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Examining Ontological Racism
through the Case of Sinophobia

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Abstrakt

Cílem práce bude zasadit česká média do kontextu ontologického rasismu, tedy rasismu neodlučitelného od myšlení a vnímání světa a svého místa v něm, a zjistit, jak na jeho základě tato média komunikují rasistické obsahy. Konkrétně se zaměřím na mainstreamová média a jejich sinofobní tropy, předsudky, či logiku. Postupně podrobím diskurzivní analýze po vzoru Teun A. van Dijka glosu vydanou na webových stránkách ČT art, komentovanou sbírku rozhovorů od české odbornice na KLR a zpravodajský pořad ČT.

Příslušné případy pak usouvztažním se sinofobií současnou i dějinnou, ale také s jejich filosofickým, ideologickým i dějinným prostředím. V závěru se zamyslím nad proliferací ontologického rasismu v kyberprostoru, v němž se pro něj nabízí mnoho ekologických nik, a který je mnohdy strukturován k tomu šířit jej, intenzifikovat i normalizovat.

Sinofobie, rasismus, rasismus v médiích, Čína v médiích, diskurzivní analýza

Abstract

The goal of this thesis is to contextualize Czech media within ontological racism, that is racism implicated in a particular understanding of the world and one's place in it and examine how the media in question tap into it to communicate racist content. Specifically, I will focus on mainstream media and the Sinophobic tropes, prejudices, and logic present there. I will apply a method inspired by Teun A. van Dijk on three examples: a short essay published on ČT art website, a collection of commented interview by a Czech expert on the DPRK, and a ČT news programme.

The examples will be related to historical and contemporary Sinophobia, but also to a wider philosophical, ideological, and historical environment. Finally, I will provide brief thoughts about the proliferation of ontological racism in the cyberspace, in which it has enough opportunities to flourish, and which is structured to spread it, intensify it, and normalize it.

Sinophobia, racism, racism in media, China in media, discourse analysis

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Introduction

The goal of this thesis is to analyse racism in elite discourse, specifically mainstream media. The racist content present there is often implicit or typically hard to discern as it does not bear the traits of what is typically thought of as racist, and it mainly conveys racist content through established notions, values, through a cultural common sense, even through communication ostensibly anti-racist. Elite discourse is by definition the one with the biggest sway in a society as its proponents usually have the necessary capital, financial or cultural, to support it. Even more importantly, elite discourse and mainstream media are representatives of the hegemonic civilizational aspects whose importance goes beyond only the elites within a society.

That is why I aim to relate racism in mainstream media to ontological racism, that is to racializing thinking which stems from a particular understanding of the world and one's place within it, in short, from one's understanding of reality and selfhood, of worldview and identity. My understanding of racism in elite discourse is heavily influenced by Teun Adrianus van Dijk, who stressed the importance of studying the often still understudied topic of racism of dominant group members, who often profit from and perpetuate racially distributed inequalities. He also warned about the inefficiency of simplistically distinguishing between racist and non-racist actors.¹ This is a point that will be expanded on in the thesis.

The first chapter is focused on introducing the method for analysing racism in media and the complications entailed. The chapter closes with an analysis exemplifying the subtlety of racism in mainstream media to illustrate how the provided context makes the audience ill-equipped to view an issue in complexity. I should note that my thesis does not follow a typical structure of a thesis and does not differentiate between the theoretical and practical parts as much. Analysis and introduction of theory are interwoven and sometimes overlapping.

In the following three chapters, I aim to contextualize ontological racism in particular philosophy, ideology, and history, which together constitute a contentious, nebulous, but nevertheless concrete lineage of "the West". I wish to situate the issue of racism in order to strip it off its general characteristics and present it as fundamentally embedded and "provincial". All the contentious terms mentioned throughout the thesis should be treated this way. The term "Third World", for example, is used here in a sense of the Other, of the outside, to the West. "Race" is another contentious term, and it is needless to try and narrow it down if we are to wrestle with its polyvalence. It is necessary to understand it as a fundamentally embedded, and therefore Western, concept, one just like "human", "nature", "culture", "thinking", etc., all of which are concepts that carry the civilizational baggage of the West and the cultural and linguistic baggage of the English language and should not be treated as evident universals. And, just like the West, race should not be reduced to a single aspect of it but should rather be examined in all its ambiguity, developing history, and internal conflict to appreciate its scope and influence.

Afterwards, I dedicate one chapter to a general overview of Sinophobia, which I view, similarly to anti-Semitism, as an interpretative framework that informs a worldview and identity formulation of a given subject, rather than being defined strictly as an antipathy towards China. That is why I will also discuss tropes such as Yellow Peril (the idea of a threatening mass of other life overrunning the West from the East) or Oriental despotism (the idea of the East as intrinsically authoritarian and unable to

¹ van Dijk, T. A. (1993). *Elite discourse and racism*. Sage Publications, p. 6.

value the lives and freedoms of people). This chapter is concluded with a literature review that is meant to introduce the scope of problems orbiting the topic of Sinophobia. The reason for its placement later in the thesis is because Sinophobia is primarily a case analysed here rather than a methodical tool applied.

