

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


Inés Valdez

This article develops W. E. B. Du Bois's notion of democratic despotism to illustrate the entanglement of popular sovereignty and empire through an excessive form of western self-determination and theorizes how features of this formation remain today. Democratic despotism implies that, in western democracies at the turn of the twentieth century, popular sovereignty was an impulse to partake of the wealth and resources obtained by empire. Western democracies issued a claim to determine themselves (democratically) and others (despotically), in what I call "self-and-other-determination." I frame the question of imperial democracy within the literature on empire and racial capitalism and the writings of Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, and Saidiya Hartman to conceptualize how racial affective attachments allow citizens past and present to restrict democratic concern to a limited community, whose wealth relies on the imperial exploitation of racialized others. I discuss the absence of these questions in the literature on self-determination and reflect on the implications of my framework for the contemporary rise of right-wing populism.

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 despot," both vis-à-vis politicians who aimed to rule over it and with respect to other polities (Hoekstra 2016, 17, 25–27, 38–42). Nineteenth-century liberalism also grappled with these relationships; Alexis de Tocqueville, for example, argued that imperial projects could supply the virtue and glory that would ignite republican public-spiritedness (Pitts 2005, 193–94). 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 (249). The relevance of this problem did not escape W. E. B. Du Bois, who in the early twentieth century conceptualized western polities as "democratic despotisms." I build on Du Bois to conceptualize popular sovereignty, self-determination, and their relationship in the context of imperial and postcolonial racial capitalism and draw implications for critical theories of self-determination and the rise of right-wing populism in the west at the time of this writing. At the turn of the twentieth century, mass movements of labor enfranchisement in the west took place in the context of empire, infusing popular sovereignty with affective attachments that supported and required the capitalist expropriation of the land and labor of imperial possessions, as well as the determination of their fate. Therefore, it is analytically more accurate to understand the iteration of western popular sovereignty described here as attached to *self-and-other-determination*, given its emergence in the context of imperial and racialized processes of enfranchisement.¹

In this article I first locate my contribution in the context of 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. I next 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. Finally, I discuss implications for the literature on self-determination and the contemporary rise of right-wing populism.

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Popular Sovereignty, Self-Determination, and Empire

Critical engagements with popular sovereignty in the literature on empire have predominantly—and importantly—attended to projects in the postcolonial world.² These scholars note that the Westphalian frame and its attendant view of decolonization as the incorporation of newly independent states to 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 (Goswami 2012, 1461–62; Mantena 2016, 300–1; Valdez 2019b). It also leaves out the radical break in the thought of postcolonial statesmen with the Eurocentric society of states (Getachew 2019, 12). These accounts confirm that a Westphalian understanding of sovereignty disregards how, in an unjust world, background conditions are lacking for genuine self-determination (Lu 2018, 234).

Yet these accounts of subaltern popular sovereignty and self-determination can be expanded to consider how the hierarchies and injustices they identify are grounded in the *democratic* western polities that sustained the imperial order and remain dominant today. In other words, a notion of imperial popular sovereignty is needed that encompasses both a will to self-government and an entitlement to govern others abroad. It is this facet of popular sovereignty and self-determination that makes the claim of an expansion of the society of states in equal terms truly absurd. To the extent that western self-determination involved a claim both to govern themselves and dominate others, its very expansion was an inconsistent project (i.e., a world of equally outwardly dominating states is surely impossible).³ The relative equality of western states among each other coexisted with democratic despotism (i.e., domination of non-European states that was *popularly* embraced). In the absence of a radical critique and reconsideration of the political ties that brought western citizens together behind this despotic project, decolonization cannot mean the end of domination, because the western polities that sustain and embrace the hierarchy of the international system remain imperial.

