism legitimates are neither immutable, ahistorical structures nor abstract entities but mutate in complex ways, inventing "frontiers and intervals, zones of passage and … spaces of transit."[66] This mutations follow what Fanon calls "partial liberation," in which racism can no longer show itself undisguised in the metropole; instead, it must be denied frequently, because citizens are "haunted by a bad conscience." In this case, racism emerges, if at all, only through the passions, as in certain psychoses.[67] Fanon's account echoes Du Bois's interest in the survival of racial affect after the waning of particular institutional formations of domination such as colonialism, whereas domination finds its place in seemingly novel arrangements such as free enterprise, which is further sustained through "false ideals and misleading fears."[68]

   The continuity of affect despite legal changes is also central in Saidiya Hartman's analysis of slave emancipation in the United States and her skepticism about the ability of formal change to lead to political emancipation in the absence of genuine liberation in society.[69] The salience of formal emancipation, she notes, deviates attention from "the violence

---

[64] "Racism and Culture," 125–26.

[65] Ibid., 122, 25.

[66] Achille Mbembe, *Sortir De La Grande Nuit* (Paris: La Découverte, 2013), 170.

[67] Fanon, "Racism and Culture," 125.

[68] Du Bois, *Peace Is Dangerous*, 6.

[69] The reproduction of injustice is also the focus of Alasia Nuti's work *Injustice and the Reproduction of History: Structural Inequalities, Gender, and Redress* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), although it does not focus on the question of affect as being central in sustaining structural injustice.

and domination *perpetuated* in the name of slavery's *reversal*."[70] Hartman's strong and paradoxical claim that violence and domination are "*perpetuated* in the name of slavery's *reversal*" captures the complex interplay between past and present and law and practice. Absent the legal institution of slavery, subjection must rely on a new language – of freedom, property, labor, vagrancy, and crime, among others. The new language assumes formal freedom and thus acknowledges and depends on new terms consistent with legal emancipation, but it is nonetheless put into the service of a subjection that is continuous with the past. Thus, legal change transforms institutions without necessarily overcoming subjection. This is not to say that no change whatsoever emerges from legal reform, but to note that an attentive scrutiny of new institutions is warranted to detect if and how racism recirculates and justifies new forms of oppression.

These transformed institutions and forms of subjectivity are what I am interested in tracking in western societies as they leave behind colonial dependencies and reengage and produce the burdened free states, newly responsible yet encumbered, to use Hartman's language and her attention to the plasticity of race.[71] The ability of race to take on new meanings works alongside new forms of domination that continue western well-being's dependence on the extraction of other peoples' land and labor. We know that, for decolonized countries, "independence" means incorporation into a regime that re-creates dependency through the need to take debt in foreign currency while specializing in volatile agricultural exports, their dependence on foreign ownership of natural resources, and their limited space of maneuver given western countries' control of financial institutions and stewardship of their multinational corporations. In Fanonian terms, these are the new relationships that are reconstructed while maintaining racism's "morphological equation."[72]

But how do white western citizens make sense of and adapt to postcolonial forms of international oppression and eventually neoliberalism? Hartman's focus on societal conditions, attitudes, and sentiments provides guidance for answering this question.[73] The novel forms of affect that organize western peoples' attachment to wealth must fit with

[70] *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 13, my emphasis.
[71] Ibid., 116–17, 19.
[72] "Racism and Culture," 123.
[73] *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, 171.

postcolonial institutions and conditions of extraction and democratic decision making, which I explore by engaging the contemporary literature on global commodity chains. My claim in this section, however, is not that the transformations of affect in western countries embedded in a world economic order shifting toward neoliberalism are *equivalent* to the shifts outlined by Hartman or Fanon. Instead, my claim is that, conceptually, Hartman and Fanon's frameworks are helpful to understanding how the formal independence of nonwestern countries during the present neoliberal era *similarly requires* new economies of feeling that reproduce domination without straying from the new structures of governance.