After the three chapters in which I establish a context for Sinophobia and the chapter introducing it, I delve into analysing Czech media cases of Sinophobia. The first case focuses on pseudo-scientific or arguably conspiratorial thinking in a short essay published on one of the websites of the Czech Public TV, showing these are not exclusive issues of alternative or extremist media. The second case analyses a publication about the DPRK that wishes to offer an alternative to a sensationalist narrative (while still exploiting it) and means to reframe it through a different moral narrative (which is, nevertheless, adjacent to the original) while keeping it in the same ideological and axiological context. The second case is also an example of how reliance on simple moral narratives may be overly reductive in regards to a topic and may also be actively counterproductive in cultivating its understanding. The final analysis deals with a case of misinformation in a Czech Public TV news programme and ponders whether Sinophobia serves as the primary context, framing, and an interpretative key when Western mainstream media producers engage with information about East Asia.

Finally, I conclude by cursorily presenting the issues implied by racism in mainstream media and listing the possible avenues of further research. I hope this thesis can contribute to developing new tools and sensitivities to these issues, so that information could be processed with more efficient tools, with more sophisticated frameworks, in more open environments provided with more robust contexts which expand the affordances of the actors operating with them and guide these actors towards creativity and productivity.

Method

Analysing discourse in context

To understand instances of Western Sinophobic racism within chosen texts, I intend to employ the techniques of discourse analysis. I will draw from the writings of Teun A. van Dijk, Renáta Sedláková, and Gillian Rose. I understand discourse as the semantic, linguistic level of how we understand our situation and how that knowledge impels us to act.² G. Rose writes that discourse analysis needs to pay close attention to the complexity of discourse, as its efficacy rests in its fuzziness and in the richness of its “interpretative repertoire,” i.e. a kit of metaphors, symbols and tools people are equipped with when dealing with reality, mental shortcuts that rely on suppositions about what is “common sense”, true, natural, or real.³

Following van Dijk, I believe that if I am to grasp how Sinophobic racism operates within the chosen discourse, I need to place the analysed texts within their relevant contexts.⁴ I think of context, to use van Dijk’s poignant words, as “the missing link between discourse and society, between the personal and the social, and between agency and structure.”⁵ Context is in the unsaid that fills the spoken with meaning, in the connotations that place it somewhere on the information map. Contexts provide the resources and confines that form the infrastructure of a text. Finally, it is of chief importance that the influence of context is often subtle and goes beyond what is observable at face value.⁶

Van Dijk cautions us not to mistake context with an overall knowledge of the world and advises to pick the relevant elements.⁷ We need to make a deliberate choice of connotations we focus on, choose a fraction of the overall knowledge, so that we can highlight a specific situatedness. I admit the scope of relevant context I chose to provide may certainly seem too wide. However, I believe the broadness is necessary and that I cannot be too reductive when approaching a phenomenon so complex and layered. A partial focus would result in a partial answer, and we have had enough of those when engaging racism, a problem I will return to in due time.

Contemporary racism and its elusiveness

If the meanings conveyed and contexts referenced within a discourse are oftentimes subtle, it is doubly true for today’s racist discourse. Rather than being racist explicitly, its participants resort to dog-whistling and stereotyping⁸ to obfuscate the racist content of their statement, or they even actively deny it altogether. Dog whistling in particular is an encapsulation of racism becoming covert and strategic; the term dog whistle denotes coded messaging meant to denigrate a marginalized group while maintaining plausible deniability. According to Ian Haney López (as read by Rossing), dog whistles show that “racial patterns adapt” in discourse and therefore keep racism “permanent”, they also testify to the intersectionality of racism and finally to the fact that racism is crucially a ubiquitous matter.⁹

² Rose, G. (2001). *Visual methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*. SAGE. p. 136.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 155-156, 158.

⁴ van Dijk, T. A. (2008). *Discourse and context: A Sociocognitive Approach*. Cambridge University Press. p. 3, 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. x.

⁸ Sedláková, R. (2014). *Výzkum médií: Nejužívanější metody a techniky*. Grada Publishing. p. 448-450.

⁹ Rossing, J. P. (2017). Dog Whistle Politics: How coded racial appeals have reinvented racism and wrecked the middle class. *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 20(1), 180–183. <https://doi.org/10.14321/rhetpublaffa.20.1.0180>. p. 180-183.

In modern Western societies, blatant racist rhetoric is generally both shunned as immoral and legally constricted. It is common knowledge one should be tolerant, and most people do not take lightly being called racists, as it would imply overstepping one of the cultural standards Western individuals adhere to.¹⁰ This tends to foster a conviction that since racism is prohibited, it is not a fundamental part of society; consequently, its significance is often minimized or entirely disregarded.