The absence of discussion of democratic despotism in the literature on British liberalism and empire may be due to the fact that—in spite of its vocal defense of liberty—early modern England was a profoundly exclusionary society with deep fault lines between genders and propertied and unpropertied classes (Greene 2010, 52). Liberals like Mill conceived of imperial rule as an explicitly elite project and warned against letting the English people partake of the government of foreign populations, advocating instead that England’s “best men” take up the task (Mill 1998, 455–56). When Mill considered the connections between empire and enfranchisement, moreover, his goal was to assess the relative ability of the disenfranchised

classes to partake of civilized rule (Pitts 2005, 249); he was not interested in these classes’ attachments to empire. Tocqueville concerned himself more directly with how French colonial expansion would elevate virtue and turn citizens to public life as a result of the attainment of glory (192–93) but seemed unconcerned otherwise.

The literature on the American empire engages more thoroughly with the entwined character of the US polity, on the one hand, and settler colonialism and external imperial aggression, on the other hand. The 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 how democracy and citizenship were shaped and dependent on imperial projects, cast the people as an agent of settler colonialism (Dahl 2018, 9–11), and required expanding slavery and expropriating indigenous groups (Rana 2010, 22). 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 (Bogues 2010, 29). The engagement of these scholars with texts, legal documents, and policy, however, falls short of exploring the popular bases of imperial attachments, which a recent literature has newly highlighted. These contributions note that lynching as a form of spectacular group violence affirmed the whiteness of the sovereign people and the subordination of African Americans (Gorup 2020). They also explore how transnational solidarity and the adoption of the imperial discourse of racial superiority by the white working class in the British settler colonies served to constitute the people while excluding nonwhites already in these territories (Valdez 2021a). My Duboisian account of democratic despotism and self-and-other-determination builds on these works and the broader political theory of empire but also complements them in important ways.

First, following Du Bois’s aim, I highlight that an excessive form of self-determination is conceptually applicable to democratic polities within empires in the western world *in general*.⁴ Second, instead of highlighting freedom or democracy, I focus on how practices of popular sovereignty depended and depend on an excessive form of self-determination and draw implications for the contemporary theorizing of these concepts. Finally, I single out the role of affective attachments in facilitating popular working-class narratives’ embrace of imperial exploitation and their demands for the distribution of this wealth among themselves. In so doing, these groups 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, my project 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 (Dawson 2016, 149; Fraser 2016, 171–72). I specify how these dynamics operated vis-à-vis external others and tainted popular sovereignty by turning white 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. Even if beliefs in the racial superiority and world domination of “Anglo-Saxons” were globally prominent at the turn of the century (Pagden 2007, 136), racial capitalism became differently articulated with western nationalisms. That is, while racial identifications were “portable,” meaning that they identified populations and created solidarity regardless of locations (Chang 2009; Hanchard 2018, 6–7), they also took shape in ways that responded to particular political conjunctures. This article explores how western polities’ claims of popular sovereignty and the way they related to the outside through claims of self-determination absorbed these transnational logics and embedded them in domestic political and economic regimes. In other words, the racial ideas contained in the “ideological cement” of empire (Hobsbawm 1987, 70), became contingently entwined with ideas of self-governance and self-determination and articulated with capitalism.

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.”⁵ This concept describes how the color line and the particular affective attachments that “fester” alongside it were constitutive of the development and consolidation of western democracies during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Instead of 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 within imperial capitalism. This type of regime shows a despotic face toward colonial dominions and depends on collective attachments to the fruits of imperial rule.

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.⁶ 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 grimmer 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. (ARW 708–9)

Yet, this “tide of democracy,” is not as irresistible as it seems. What are we to make of the remaining realms of despotism in the west’s imperial possessions or the race hatred and racial brutality in the United States? Far from 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” (ARW 709; emphasis added; see also BRA, 634).

Du Bois is interested in how 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’” (Myers 2019, 12).⁷ Du Bois’s interest in white dominion, a form of thinking and acting in accordance “with the conviction that racialized others are their property” (13–16), is not new. In an 1890 essay on Jefferson Davis 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” (JDRC 14).⁸ What interests me, however, is how in this iteration Du Bois takes aim at central concepts of political theory and argues for their attunement to the *practice* of western imperial democracies. In other words, he 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” (ARW 709; emphasis added; see also JDRC 14).