I define neoliberalism simply as the theory of political economy that takes entrepreneurial freedoms operating in the context of strong property rights, free markets, and free trade to be the most conducive road to human well-being.[74] This theory has underpinned a political turn since the 1970s toward deregulation, privatization, and the withdrawal of the state from social provision.[75] A neoliberal state apparatus is one whose "fundamental mission [is] to facilitate conditions for profitable capital accumulation on the part of both domestic and foreign capital."[76] The safeguarding of capital, according to neoliberal globalists, needs to be accomplished through the embedding of states in an international institutional order insulated from democratic decision making to replace the organizing role of waning empires.[77]

While the system of rule imposed by neoliberalism seems looser and harder to assess than empire, political theorists interested in justice and responsibility have focused on the unjust relations of production, trade, and consumption structured through the global commodity chains that accompanied the turn to free trade.[78] But, rather than seeming singularly neoliberal and detached from coercive rule, commodity chains can be seen to work in tandem with self-and-other-determination, as updated

---

[74] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[75] Fraser and Jaeggi, *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*, 31–35, Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 3.

[76] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 7.

[77] Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 9, 12.

[78] Iris Marion Young, "Responsibility and Global Labor Justice," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 12, no. 4 (2004), Leif Wenar, *Blood Oil: Tyrants, Violence, and the Rules That Run the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), Benjamin L. McKean, *Disorienting Neoliberalism: Global Justice at the Outer Limit of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

structures that cater to privileged western consumers still rely on racialized schemes of dominion and expropriation (e.g., through off-shore export-processing zones and exceptional regimes of labor and taxation). In other words, the vicious colonial linkages described by Du Bois, which enable the right to imperial dominion and expropriation for the sake of wealth and luxury in the metropoles, reappear and find in commodity chains apt mechanisms to link together sites of expropriation enabled by western corporations' search for profit, western-backed free trade agreements, and willing elites in formerly colonial states.[79] Critical logistics scholars highlight these very affinities when they argue that global logistics is constituted by "violent and contested human relations," including "land grabs, military actions, and dispossessions" to make space for the exchange infrastructure.[80] Their claim is that, despite paradigmatic shifts, the architecture of contemporary trade "marks the continuation of centuries-old processes of imperial circulation and colonization."[81]

Yet the possessive popular sovereignty tied up with self-and-other-determination must mutate in parallel with the freeing of trade and investment flows and the new terms of exchange. Even though they remain racialized, the affects must be reoriented toward new languages and legal linkages to fit this new and complex architecture.[82] Whereas explicitly racial discourses of barbarism and civilization were associated with formal empire; notions of governance, human rights, and liberal or decent versus outlaw, burdened societies or failed states dominate the debate today.[83] Affective attachments follow suit; the shift toward

---

[79] This elites were the target of Fanon's criticism in another of his works, analyzed at length in Chapter 5, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004 [1961]), 98.

[80] Deborah Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 2–3.

[81] Charmaine Chua et al., "Turbulent Circulation: Building a Critical Engagement with Logistics," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 36, no. 4 (2018): 619.

[82] On this structure, see Anthony Anghie, "Time Present and Time Past: Globalization, International Financial Institutions, and the Third World," *New York University Journal of International Law & Politics* 32, no. 1 (1999), "The Evolution of International Law: Colonial and Postcolonial Realities," *Third World Quarterly* 27, no. 5 (2006), and Turkuler Isiksel, "The Rights of Man and the Rights of the Man-Made: Corporations and Human Rights," *Human Rights Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (2016).

[83] Antony Anghie, "Decolonizing the Concept of 'Good Governance'," in *Decolonizing International Relations*, ed. Branwen Gruffydd Jones (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), John Rawls, "The Law of Peoples," in *The Law of Peoples with 'the Idea of Public Reason Revisited'* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), Jack Donnelly, "Human Rights: A New Standard of Civilization?," *International Affairs* 74, no. 1 (1998). There is some overlap between this brief account of the transformation of narratives of

"responsibility, will, liberty, contract, and sentiment" that Hartman shows justified Black oppression post-emancipation[84] has a parallel in discourses of responsible government and its implied association with free markets that justify substantial societal transformations toward export-led economic development, "poverty-lifting" programs of minimally taxed off-shore production, and reduced state intervention, which supposedly weakens economic growth. These new terms are tied to new affective attachments that circulate dynamically through reconstructed psychoaffective and economic relations that modify racism and how it operates vis-à-vis domination. Racialized constructions of corrupt governments, civil conflict, black markets, and informality complete the affective picture of degraded subjects, one that warrants punitive stabilization and structural reform projects packed with conditionalities to steer economies toward global trade priorities, rather than their own well-being. Thus understood, technocratic interventions that supposedly *assist* developing countries reveal their affinities with the affective constructions of the nonwest as disordered; these interventions resubordinate and expropriate, ensuring continued access to cheap raw materials and mass-produced consumer and luxury goods.[85]