Indeed, precisely because we understand tolerance as a facet of our civilization, and because racism is officially frowned upon and banned, is there the need to deny racism. Aside from refusing to acknowledge they are happening, brushing off racist incidents as unrepresentative of the society, attributing them solely to “bad apples”, or shifting focus away from them by blaming the victims all serve as means to preserve the ideal of racial equality and therefore help maintain the consistency of the official or hegemonic ideology in the West of which this ideal is part of.

Those instances of racism, which the society considers undeniable, are presented as a deviation.¹¹ The “actual” racism is understood as an outlier in contemporary Western societies that should be reserved for extremists.¹² Their overt forms of racism can be easily called out to affirm the purported anti-racism of the establishment and to shield the subtle forms of racism from accusations by making them seem baseless in comparison. Especially in cases when an utterance was not overtly racist are such accusations dismissed as hysterical or exaggerating, and the accusers themselves are painted as intolerant, ungrateful and oversensitive.¹³

Moreover, since the label of “racist” is often attached to the likes of neo-Nazis, being called a racist may in fact imply an association with Nazism, which is deemed an ultimate historical evil. Therefore, a racist is by that logic someone whose belonging to the side of fundamental good represented by our current establishment is rejected. This brings us to the crux of the matter, as it is not only the societal fringes that racism applies to by the denialist logic. Racism is rather relegated to a more general domain comprised of all which is outside of what we consider “ours” and “us”. Denialism is employed to strip racism not just of its present, but also of its past and overall context in order to demonstrate that our purported anti-racism is both a definitive matter long-ago set-in stone and an integral part of our identity.

So, aside from the current political extremists, this also applies to anyone “we” feel inimical towards in the past, especially if it helps exonerate “us.” It also applies to “our” civilizational enemies. That is why racism, aside from being portrayed as a thing of the unenlightened past, also features as a way to make distinction between “Us” and Othered peoples and cultures we consider hostile to our values.¹⁴ Denial of racism posits an uncrossable gap both between racist history and the more enlightened present, and between the “civilized” west of today and its inverse image abroad, be it “savage” or “undemocratic”.

The core of my method here can be summed up as what Sedláková dubs the “ideological square” she attributes to van Dijk.¹⁵ It schematizes a way the “Us” vs “Them” polarity is hinted at by attributing positive characteristics to the *ingroup* and negative ones to the *outgroup*. The ingroup highlights the

¹⁰ van Dijk, T. A. (1992). Discourse and the denial of racism. *Discourse & Society*, 3(1), 87–118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926592003001005>. p. 89.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 95.

¹² Ibid., p. 93; Van Dijk, T. A. “New(s) racism: a discourse analytical approach.” In: Cottle, S. (2000). *Ethnic Minorities and the media: Changing cultural boundaries*. Open University Press. p. 34.

¹³ van Dijk, T. A., (1992), p. 90, 94, 96.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 93, 97.

¹⁵ Sedláková, R., (2014), p. 450.

negatives of the antagonist and problematizes their positives, all the while exalting its own positives and obscuring its negatives. Hence the argument that the actual racists or misogynists or other sorts of bad actors are “the other ones”. Van Dijk’s Us vs Them schematic is reminiscent of the one introduced by Said’s Orientalism, or the schematic of Wedom vs Theydom,¹⁶ the reason I chose van Dijk’s conception is because he trimmed this dichotomy to a bare skeleton, allowing for this discursive practice to be recontextualized as needed.

And because these techniques are employed by political actors too, their application has severe political implications. Denying racist intentions, ridiculing opposition, and validating the claim that racism is a thing of yesteryear and fundamentally not a systemic issue are all means to stymie anti-racist pushback.¹⁷ Furthermore, a claim can be made about the moral high ground western civilization has over its Others, because like racism, ethnocentrism can be denied as well. Such entitlement paired with specific racist narratives and tropes has justified foreign policy actions including war, which speaks to racism’s dangers.¹⁸

Van Dijk has dedicated an entire book to the idea that it is not just political elites but elites in general whose impact on racist discourse needs to be scrutinized. Although pinning racism on marginal actors has an exonerative function for the ingroup as a whole, it can also serve to exclude the elite actors specifically.¹⁹ The western elites usually profess certain humanistic or even ostensibly anti-racist values while condoning or actively defending systems of oppression that perpetuate inequalities.²⁰ Elites tend to conceal their racism or simply think about it in implicit terms and use those. That is why implicit racism is chiefly dangerous; on one hand, it flies under the radar, which allows it to exert its influence unbarred, on the other, it makes more sense for those in power to stay away from being explicit and avoid overstepping set boundaries.

By elites I mean those who are able to structure public discourse²¹, have a significant media platform or sway over its topics,²² therefore not only politicians or cultural personages, but educational, academic, and media institutions at large are considered the elite here, in fact, it will be especially the intellectuals and media who will be inspected in my thesis.

Racism, science, and history

After establishing that today’s racism is subtle but no less present, I would also like to reiterate, with van Dijk’s backing, that elites are indispensable for the reproduction of racist discourses and systems of oppression alike.²³ Now, I would like to ask two questions?