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 US materialism 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 (*CNA* 325). According to Du Bois, American goals are “tawdry and flamboyant,” embodied in the acquisition of “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” (325).⁹ 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 (Leach 1994, 27). 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 like department stores, theaters, restaurants, dance halls, and amusement parks, keeping pace with urbanization, commercialization, and secularization (27–28). Pursuing material goods was the means to all that was “good” and to “personal salvation,” even when, in the context of concentrated wealth, it was often reduced to mere desire (27–28, 35). 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 (1909, 22–23).

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, labor narratives now highlighted that wage work was not essentially problematic if it allowed for consumption that guaranteed a high standard of living.¹⁰ Rather than 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 (1897, 47), “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.”

Wages were no longer the badge of slavery they represented within producerist republicanism but rather,

according to George Gunton (1889, 8), an eight-hour pamphleteer, a “continual part of social progress.” The required wage level could only be determined according 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” (Glickman 1993, 226). This trend followed from the rise in Europe and the United States of the bourgeois housewife, who operated in the context of the expansion of colonialism and imperialism and who contributed to creating a family culture of consumption and luxury needs, which would be subsequently mimicked by the white working class (Fraser and Jaeggi 2018, 88; Mies 1998, 100–1).

Du Bois’s framework throws into relief that the desires to achieve the American Standard of Living that fueled demands for enfranchisement by white workers depended on the exploitation of faraway lands (*PD*, 4). Rather than a simple add-on, this feature 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 partially shared with newly enfranchised groups and because labor discourse argued that the high standard of living served to preserve republican institutions and safeguard liberty and virtue. These standards avowedly determined the physical, mental, and moral foundations of the masses that grounded institutions (Jelley and et al. 1887, 163; cited by Glickman 1993, 226). In this account, virtue was mistakenly equated with well-being, an equation that Black people “had excellent reasons for doubting,” as James Baldwin ([1963] 1993, 22–23) would note decades later. Those virtues, “preached but not practiced” (23), were merely additional means to subject Black groups and, Du Bois added, imperial subjects abroad. In other words, the extraction of wealth distributed democratically among white citizens required despotic forms of rule.

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 whose labor is subject to expropriative working conditions within and outside the polity.¹¹ 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 nonwestern peoples; namely, *self-and-other-determination*. In other words, popular sovereignty for western countries means the “ownership of the earth for ever and ever” (*DW*, 18); that is, the appropriation of others’ resources, subject only to the demands of other western states.¹² Importantly, this claim to mastery, according to which a polity asserts its right to rule others, depends 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. [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. (*BRA* 15–16; emphasis added)

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.¹³ 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” (*BRA* 30). 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. 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: it not only links citizens reciprocally to each other but also (nonreciprocally) to subjects in faraway lands in ways that are entwined with capitalism. Moreover, collective affect is tied to a desire for enjoyment of well-being and, in the extreme, luxurious goods, 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: “Hitherto the peace

movement has confined itself chiefly to figures about the cost of war and platitudes on humanity.... How can love of humanity appeal as a motive to nations whose love of luxury is built on the inhuman exploitation of human beings and who, especially in recent years, have been taught to regard these human beings as inhuman?” (*ARW*, 712).

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 it is a desire for the “American way of life” that drives these political impulses, and not for luxury or conspicuous consumption. 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 (*PD*, 4). Desire for goods, however, 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 (4). 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, resulting in profit. This process

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.” (*DW* 41; emphasis added).

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 and the creation of 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 (*NMRO*, 407).¹⁴ This curious and childish propaganda dominates the public sphere, such that “good, earnest, even intelligent men have come by millions to believe almost religiously that white folk are a peculiar and

chosen people whose one great accomplishment is civilization [which] must be protected from the rest of the world by cheating, stealing, lying, and murder” (407).