These affective orientations are at play in Leif Wenar's policy-engaged work *Blood Oil*, which recommends action by western citizens against unjust regimes in the Global South. There is much to praise in Wenar's account: he shows that global supply chains are "tainted" by their reliance on violent forms of extraction of raw materials, which are key to keeping the west's high-tech way of life going. Wenar declares that, ultimately, "We [in the west] all own stolen goods" because the "rip[ping] ... out from

---

development in history and Thomas McCarthy's *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 201–19, which tracks the evolution of developmentalism in postcolonial discourses of modernization, neoliberalism, and neoconservatism. However, my focus is on connecting these discourses to self-determination and its entanglement with the desire for wealth and consumption.

[84] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 119.

[85] An existing literature considers the orientations of western citizens necessary for overcoming relationships of injustice. However, the characterization of the political ground in which these desirable orientations can take root depends on understanding how *existing* orientations sustain – through disavowing narratives – unjust commodity chains, something that Benjamin McKean (2020) does do in his work, though with a focus on neoliberal, rather than racialized, imperial attachments. Iris Marion Young, "Asymmetrical Reciprocity: On Moral Respect, Wonder, and Enlarged Thought," *Constellations* 3, no. 3 (1997), Young, "Responsibility and Global Labor Justice", McKean, *Disorienting Neoliberalism: Global Justice at the Outer Limit of Freedom*.

the ground" of raw materials for supply chains has disastrous results for those nearby.[86] Moreover, he highlights the obfuscation built into commodity chains and insists we reenvision our daily lives and the products we use every day by considering where their component parts came from and how they were extracted.[87] At the center of Wenar's approach are also a powerful defense of popular resource sovereignty and a clear-eyed acknowledgment that "the choices of [western] governments … decide the rules that run the world" and allow for the authoritarian plundering of natural resources in violation of the former principle.[88]

Yet Wenar's critical claims about the global supply chain apply exclusively to those goods that depend on raw materials that are extracted by authoritarian leaders variously described as tyrannical, bloody, cruel, and murderous.[89] Once these leaders are replaced by democratic governments, Wenar argues, the western way of life could be sustained without violence. He explicitly acknowledges the anxieties about consumption that I posited as core to self-and-other determination but assures readers that the comfort of western citizens that depends on natural resources that enrich bloody authoritarian regimes will not suffer by the proposed reforms.[90]

Moreover – despite the acknowledgment of the western role sustaining the global legal structure that allows for trade in tainted products – Wenar repeatedly returns to authoritarian regimes as the initiating agents in the problem that occupies him. These authoritarian leaders, he argues, have greatly affected the west, whose crises, conflicts, and threats from abroad radiate from "resource-disordered states."[91] Western citizens, in contrast, are unambiguously on the "right side" and only need to be made aware of the disturbing violence entailed in the production of their latest gadgets to press their own governments to break ties with these strongmen, thereby righting the trajectory of global trade.[92]

---

[86] *Blood Oil: Tyrants, Violence, and the Rules That Run the World*, xx, xxii.

[87] Ibid., xxv.

[88] Ibid., 191, 32.

[89] Wenar, ibid., xiv, xxxix, xl, 23, chapter 3, borrows from the extensive literature on the resource curse to argue that the extraction of raw materials (including petroleum, metals, and gems) from the ground is the "defective" link in the chain, because it wrongly incentivizes leaders, who can sell these resources in the global market and can therefore ruthlessly accumulate power without needing to rely on popular support or taxation. See Timothy Mitchell's *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London: Verso, 2011) for a critique of this literature.

[90] *Blood Oil: Tyrants, Violence, and the Rules That Run the World*, xv.

[91] Ibid., 81.

[92] Ibid., 259, 80–81.