1) What sort of subtlety can be observed in scientific discourse?

2) How should we account for the difference between old (colonial) racism and new racism described above.²⁴

Apropos the question of scientific discourse, I believe it will be useful to focus on a particular strand of geographical determinism. Generally, geographical or environmental determinism denotes a

¹⁶ Chun, W. H. K., & Keenan, T. (2006). *New media, old media: A History and Theory Reader*. Routledge. p. 268.

¹⁷ van Dijk, T. A., (1992), p. 96.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 97.

¹⁹ van Dijk, T. A., (1993), p. 8.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

²¹ Ibid., p. 11.

²² Ibid., p. 241, 250.

²³ Ibid., p. x.

²⁴ More on this distinction: Sedláková, R., (2014), p. 449; van Dijk, T. A. In: Cottle, S., (2000), p.33-34.

theory that regards climatic, physical circumstances as decisive for societal development. Western colonizers utilised such a theory to justify their endeavours and make colonialism seem only natural. According to them, the colonized were fated to be uncivilized because of tropical conditions, while the mild climate rendered the colonizers superior by nature.

This logic endures in explanations of current conditions that exclude the history of colonialism; in their understanding, the poverty of the colonized peoples is due to the character of their environment rather than because of colonial exploitation and the succedent neo-colonial economic relations. Not only are these explanations more palatable because they mitigate the role of the crimes committed by the colonizers' ingroup, they also do not pin the problem directly on humans or their biology, which would be too reminiscent of explicitly racists or historically well-known racist discourses.

However, blaming the environment only works when the environment is outside and apart from "Us". Within "our" society, perceived issues with a minority group are still being depicted as inherent to their character or nature (even if in a less outspoken fashion than during the height of colonialism; for example by blaming culture instead of nature), so as not to implicate the ingroup. If a racialized community happens to be poor for example, it is attributed to their natural laziness or ineptness, rather than, in the case of Black Americans, to a centuries-long history of discrimination, or in the case of Indigenous Americans or Australians, to the impact of their systematic genocide. The workings of this logic in Czech context are well exemplified by the use of anti-Romani slurs against poor White people; if someone of "our own" race does not fit the racist narrative, their own race or the right to belong to it is called into question, not the racist logic itself. In other words, racism extends itself into racialized classism to reaffirm the divide between a desirable ingroup and an undesirable outgroup.

Nevertheless, let us focus on how this kind of argumentations unfolds within the scientific discourse itself. Hardly we could find an example more germane than that of Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel*. After all, it garnered much attention and even received the prestigious Pulitzer Prize, which granted it additional credibility.²⁵ The book itself exhibits much of the revisionism described above; while it tries to explain why a part of the world is poverty-stricken while another is affluent, it completely disregards colonial history. The core issue, however, was aptly identified by Andrew Sluyter in his review of the book. He points out that Diamond copies the argument of the colonialist thinkers of 19th century but adds an extra step: it is not that biology determines poverty, but it is environment that determines biology and poverty. What more, Diamond does not even forget to distance himself from the racist science of yore, therefore denying he could be following in its footsteps.²⁶ Van Dijk's pattern tracks onto academic sphere as well.

As for the reason behind the success and outreach of J. Diamond's publication, I am convinced by David Correia's discernment²⁷. Environmental determinism whitewashes the current global system of economic relations and argues that the inequalities resulting from it are mere accidents of nature and "fate". The system in question is one that Diamond's ingroup benefits from and it is not surprising

²⁵ Sluyter, A. (2003). Neo-Environmental determinism, intellectual damage control, and Nature/Society science. *Antipode*, 35(4), 813–817. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1467-8330.2003.00354.x>. p. 813.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 815.

²⁷ Ironically, Correia also fails to avoid using a racist trope when he off-handedly mentions it was most likely the Mongols' enormous army size that led to their success. That hearkens to writings of medieval chroniclers at best, 19th century Yellow Peril at worst. The Mongol army, contrary to popular belief, did not rely on seemingly infinite manpower, but rather on the qualities of its army. See for example: <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/Directors-Select-Articles/Genghis-Khan/>.

his ignorance of history and implicitly racist scholarship expediently vindicate it.²⁸ Correia's writing style also manages to capture the urgency with which such "junk science", as Sluyter calls it, should be combatted. Both old and new environmental determinism are fundamentally white supremacist theories which engage in racist denialism by exonerating the ingroup (i.e. denying its racism) and displacing the responsibility for adverse effects of colonialism on its victims (i.e. victim-blaming).

As is clear from how I have written about it thus far, understanding colonialism is both indispensable to understand contemporary globality and incommensurable with racist fantasies, which is why I will dedicate a part of this thesis to elaborate on it.

Now for the second question, while distinguishing between old and new racism might help us understand that today's standards tend to accentuate and obscure different things than in the past and that the paradigm shifted, we should not see their difference as an absolute split. Distinguishing between racism old and new is helpful as long as it does not imply a clear cut between the two, because that could in itself lead to a form of denialism in which today's racism is claimed to be diametrically different and disjointed from the past it sprouted from.