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. Du Bois addressed western humanitarians and peace activists critically for their reluctance to discuss colonial violence (*CD*, 110, 111). His complaint was that their humanitarianism was either platitudinous or outright deceitful and complicit in the images that sustained racist narratives: “Religious hypocrisy must stop. ‘Blood-thirsty’ Mwangi of Uganda killed an English bishop because he feared that his coming meant English domination. It did mean English domination, and the world and the bishop knew it, and yet the world was ‘horrificed!’” (*ARW*, 714).

The following passage from “The African Roots of War” reveals 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 covering up the aims of domination behind religious missions and through their 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. (*ARW*, 708; see also *DP*, 305).

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 (*ARW*, 708). 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, racism is a disposition of the mind but not merely a “psychological flaw” (1956, 127): it is the “emotional, affective and sometimes intellectual unfolding” of the inferiorization required by economic domination (128–29). Racism appears in the potentialities and latencies of the psychoaffective life that underlie economic relations under racial capitalism (129). 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 (1986 [1952], 12–13) is always clear that a primarily economic process is behind inferiorization, which is then “epidermalized” and

internalized psychologically.¹⁵ 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 (2004) notes regarding the politics of disgust. Reciprocity and solidarity are replaced by hostility, which mediates political (non)relations that are monologic and based on dispositional (rather than contextualized or situational) judgments about members of the targeted group (Hancock 2004, 2, 7, 11).

The affective attachments described so far 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 can “seduce the conscience,” so that even resistance to oppression can provoke surprise and indignation in “the best people” (*DP*, 303). 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: “The resultant jealousies and bitter hatreds tend continually to fester along the color line. We must fight the Chinese, the laborer argues, or the Chinese will take our bread and butter. We must keep Negroes in their places, or Negroes will take our jobs... if white men do not throttle colored men, then China, India, and Africa will do to Europe what Europe has done and seeks to do to them” (*ARW*, 711–12).

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 the 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. The Duboisian picture shows that the entanglement between racism and capitalism reappears in materialist attachments to comfort, luxury, or both that are accompanied by hostility and nonreciprocity toward those whose expropriation makes them possible.

Moreover, these dynamics were neither antithetical nor separable from processes of democratization in western countries in the early twentieth century. Instead, claims of

popular sovereignty, which demanded political and socio-economic enfranchisement of the white working class, were molded to partake *democratically* of the wealth and luxury made possible by empire, a form of government that involves the despotic determination of 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 engage in the *othering* of 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 then held in common and distributed by a *self*-determining collective.

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 capitalism and 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.

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 and campaigns of decolonization of western imagined communities, 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 (1956, 125–26) 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. The survival of racism does require an adjustment, so that it begins working along "perfected means of production"

rather than brutal exploitation; it requires camouflaged techniques for exploiting men, which must take on shades and change its physiognomy, without abandoning the fate of the cultural whole that inspired it (122, 5). Just like racism, colonialism is neither an immutable, ahistorical structure nor an abstract entity but a complex and mutating process that invents "frontiers and intervals, zones of passage and interstitial spaces or spaces of transit" (Mbembe 2013, 170). This is particularly the case with partial liberation, in which racism is no longer shown undisguised in the metropole; instead, denials occur frequently and are "haunted by a bad conscience" so that racism emerges, if at all, only through the passions, as in certain psychoses (Fanon 1956, 125). Fanon's account echoes Du Bois's interest in the survival of racial affect after the waning of institutional formations of domination like colonialism, whereas domination finds its place in seemingly novel arrangements such as free enterprise, which is further sustained through "false ideals and misleading fears" (PD, 6).

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.¹⁶ The salience of formal emancipation, she notes, deviates attention from "the violence and domination *perpetuated* in the name of slavery's *reversal*" (1997, 13; emphasis added). 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 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 whether 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 (1997, 116–17). This reengagement depends on the plasticity of race and its ability to take on new meanings (119) that work alongside new forms of domination that continue western well-being's dependence on the extraction of other peoples' resources. 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 (1963, 123), these are the new relationships that are reconstructed while maintaining racism's "morphological equation."