Thus, when I take issue with Wenar, it is not out of disagreement with his diagnosis of the violent character of the global supply chain or the principle of popular sovereignty of natural resources. Instead, I take issue with the assumptions that authoritarian strongmen are the main source of these problems, that we should only be concerned with these extreme cases of violence, and that western citizens are ready to intervene against this violence once they are made aware of their mistaken reliance on "blood oil."[93] These assumptions reveal two broader problems. First, Wenar's narrative reaffirms the racialized figures of authoritarian leaders as violent others as the core problem behind tainted goods, and western citizens as the benevolent agents righting these wrongs, rather than scrutinizing the capitalist extraction of raw materials more generally as a source of violence and injustice that underlies western well-being.[94] By focusing on extreme violence and obvious benevolence, Wenar falls into the narrative of "savages-victims-saviors" that scholars find entwined with human rights discourse and that often justifies economic and military intervention.[95] Starting with the blood-soaked hands on the book's cover, Wenar aims to spur action through a shared feeling of horror, which Sinja Graf associates with a minimal and hegemonic form of inclusion because it incorporates certain nonwestern countries only as law breakers or criminals against humanity.[96] Du Bois's critique of humanitarian discourses noted earlier also applies here, as does his reaction to the equalization of Africa with "bestiality and barbarism," which he saw as contributing to the racialization that facilitated domination.

Although Wenar's support for the popular ownership of natural resources is the opposite of the domination or intervention that Du Bois condemned, the framing of Wenar's critique works against this recognition

---

[93] Ibid., 259.

[94] This positioning of western citizens is a broader tendency in the global justice literature. See Inés Valdez, "Association, Reciprocity, and Emancipation: A Transnational Account of the Politics of Global Justice," in *Empire, Race, and Global Justice*, ed. Duncan Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[95] Makau Mutua, "Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights," *Harvard International Law Journal* 42, no. 1 (2001): 202, Nicola Perugini and Neve Gordon, *The Human Right to Dominate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 13. See also Cameron Macaskill, "Beyond Conflict and Cooperation: Systemic Labor Violence in Natural Resource Extraction," manuscript on file with author (2023), on the blood diamonds campaign, which encourages consumers to shun "conflict diamonds," while disavowing the routine violence of exploitive mining work in nonconflict countries.

[96] *The Humanity of Universal Crime: Inclusion, Inequality, and Intervention in International Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

and, importantly, relativizes western responsibility for these ills. This relates to the second problem in Wenar's framing: the presumption that acceptance of popular sovereignty in western polities directly translates into acceptance of popular sovereignty for others on whose work their well-being depends.[97] Wenar specifically claims that the "[f]ight for people's rights has been fought and mostly won," making the principle of popular sovereignty widely accepted and western societies' "belief in their own innate racial superiority" a thing of the past.[98] In this picture, the only surprise for western citizens is "how much [they] contribute to the violation of people's rights,"[99] because Wenar assumes that as soon as western citizens notice this, they will not "doubt which side is right."[100] This is the very point that Du Bois argues against, noting that racialized forms of affect allow western citizens to both govern themselves democratically and accept the domination of others whose exploitation enables their wealth. The racialized affect associated with humanitarianism is one example of this trend, notably the focus on child soldiers (which figure prominently in Wenar's account), which entails the mistrust of the moral and political capacity of adults in those countries, weakening the right to self-determination and leading to a more unequal international system.[101] Thus the affective attachments that Wenar elicits by focusing on bloody conflict (outraged disgust and humanitarian pity toward violent statesmen and their victims, respectively) works at cross-purposes with his commitment to recognizing the popular sovereignty of natural resources. Such forms of affect also fit with technocratic prescriptions of responsible government and neoliberal measures of labor, trade, and capital liberalization, taken to be the opposites of disordered, corrupt, and authoritarian regimes. Again, Wenar advocates popular sovereignty rather than neoliberal reforms, but his singling out of the cruelty of resource-owning nonwestern authoritarian leaders as the core defect of commodity chains and the assumption that western access to goods will be undisrupted if extreme

---

[97] *Blood Oil: Tyrants, Violence, and the Rules That Run the World*, 259.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Vanessa Pupavac, "Misanthropy without Borders: The International Children's Rights Regime," *Disasters* 25, no. 2 (2001). Further supporting the distinctiveness of humanitarianism, Sabrina Pagano and Yuen Huo, "The Role of Moral Emotions in Predicting Support for Political Actions in Post-War Iraq," *Political Psychology* 28, no. 2 (2007), show that, although feelings of empathy enhance support for humanitarian aid to Iraq, feelings of guilt more clearly correlate with support for "restoring damage created by the U.S. military," thus illuminating the detachment between humanitarianism and responsibility.

instances of violence at the source of commodity chains are addressed have a certain affinity with property rights' discourses of neoliberalism. This stance appears to suggest that violent others need to learn to play by market rules and puts western peoples at ease with their lives of abundance, which are viable with the "correct" functioning of markets.