Let us look at a speech from the "EU Foreign Minister" Josep Borell²⁹ in which he likens Europe to a "garden" in which "everything works" and that is surrounded by a "jungle, ... [which] could invade the garden". The right way for the "gardeners" to protect themselves from invasion is to "go to the jungle". Borell even says it is their "duty" to "take care" of "the jungle outside".

Is his use of language still subtle, are its metaphors dog whistles? Or is it closer to the discourse of 19th century colonialists, are those metaphors representative of tropes such as "The White Man's Burden"? The distinction between old and new racist discourse may seem blurred in certain cases and that very well might be because indirectness and particular vocabulary are features, rather than the bedrock of the racist logic that underlies both. As written above, the indirectness of new racist discourse is not accidental, it reacts to different needs and adapts to new circumstances. There is on one hand a continuity tangling racism past and present and on the other a shift reflecting specific historical developments. In order to appreciate these two layers, this thesis will attempt to trace some of the history which propelled racism towards a new direction, new sensitivities and considerations.

Analysis: implicit racism in science journalism

Before the thesis moves on to the next chapter, allow me to exemplify how the introduced method works in practice and how heavily contemporary racism relies on inconspicuous hints. I have chosen a ČT (an acronym for Česká Televize, the Czech public television broadcaster) article³⁰ published on 9. 6. 2023. It is available on the ČT24 web that focuses on reporting and consists of a text accompanied by a videoclip of the relevant broadcasting segment. Aside from reporting on local and world news, it also has educational segments on academic developments, as in the case of the article I have chosen. I want to focus on the intellectual context of racism and its influence on public discourse at large, which is why I picked an educational article published by an authoritative and trusted medium. Furthermore, I wanted an example of the general racist logic, which is why I did not choose an article

²⁸ Correia, D. (2013). F**k Jared Diamond. *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, 24(4), 1–6.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10455752.2013.84649>. p. 1-3.

²⁹ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-diplomatic-academy-opening-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-inauguration-pilot_en.

³⁰ <https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/clanek/svet/najezdy-africkych-otrokaru-na-jizni-pobrezi-anglie-zmapovala-skupina-mistnich-historiku-5897>.

about China, the main topic of this thesis. Instead of the original Czech version, I will work with my English translation of it here.

The headline is as follows:

Raids by African slavers on the south coast of England charted by a group of local historians

I apologize for the inelegant wording, but I wished to retain the original word order as much as possible so as to preserve a more click-worthy appeal. After all, starting with “local historians” would not draw as much attention as with “African slavers.” Now, let us also turn to the lead paragraph.

*A group of historians uncovered a forgotten part of British history – **African slavers** raiding the south of England. Across centuries, they have abducted tens to hundreds of thousands of **Christians** from there. The scholars are trying to bring attention to the topic and show that slavery and enslavement³¹ is **a much more complicated subject than is presented today.*** (emphases mine)

Let me state my thesis: The main goal of the article is to relativize the history of the Atlantic Slave Trade by 1) generalizing terms and manipulatively shifting their definitions and 2) by reinforcing the “Us vs Them” dichotomy.

I specifically highlighted three parts that I found most telling. By unpacking them I hope to clarify my assumptions.

Firstly, the article exploits an unspoken controversy with a seeming oxymoron, **African slavers**. Africans are typically thought to be the slaves (i.e. victims) and this reversal of roles (that of the victim and the victimizer) questions the common understanding, which is after all, the stated goal of the scholars and by extension, this report. Apart from this, the adjective **African** is generalizing enough to conveniently present Africa as a monolith. After all, the slavers mentioned in the article hailed from the northwestern part of the continent (the article names Morocco and Algeria) while the transatlantic slave trade alluded to involved the lands along the Gulf of Guinea. No significance is assigned to this fact, making it seem that slavers from a very different geographical setting can be grouped with slaves from another one. The article constructs a “Them” that moves peoples of different cultures, ethnicities, and histories under one racialized banner.

The role reversal itself is more explicitly stressed in the accompanying video; from 47:04 to 47:15 the reporter says the events of the discussed topic were indeed “*paradoxically a case of reversed slavery, [contrary to] what is taught in schools today. This time, it was African barbarian pirates, primarily from Morocco and Algiers, who were abducting White Christian slaves...*” Here, we can already see the “barbaric” African “Them” that encompasses both the victims and the victimizers is being contrasted with an “Us”.

That brings us to the second highlight: **Christians**. I believe we should not take lightly this choice of identification. Although the headline already informs the readers it is southern England that was raided, the leading paragraph does not denote the victims as English, nor does it use any generic term such as “people” or “locals”. It uses a civilizational term by which they can appeal to a shared identity, give the target audience of Czech readers a sense of belonging with the victims, one that also contrasts with the Muslim African slavers. Elsewhere, it is mentioned the victims were *white* villagers, this common denominator, however, comes with the awkward racial component, which is perhaps why the leading paragraph opts for “**Christians**”. Nevertheless, this group name functions as a stand in for *White*,

³¹ In Czech, there is a difference between “otrokářství” (owning slaves) and “otroctví” (being a slave) which I wanted to indicate by this choice of words.

as a dog whistle, since the dichotomy here indeed vaguely extends to the question of race and civilization.