But how do white western citizens make sense of and adapt to postcolonial forms of international oppression and eventually neoliberalism? Hartman's (1997, 171) focus on societal conditions, attitudes, and sentiments provides guidance in answering this question. The novel forms of affect that organize western peoples' attachment to wealth must fit with 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, I argue that, conceptually, Hartman and Fanon's frameworks are helpful to understand how the formal independence of non-western countries during the present neoliberal era *similarly requires* new economies of feeling that reproduce domination without straying from the new structures of governance.

Political theorists interested in justice and responsibility have focused on the unjust relations of production, trade, and consumption structured through the global commodity chains brought about by neoliberalism (McKean 2020; Wenar 2016; Young 2004a). When considered through a framework of self-and-other-determination, however, commodity chains look a lot like updated structures that cater to privileged western consumers while still relying on racialized schemes of dominion and expropriation (i.e., 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 metropolises, 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 formally colonial states (Fanon 1963, 146). Critical logistics scholars highlight these very affinities when they acknowledge 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 (Cowen 2014, 2–3). The claim is that, despite paradigmatic shifts, the architecture of contemporary trade "marks the continuation of centuries-old processes

of imperial circulation and colonization" (Chua et al. 2018, 619).

The structure of a 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 complex architecture (on this structure, see Anthony Anghie (1999, 2006b) and Turkuler Isiksel (2016)). 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 (Anghie 2006a; Donnelly 1998; Rawls 1999).¹⁷ Affective attachments follow suit; the shift toward "responsibility, will, liberty, contract, and sentiment" that Hartman (1997, 119) shows justified Black oppression post-emancipation 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 weaken 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 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 intervention that supposedly *assists* developing countries reveals its affinities with the affective constructions of the non-west as disordered countries; these interventions resubordinate and expropriate, ensuring continued access to cheap raw materials and mass-produced consumer and luxury goods.¹⁸

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" (2016, xx) because the raw materials that supply chains "rip ... out from the ground" (xxii) have disastrous results for those nearby. Moreover, he highlights the obfuscation built into commodity chains and insists that 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 (xxv). 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 (191, 32)

Yet Wenar's critical claims about the global supply chain apply exclusively to those goods that depend on raw materials extracted by authoritarian leaders variously described as tyrannical, bloody, cruel, and murderous.¹⁹ Once these leaders are replaced by democratic governments, Wenar argues, the western way of life can be sustained without violence. He explicitly acknowledges the anxieties about consumption that I posited as core to self-and-other determination by assuring readers that the comfort of western citizens that depends on natural resources that enrich bloody authoritarian regimes will not suffer by the proposed reforms (2016, xv).

Wenar repeatedly returns to authoritarian regimes as the initiating agents in the problem—despite his acknowledgment of the western role in sustaining the global legal structure that allows for trade in tainted products. These authoritarian leaders, he argues, have greatly affected the west, whose "crises and conflicts [and threats from abroad] have radiated from resource-disordered states" (2016, 81). Western citizens, in contrast, are unambiguously on the "right side" and only need to be made aware of the disturbing violence entailed by the production of their latest gadgets to press their own governments to break ties with these strongmen, thereby righting the trajectory of global trade (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 question his 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" (Wenar 2016, 259). These assumptions reveal two broader problems. First, Wenar's narrative risks reaffirming the racialized figures of authoritarian leaders as violent others as the core problem behind tainted goods versus 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 underlie western citizens' well-being.²⁰ By focusing on extreme violence and obvious benevolence, Wenar falls into the narrative of "savages-victims-saviors" that is entwined with human rights discourse and that often justifies economic and military intervention (Mutua 2001, 202; Perugini and Gordon 2015, 13).²¹ Starting with the blood-soaked hands on the book cover, Wenar aims to spur action through a shared feeling of horror,