Rather than soothing western citizens' anxiety about material possessions by assuring them that genuine popular sovereignty can coexist with capitalist extraction, the account I propose exposes the problematic (because excessive) modes of self-determination in the west that underlie global injustice. It requires the self-determination scholarship to engage critically with the problem of self-and-other-determination and the affective attachments that jointly enable the political, economic, and racial rearticulations of postcolonial regimes of extraction.

1.5 SELF-DETERMINATION: FROM LACK TO EXCESS, FROM SETTLER TO DETERRITORIALIZED DOMINATION

A dynamic critical literature has addressed the question of self-determination. Joseph Massad's work, for example, tracks the trajectory of self-determination from its progressive origins toward a right of conquest in the post–World War II era.[102] In this period, a right that had been narrowly applicable to European nations was briefly expanded and acquired emancipatory potential during Bandung, only to be reclaimed by settler states. The ultimate co-optation of self-determination by world powers was epitomized by Woodrow Wilson's adoption of the term in response to Russian support of a progressive and anticolonial instantiation of this concept.[103] The co-optation of self-determination by empires transformed it into a tool for "securing and maintaining colonial claims and gains, especially in settler-colonies," where this principle was granted to the colonists rather than the colonized.[104] Given Massad's interest in settler colonies, he understandably focuses on the 1970s restriction of the right to self-determination to the government of peoples who represent "the whole peoples of the territory," a fatal clause for peoples who are dispossessed of their land.[105] Yet Massad understands self-determination

---

[102] Joseph Massad, "Against Self-Determination," *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 9, no. 2 (2018).

[103] Ibid., 168.

[104] Ibid., 169.

[105] Ibid., 173–74, 85. See also Catherine Lu, "Decolonizing Borders, Self-Determination, and Global Justice," in *Empire, Race, and Global Justice*, ed. Duncan Bell (Cambridge:

as contained in the legal documents and practices that sanctioned this principle as a tool to legitimize settler colonialism. In contrast, I am interested in conceptualizing how western peoples – not just settler ones – effectively determine other countries' fates by appropriating resources from abroad – not just from the populations living within their territory whose land they occupy – and treating these resources as part of the commonwealth they collectively adjudicate among themselves.

Iris Marion Young's critique of self-determination understood as noninterference is also partly motivated by Indigenous peoples' claims.[106] She criticizes the understanding of self-determination as the ability of a political unit to claim "final authority over the regulation of all activities within a territory" because it does not acknowledge the interdependence of peoples, their common embeddedness in relations and institutions, and the possibility of domination.[107] Young's relational nondomination account implies that powerful states' actions over others give the latter "a legitimate right to make claims" on the former when these actions are harmful.[108] She rightly diagnoses the problem that motivates this chapter: that powerful states can interfere arbitrarily with and dominate formally self-governing peoples while being absolved of responsibility to "support these countries."[109] But she quickly refocuses attention on the dominated peoples, who have no public forum or authority to "press claims of such wrongful domination against a nation-state" and who therefore cannot be said to be self-determining.[110] In response to this problem, Young proposes to regulate international relations to create such forums and prevent domination.[111]

Adom Getachew further develops a nondominating relational account of self-determination by drawing on the writings of postcolonial statesmen and thinkers.[112] This tradition recast sovereign equality as world making, as a global anticolonial project that would "undo the hierarchies that facilitated domination." The world that these thinkers sought to transform entailed the unequal integration of newly independent

---

Cambridge University Press, 2019), who notes that the recognition of self-determining settler states consolidates the dispossession of indigenous peoples.

[106] "Two Concepts of Self-Determination," in *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Minority Rights*, ed. Stephen May, Tariq Modood, and Judith Squires (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 181, 85–89.