Finally, the conclusion of the leading paragraph and the article itself is that slavery is a **complicated subject**. This sinister case of false equivalence reinforced throughout the whole segment equates the raids in England with the gruesome history of chattel slavery and Atlantic slave trade that affected millions and by extension with the completely obfuscated global system founded on racism and colonialism of which Atlantic slave trade is part of. This false equivalence is a form of denialism which aims to portray history in favour of the ingroup (“Us”), but it also aims to devalue criticism and opposing arguments. If two different but highly contentious topics are rendered interchangeable, the discussion is stopped by simple whataboutisms.

At the end of the accompanying video (1:59 onwards), the reporter explains why this topic is relevant in the present day:

According to specialists, it is necessary to remember this part of history even today when the statues of European colonizers are being destroyed.

The chosen context are the public instances of critical reactions to the legacy of colonialism that have been reported on in the past several years and it is these critical reactions the article chooses to problematize. Is this critical position, however, a majoritarian one, a common sense one, so that its problematization is in order? If not, is it a position whose claims are reported on in an exhaustive fashion are given a significant platform? At least in Czech public debate that is in the very least highly debatable. Opting to provide protests against symbols of racist violence as the most relevant context could come off as a veiled whataboutist threat. As if the message was: Next time someone topples a statue, let us remind them of this.

After this line, the reporter immediately adds: *“But that does not mean we should exculpate European slavers...”* After shielding themselves from critique with this performative line (in practice, exculpating European slavers is precisely what they were doing all along), the reporter reaffirms the goal one last time: *“... it is just necessary to add that the problem of slavery was and is much more complex...”*

The article suggests it presents information contrary to common knowledge (“slavery is... a much more complicated subject **than is presented today**”; a case of reversed slavery, [contrary to] what is **taught in schools today**). However, if we acquiesce to van Dijk’s scholarship and recognize racism is indeed present at large in Western societies and its elites can play an immense role in reproducing it, taking a solid enough grasp of the history of slavery among the general populace as a given seems to be built on nothing but a surmise. Recognizing this can also help us understand how dangerous such articles may be, especially in an age where information is often consumed in an environment of vitriolic social media and within the frames of culture wars.

Public media like ČT is certainly one of said elites, it is also not a medium that goes against liberal democratic values but one that vigorously affirms them. The article analysed above is tonally and stylistically consistent with the rest of the medium, it does not formally deviate from standards of neutrality, nor does it come off as emotionally charged. Any of its racist insinuations can therefore pass much more smoothly and are less easily detected, let alone proved.

To clarify, I am not trying to make claims about intentionality behind ČT’s pushing of racist narratives, intentionality is not my primary concern. I do not mean to suggest that racism and its denial is always something active and conscious either, quite the contrary. I am more interested in those

instances when denialism is passive and the racist insinuations remain unreflected, or in other words, when denialism is automatic because racism is simply part of the logic.

Ontological racism as philosophical context

Delimitation of the concept of racism

It is necessary to specify the term *racism* as I will employ it throughout the thesis. My goal is to treat racism as an unavoidable context of a concrete, historical civilization, namely the Western one. I do not wish to use the word as a marker that decides whether something is or is not racist and limit possible analyses by confining the discussion to a “moral arena”³² that makes racism an issue of evaluation and judgement rather than an entrenched context. This is mainly a problem when racism is treated as a problem of individuals, groups, or institutions, rather than a systemic one, which is, as was explored in the previous chapter, a basis for racist denialist tactics of relegating blame. A condemnation of racism on the level of separate actors may lead to a dismissal or general absolution without the need to further examine the magnitude of the problem.

Not relating separate actors to wider structures only allows us to locate the problem in those actors themselves and frame racism as an issue of moral failing. But victims of racism do not only suffer because of the actions of individuals. Hence, terms such as structural or systemic racism were developed to address impersonal mechanisms acting with racist bias. Scheurich and Young propose a schematic which describes racism as subsisting of several layers ranging from the individual one to ever broader and more structural ones meant to distinguish the different scopes at which racism is ingrained society-wide.³³ At the end of the spectrum they recognize a fundamental category to which the preceding ones are subordinated: civilizational racism³⁴, which encompasses a milieu as broad as the Euro-American modernity, or the West.

It consists of three dimensions: axiological, epistemological, and ontological. The first is concerned with evaluating reality, the second with knowing reality, and the third with conceiving (of) it. There are several reasons I decided on ontological racism as the primary framing of my analysis, one of which is that ontology is concerned with reality and one’s place in it, it therefore links identity, reality, and thought. By taking identity into account, I hope to evade the pitfall of resolving racism in the “moral arena”, that is making it an issue of correct representation on one hand and condemnation on the other. Instead, highlighting the role of identity should help expose personal stakes that inevitably enter any debate over racism.