which Sinja Graf (2021) associates with a minimal and hegemonic form of inclusion because it incorporates certain nonwestern countries only as law breakers or criminals against humanity. 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 contributing to 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 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 (2016, 259). Wenar claims that the fight for people's rights has been fought and largely won, making the principle of popular sovereignty widely accepted and western societies' "belief in their own innate racial superiority" a thing of the past (259). In this picture, the only surprise for western citizens is "how much [they] contribute to the violation of people's rights" (259), because Wenar assumes that as soon as western citizens notice their role in the violation of *other people's* rights, they will not "doubt which side is right" (259). This is the very point that Du Bois argues against, noting that racialized forms of affect allow western citizens both to 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 (who figure prominently in Wenar's account) carries with it a mistrust of the moral and political capacity of adults in those countries (Pupavac 2001), weakening the right to self-determination and leading to a more unequal international system.²² Thus the affective attachments that Wenar elicits by focusing on bloody conflict (outraged disgust and humanitarian pity toward violent statesmen and their victims, respectively) may work at cross-purposes with his commitment to recognizing the popular sovereignty of natural resources. Such forms of affect, alongside certain aspects of Wenar's account, 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 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 being dependent on 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. This account requires 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.

Self-Determination: From Lack to Excess, from Settler to Deterritorialized Domination

The concept and practice of self-determination have been explored by a dynamic critical literature on the topic. Joseph Massad, for example, tracks the trajectory of self-determination from its progressive origins toward a right of conquest in the post–World War II era. Massad argues that, 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 (Massad 2018, 168). 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 (169). 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 (173–74, 85).²³ Yet Massad understands self-determination 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 (that is, 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 (2004b, 182) critique of self-determination understood as non-interference is also partly motivated by Indigenous peoples’ claims. 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 (181, 5–9). 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 (188). She rightly diagnoses the problem that motivates this article: that powerful states can interfere arbitrarily with and dominate formally self-governing peoples while being absolved of responsibility to “support these countries” (188). 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 (189). In response to this problem, Young proposes to regulate international relations to create such forums and prevent domination (188–89).

Adom Getachew’s (2019, 2) recent work further develops a nondominating relational account of self-determination by drawing on the writings of postcolonial statesmen and thinkers. 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 countries—that is, membership with onerous obligations and limited rights—and racial hierarchy (10, 8). 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 (12, 74).

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. This leaves unexamined the inner workings of dominating states and how these projects of domination depend on and infuse practices of self-rule through which democratic collectives appropriate outside wealth. This is the contribution of the present article: 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 the possessions facilitated by the unjust international order. 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, now operating within the neoliberal world order.

Tracking the evolution of collective possessive attachments toward outside resources during neoliberalism does

not imply asserting the affinity between democratic forms of popular sovereignty and neoliberalism. On this relation, scholars have shown that global neoliberal thought and institutions strive to keep markets “safe from mass demands for social justice and redistributive equality” (Slobodian 2018, 14, 6) and that the neoliberal economization of all aspects of existence damages basic elements of democracy, including practices of rule and democratic imaginaries (Brown 2015, 17). Instead, I argue that the racialized possessive attachments still hold popular appeal as part of discourses that *oppose* neoliberal forms of global extraction, *even though* the gains of global neoliberalism are no longer appropriated as equally within the west as during the golden age of welfare capitalism. This is still important 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 (Mutz 2018, 2–3). 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 populist movements on the Right. 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 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 publics 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 a reform of such a system along global egalitarian principles. In so

doing, this imaginary reveals an indebtedness to the world of imperial self-and-other-determination I describe and remains tethered to possessive attachments and extraction abroad. In fact, this scrutiny might be necessary to understand which collectives scholars have in mind when they decry neoliberalism-damaging effects on democratic logics. By identifying individualist and marketizing discourses as the main threat to democratic politics, these critiques invest less analytical resources in characterizing long-standing popular appeals in which “the people” claim to rule partly based on resources appropriated from others. As this article reconstructs, these *lived* practices of rule were important in founding moments and carefully demarcated the reach of principles of justice and democracy while expanding the realm of acquisition of wealth well beyond their territory. This means that critiques of neoliberalism’s de-democratizing effects that do not scrutinize how the western collectives victimized by neoliberalism relate to the global are incomplete if they do not also search for models that depart from the racialized welfare capitalist states that were dismantled by Thatcher and Reagan.