[107] Ibid., 85–89.

[108] Ibid., 188.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Ibid., 189.

[111] Ibid., 188–89.

[112] Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*, 2.

countries – that is, membership with onerous obligations and limited rights – and racial hierarchy.[113] In contrast, anticolonial statesmen sought to bring into being a radically transformed world order with enhanced bargaining power for postcolonial states, democratized decision making, and international wealth redistribution.[114]

Thus, whereas Massad is concerned with uses of self-determination that enable domination in settler–native situations, Young and Getachew focus on dominated countries embedded in an unequal international system and propose global democratization measures to enable the self-determination of these groups. Thus their critique only reaches the international system, and leaves unexamined the inner workings of dominating states and how they depend on and infuse practices of self-rule through which democratic collectives appropriate outside wealth. This is the contribution of the present chapter: to spell out the excessive self-determination of western countries and its entanglement with western peoples themselves, whose collective projects of self-government are tied to this excess by affective attachments to possessions, whose appropriation is facilitated by a racial capitalist global order enabled by empire. These affective attachments and the popular politics they infuse, moreover, do not end with formal decolonization but transform themselves while continuing to rely on racialized sentiment, presently operating within the neoliberal world order.

This story holds even if the gains of global neoliberalism are no longer appropriated as equally within the west as during the golden age of welfare capitalism. This is because an aspirational, popularly felt possessiveness remains and shapes the politics of resistance to neoliberalism, channeling it toward right-wing populism. The empirical literature that examines support for Trump, for example, notes that rather than actual hardship, or in addition to it, it was the perception by high-status groups that their standing was threatened by domestic racial others and potential global challenges to US power that motivated these voters.[115] The proposed genealogy of global attachments illuminates why "the global" in the form of migration, refugee flows, trade, and regional integration emerged as central sites of affective engagement for right-wing populist movements. These resentful reactions target racialized others who are seen as rightly deployed for low-cost production and as victims of failed governments, but who are

---

[113] Ibid., 10, 18.
[114] Ibid., 12, 74.
[115] Diana C. Mutz, "Status Threat, Not Economic Hardship, Explains the 2016 Presidential Vote," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2018): 2–3.

not supposed to trespass western borders or demand better conditions of exchange. When migrating or exiting the role of victims or exploited workers, these actors are seen as unduly taking what is not theirs. Thus, the threat, for many western citizens, is that of equality, which clashes with the hierarchical orderings associated with self-and-other-determination.

In other words, even if western democracy suffers under neoliberalism, the possessive popular sovereignty and dynamics of self-and-other-determination reappear in the *resistance* to neoliberalism. Such collective forms of identification and the desire to continue appropriating resources extracted from abroad constitute a *popular* imaginary worth analyzing, whether they appear under the guise of left-protectionist nationalism or right-wing antiglobalism. Just as an anticapitalist imaginary at the turn of the twentieth century demanded the distribution among democratic white publics of violently obtained wealth, a reaction to neoliberalism's drastic effects on western peoples may elicit an equally narrow democratic imaginary. This imaginary demands the continued exemption of the west from the ravages of neoliberalism (variously personified by the European Union, Chinese manufacturing prowess, or free trade agreements), rather than the transformation of the system away from racism and capitalism. In so doing, this imaginary reveals an indebtedness to the world of imperial self-and-other-determination that I describe and remains tethered to possessive attachments and extraction abroad.

The proposed theorization is necessary to scrutinize contemporary writings and political responses to neoliberalism and the right-wing reaction to it. A salient strategy is to focus on the how neoliberalism economizes all aspects of existence and damages basic elements of democracy, including practices of rule and democratic imaginaries.[116] Scholars have also shown that global neoliberal thought and institutions strive to keep markets "safe from mass demands for social justice and redistributive equality."[117] These critiques work against an assumed past in which the demos was able to rule over the economic realm, but disregard the fact that before these *peoples* were negatively affected by neoliberalism, they claimed to rule themselves partly based on resources appropriated from others. As this chapter reconstructs, these *lived* practices of rule were important in founding moments and did not so much contest capitalist logics of extraction as racialized them, making sure that a white sub-group could access goods and wealth well beyond their territory by