The goal of a more thorough theory of racism should be to help prevent the disavowing denialism that tries to subsume anti-racist critique to distance “Us” from allegations. The demarcation of institutional and societal racism was made, among other things, to discount intention as the decisive drive behind racism. Nevertheless, the absence of conscious intention behind racist actions and attitudes does not mean there will automatically be willingness to change if the racist content is made explicit. Scheurich and Young stress the interdependence of the three components of civilizational racism³⁵, which encompasses a bond between reality and identity, or in other words, between knowing the world and belonging in it. If ontology, epistemology, and axiology are truly interdependent, then the perception of own self, world, or belonging will factor heavily in one’s approach the issue of racism. If the foundations of one’s existence have a racist bias, addressing it means questioning one’s way of

³² In the original article I adopted this collocation from, Scheurich and Young use the word “ethical”. I replaced it with “moral” to indicate an axiology that refers existence to transcendent values (see: Deleuze, G., & Hurley, R. (1988). *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. City Lights Books. p. 23).

³³ Scheurich, J. J., & Young, M. D. (1997). Coloring epistemologies: Are our research epistemologies racially biased? *Educational Researcher*, 26(4), 4–16. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189x026004004>. p. 5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

conceiving of and inhabiting the world. Civilizational racism could therefore help understand how racism endures and reiterates itself after institutional and societal reforms as it portrays the actors within a racist system as stakeholders rather than passive agents.

Situating the Us and Them dichotomy

To understand the specific Sinophobic formula pitting Us against Them, we have to understand not only its two elements but also its setting, namely the Western ontology. In other words, to understand the sense of Self and Identity of the West and the Other that it contrasts and opposes, we need to demarcate the philosophical grounds upon which this drama unfolds.

Concepts such as John Law's one-world world, Helen Verran's uniformitarianism, or Bruno Latour's distinguishing between cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitics all grapple with the manner in which Western ontology treats reality as rooted in universal and unitary Truth to which it lays claim. Through colonialism, European ideas were refined, spread, and imposed as universal. It is taken for granted that their situatedness in European history, in Enlightenment thought, in theology, do not make them any less relevant for the rest of the world.³⁶ In fact, the notion of their universality is reinforced through translation of foreign concepts that ignore differences in order to reduce them to general standards, to a universal sameness, taking them out of their locality and transport them to the only locality with universal overlap, the Western one.³⁷ Europe supplies a theoretical model to be applied on the non-European "mere" data, and the non-European data fleshes out this general standard model.³⁸

One of the representatives of this attitude, as historian Dipesh Chakrabarty writes, was Husserl, who stated that the difference between Western and Eastern thought lies in the former's ability to formulate absolute insights with universal validity, while the latter is stuck in an unscientific naïveté.³⁹ Among the implications of this attitude is that scholars from colonized countries do not readily employ local scholarly tradition in study of their own societies, treating them only as objects of study rather than an available tool. On the other hand, applying European scholarship is almost obvious and seldom needs to be questioned or legitimized.⁴⁰

Generalizations reliant on colonial registers of knowledge do not only neutrally simplify knowledge but incorporate it to a specific system of thought that classifies knowledge according to specific values and preconceptions. Imposition of universal theoretical categories is not happening outside of history and has material effects. Western scholarship operates with a pre-established notion of a unitary, single humankind sharing a History, itself singular, as if these were self-evident rather than defined and imposed by the West.⁴¹ It is all the more necessary to unpack these notionally self-evident terms because they have been modelled on Western ideals that tacitly, if not blatantly, discard a variety of human experiences, exclude undesirable humans or include them on their own terms.

The humankind as composed of individuals whose subjecthood is defined by liberalism and humanism has historically been modelled on an ideal of a White European male with particular mind, body, status, behaviour, and convictions. While upholding White males as the norm disenfranchised marginalized groups other to them, on a much more fundamental level, the conception of this norm as a consistent identity stands at the root of the issue.⁴² The ideal form is ultimately unattainable because it is by design transcendent, outside of the experiential world, it does not allow for the kind

³⁶ Chakrabarty, D. (2009). *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference - New Edition*. Princeton University Press. p. 4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xiii-xiv, 17.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5-6.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴² Hayles, N. K. (1999). *How we became posthuman*. The University of Chicago Press. p. 4.

of inconsistencies that come along with living. The resulting hierarchy, while privileging those closer to the ideal, can therefore forever discipline everything immanent as lacking.⁴³ It is a setup for a concrete ontological authoritarianism, because the transcendent, that is the unshakably stable, is being maintained and reproduced by the affirmation of sameness in the form of denial of difference and subsumption of otherness. I will dedicate the rest of this chapter to explain this dynamic.