Conclusion

This article argues that western democracies developed and deepened their social and political enfranchisement while holding imperial possessions and so developed attendant notions of popular sovereignty associated with access to wealth and goods made possible by empire. The elective affinity between western popular sovereignty and an excessive self-determination worked through racialized affect, updated through new regimes of interconnection that rechanneled and transformed exploitive relationships, rather than overcoming them after decolonization and into the neoliberal era. The importance of reconnecting western politics (rather than states or the international system) to the institutionalization and maintenance of domination is twofold. First, not doing so allows scholarship to unreflectively assume that western citizens or politics themselves will lead the struggle for global justice, as does much of the literature on that topic (Valdez 2019a; 2019b). Second, failing to make that connection prevents us from grasping the thoroughly transnational dimensions of contemporary right-wing populism, which activate hostile global attachments that are both racialized and deeply entangled with an entitlement to global wealth currently threatened by neoliberalism.

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 are 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, demanding instead the reinstatement of their right to rule others and appropriate their resources.

In this framework, the vulgar racism that has accompanied the growth of right-wing populism can be understood through Fanon's (1956, 128) assertion that "it is racists who are right." 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 (126).

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 (Dawson 2016, 154). 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. 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 neoliberalism's dehumanization and exploitation.

It also follows that critiques of neoliberalism must eschew nostalgia toward moments of enfranchisement led by white labor or easily accept demands of isolationism, protectionism, or closed borders as genuinely motivated by white grievances, as commentators in the United States and leftist leaders in Europe have done (Adler 2019; Sandel 2016). Moreover, inclusionary humanitarian responses to racial hostility should also be avoided because they recast the problem as one of victims of endemic violence in the Global South requiring assistance, rather than understanding poverty and migration as entwined with western self-and-other-determination (Valdez 2020, 97–101; 2021, 20–22). These strategies reinforce, rather than challenge, the racial affect that sustained white democracy and would isolate, rather than support, emancipatory projects spearheaded by Black and brown groups that are both antiracist and anticapitalist (Dawson 2016; Threadcraft 2017; Apostolidis 2019; Valdez 2020, 101–5).