---

[116] Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, 17.
[117] Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism*, 14, 16.

dominating racial others. Critiques of neoliberalism's de-democratizing effects misrecognize this past and thus mourn a form of popular politics that both lacked a radical critique of capitalism and related despotically to racial others. In so doing, they also cannot capture why racialized possessive attachments still hold popular appeal as part of discourses that *oppose* neoliberal forms of global extraction. The proposed framework instead shines a critical light on the genesis of the racialized welfare capitalist states that were dismantled by Thatcher and Reagan, to inform a future-oriented popular politics that does not relate despotically to the global and sheds its entanglements with racial capitalism, which the third part of *Democracy and Empire* develops.

In other words, western publics oriented toward self-and-other-determination are ill prepared to judge their relation to the global without devolving into resentment at the loss of their right to dominion and exploitation. Their reactions target racialized others in the Global South or within the west and assert, rather than contest, the economic structures and unequal wealth distribution that were central to their past prosperity. The proposed framework shows that these orientations are not exceptional or foreign to democracy; indeed, they were internal to the expansion of popular sovereignty in western imperial countries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Within this frame, western citizens cannot see the relative decline in their living standards – when applicable – as part and parcel of the new neoliberal shape of capitalism that must be opposed or discover commonalities between their grievances and the historical and present vulnerability of the Global South, and demand instead the reinstatement of their right to rule others and appropriate their resources. By reconnecting western *polities* (rather than states or the international system) to the institutionalization and maintenance of domination, two important theoretical implications follow. First, it becomes clear that we cannot unreflectively assume that in the absence of a radical transformation in their consciousness and practices of consumption, western citizens or polities themselves will lead the struggle for global justice, as does much of the liberal literature.[118] Second, the thoroughly transnational dimensions of contemporary right-wing populism emerge clearly, highlighting that the hostile global attachments that characterize this movement

---

[118] Valdez, "Association, Reciprocity, and Emancipation: A Transnational Account of the Politics of Global Justice", Valdez, *Transnational Cosmopolitanism: Kant, Du Bois, and Justice as a Political Craft*, Margaret Kohn, "Globalizing Global Justice" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

contain an entitlement to global wealth obtained via racial domination, wealth that neoliberalism is concentrating in fewer and fewer hands.

In this framework, the vulgar racism that has accompanied the growth of right-wing populism must be taken seriously, i.e., in Fanon's words: "it is racists who are right."[119] Overt racism clues us into important *political* dynamics of racial capitalism that need theorizing and contesting. In other words, the outward expressions of racism are more telling about the current crisis than the constitutional principles invoked against these outbursts or the "facts" adduced to counter lies. If these outbursts used to be only episodic, it is because the solidity of the overall system of domination made daily assertions of superiority superfluous, and more subtle and "cultivated" forms of racism could prevail.[120]

Yet the increased regularity of outbursts at the time of writing indicates that the quid pro quo through which "the state … maintained [white groups'] privilege in implicit return for their support of capitalism" is in crisis.[121] This is because of both economic deterioration and challenges to white and male privilege by Black, Indigenous, Latinx, women's, immigrant, and anti-neoliberal movements around the world.[122] Thus understood, the reactive targeting of racial others (both foreign and domestic) reveals that energies are still directed to repairing self-and-other-determination, rather than contesting the dehumanization and exploitation of racial capitalism.

In addition to eschewing nostalgia toward historical moments of enfranchisement, critiques of neoliberalism must resist demands of isolationism, protectionism, or closed borders as motivated by normatively defensible white grievances, as commentators in the United States and leftist leaders in Europe have done.[123] Chapter 2 expands on this question, by exploring how racist systems of immigration control were also foundational to the imperial mode popular sovereignty theorized here, because they served to organize the distribution of resources in ways that catered to white settler priorities while governing racialized immigration flows to ensure access to controllable labor.

---

[119] Fanon, "Racism and Culture," 128.
[120] Ibid., 126.
[121] Dawson, "Hidden in Plain Sight: A Note on Legitimation Crises and the Racial Order," 154.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Michael Sandel, "Progressive Parties Have to Address the People's Anger," *The Guardian*, December 31, 2016, David Adler, "Meet Europe's Left Nationalists," *The Nation*, January 10, 2019.