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Notes

- 1 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.
- 2 By "the postcolonial world" I mean formerly colonized and currently independent countries who formally detached themselves from colonizers, though a core claim of this article is that colonial relations with powerful western countries persist under different guises.
- 3 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 society when she notes that "in a contradictory and exploitative relationship, the privileges of the exploiters can never become the privileges of all."
- 4 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. Despite the US focus of the former 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 (Marx [1870] 1973; Mies 1998, 98–99; Valdez 2021a, 907–908).
- 5 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 ([1835] 2003, 806).
 - 6 In this article, I use the following abbreviations of Du Bois’s works (in alphabetical order): *ARW*: “The African Roots of War,” *Atlantic Monthly* 115, no. 5 (1915): 707–14; *BRA*: *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860–1880* (New York: Free Press, [1934] 1998); *CD*: *Color and Democracy: Colonies and Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1945); *CNA*: “Criteria of Negro Art,” in *The Oxford W. E. B. Du Bois*, ed. E. J. Sundquist (New York: Oxford University Press, [1926] 1996), 324–28; *DP*: “The Development of a People,” *International Journal of Ethics* 14 (3): 292–311; *DW*: *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (New York: Dover, [1920] 1999); *JDRC*: “Jefferson Davis as a Representative of Civilization,” in *Against Racism: Unpublished Essays, Papers, Addresses, 1887–1961*, ed. H. Aptheker (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, [1890] 1988), 14–16; *NMRO*: “The Negro Mind Reaches Out,” in *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Touchstone, [1925] 1997), 385–414; *PD*: “Peace Is Dangerous,” *National Guardian* (1951) in *W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312) Special Collections and University Archives*, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries; and *WC*: “Worlds of Color,” *Foreign Affairs* 3, no. 3 (1925): 423–44.
 - 7 Conceptually, the affinity between Du Bois’s essay and the Marxist critique of imperialism—notably that of Lenin and 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 (Porter 2010). Yet, in addition to worrying about the susceptibility of the working class to nationalism and imperialism (like Lenin [1915] 1974) and seeing imperialist competition and the drive to accumulation behind the “ransacking” of the planet (like Luxemburg [1913] 2015, 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.
 - 8 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 2004, xv) is also at the core of Du Bois’s democratic thought. A related literature considers Du Bois’s notion of the “wages of whiteness,” or the *domestic* dynamics of appropriation of psychological and economic resources (Myers 2019; Roediger [1991] 2007).
 - 9 There are echoes between this discussion and Andrew Douglas’s (2015) illuminating reconstruction of Du Bois’s critique of the competitive society.
 - 10 For republican cooperativist traditions in the US labor movement, see the work of Alex Gourevitch (2014). On the transformation of producerist narratives toward narratives focused on consumption, see the work of Helga Hallgrimsdottir and Cecilia Benoit (2007) and Lawrence Glickman (1993). Finally, Paul Durrenberg and Dimitra Doukas (2008) highlight the persistence of counterhegemonic producerist narratives in particular locales after this shift.
 - 11 Throughout the article, 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 (Dawson 2016, 151; Fraser 2016, 166–68), even though these are not internally homogeneous categories and there are not always clear-cut distinctions between the two, as clarified through personal exchanges with Emily Katzenstein and Michael Dawson.
 - 12 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 how 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—were no obvious reasons for celebration for the majority of the world population, which lived under their imperial yoke.
 - 13 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 for work that is performed away from it and alongside technology, as I argue elsewhere in an ecological reading of Du Bois (Valdez 2021b, chapter 4).

- 14 This account echoes Benedict Anderson's well-known notion of "imagined communities," although Étienne 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 (Balibar and Wallerstein 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 (Bell 2014, 649).
- 15 These excerpts, which tie racism to economic domination, reveal the indebtedness of Fanon's account to Marxism (Forsythe 1973, 161). These affinities notwithstanding, Fanon (1963, 5) himself warned readers that Marxism had to be "slightly stretched" to deal with the colonial problem, a task that he himself pursued, producing an "African-centered brand of democratic socialism" (Rabaka 2011, 126).
- 16 The reproduction of injustice is also the theme of Alasia Nuti's work (2019), although it does not focus on the question of affect as being central in sustaining structural injustice.
- 17 There is some overlap between this brief account of the transformation of narratives of development in history and Thomas McCarthy's (2009, 201–19) tracking of 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.
- 18 An existing literature considers the orientations of western citizens necessary for overcoming relationships of injustice (Young 1997, 2004a). 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 in his work, though with a focus on neoliberal, rather than racialized, imperial attachments.
- 19 Wenar (2016, 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* (2011) for a critique of this literature.
- 20 This positioning of western citizens is a broader tendency in the global justice literature (Valdez 2019a).
- 21 See, for example, Cameron Macaskill (2021) on the blood diamonds campaign, which encourages consumers to shun "conflict diamonds," while disavowing the routine violence of exploitive mining work in nonconflict countries.
- 22 Further supporting the distinctiveness of humanitarianism, Sabrina Pagano and Yuen Huo (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.
- 23 See also Catherine Lu (2019), who notes that the recognition of self-determining settler states consolidates the dispossession of indigenous peoples.

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