What does it mean to acknowledge the particularity and historicity of Western ontological assumptions? First and foremost, it is to identify the claim of universality as an exercise of power. Because our starting point is ontology, the entirety of cosmos is to be called in question. Presumptions to default to and natural givens taken for granted need to be related to both Western thought and colonial history if we are to provincialize European knowledge and sufficiently address the question of power in West's relationship with the non-West.

If we are to talk about the West's domination of the process of globalization, its will to universalise, to speak for and over others, we might start with what Giordano Nanni called one of its most significant manifestations: absolute time; itself a legitimising tool in colonial dominance.⁴⁴ Time-keeping as a practice to bring order and regulate was pedestaled by Christian monasteries and was later reproduced by Christian missions in the colonies. Both of these institutions were considered as bastions of regularity surrounded by temporal "wilderness".⁴⁵ This wilderness encompasses the uncivilized, the savages, but also nature itself; regularity of the parcelled out clock-time independent of nature's rhythms become another source of Europe's sense of superiority of non-Western societies who lacked such a transcendent time.⁴⁶ Nanni even names the opposition between regularity and irregularity as one the polarizing features of the colonial Us vs Them dichotomy, a tool for Othering.⁴⁷

Engaging with Irigaray's thought, philosopher Sadie Plant writes of this Othered wilderness that features in patriarchal and colonial discourses more generally as being met with two simultaneous reactions that seek to curb its excessive, threatening potentiality, that seek to have a relationship with the Other devoid of vulnerability. The first is mastery, solving the relationship through control over nature, women, the colonized. The second is appropriation, to render harmless by making the various Others same with the ideal, neutralize them by making them interchangeable with the ideal and each other.⁴⁸ Also, the imposition of ever-more abstract time helped naturalize time-space of linearly progressing history centring the Euro-Atlantic civilization (consciously or otherwise), integrating the rest of the planet into an already unitary story of a single humanity as predefined by the West was then all the more logical.

Delimitation of Western ontology

The best way to begin understanding Western ontology is to acknowledge its existence as opposed to following its premises without pause. One option is to look at Latour's critique of Ulrich Beck's cosmopolitanism. In Beck's conception, conflicts between different groups of people rest on their differing views of the same world, on superficial interpretations.⁴⁹ He relies on the idea of a shared world, singular and true, and of belonging in it (cosmopolitanism) delineated by the Stoics and by Kant.⁵⁰ Not only is it Eurocentric and therefore limits what is or can be part of the cosmos, it also

⁴³ Plant, S. (1995). The future looms: weaving women and cybernetics. *Body & Society*, 1(3–4), 45–64.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034x95001003003>. p. 61; Jullien, F., & Todd, J. M. (2009). *The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject through Painting*. The University of Chicago Press. p. 4-6.

⁴⁴ Nanni, G. (2012). *The colonisation of time*. Manchester University Press. p. 2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴⁸ Plant, S., (1995), p. 62.

⁴⁹ Latour, B. (2004). WHOSE COSMOS, WHICH COSMOPOLITICS? *Common Knowledge*, 10(3), 450–462.

<https://doi.org/10.1215/0961754x-10-3-450>. p. 454.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 453.

limits what can be the objects and who the subjects of politics by reducing the inclusion of, for example, land or gods in the negotiation to matters of opinion. That is why Latour instead advocates for Isabelle Stengers' conception of cosmopolitics, which would keep both the question of cosmos and politics open. If the problem is not conflicting opinions of the same world, but inhabiting of different worlds, solution is a matter of building new realities to inhabit, not of correction.⁵¹

Drawing on Carl Schmitt, Latour then argues that if the West sees wars as happening in an already common world, it needs to see its enemies as somehow wrong. Such enemies are not opponents that can indeed win and thus, are not equal opponents either. Wars that the West wages, therefore, are police and pedagogical in nature, which is followed by an assumed Western responsibility for its assumedly misguided enemy.⁵² Even in a perceived peacetime, the typically representational philosophy of the West, which posits and ultimate reality beyond appearances, prearranges the limits of the possible and acceptable with already preset ends. That ultimate reality can work as an arbiter of truth or propriety even if one allows for multiple perspectives to exist because in the end, it is only that reality which matters, and West has an inherent monopoly on it. Latour writes that rather than an inauthentic peace, he would prefer a war that allows its sides to develop a common world. Because I want to particularly focus on power and violence that comes with Western ontology, the next angle I introduce will frame the ontological conflict we find ourselves in as an already ongoing war, stressing the violence and tension entailed and leaving more room for the policed side's agency to be thought.

This angle is offered by CCRU's⁵³ "hyperstitional model", which allows us to think Western ontology as embedded within a larger universe of possibilities, itself being only one possible entity among infinites of alternatives. In said model, reality is not opposite to fictions but composed from them.⁵⁴ It does not consider language and signs to be means for creating an image of reality that would be as faithful as possible, for it does not operate with an expectation of a definite truth to reflect or approximate. According to the model, signs directly intervene in reality, which is ceaselessly in the making, and enable the emergence of new entities. This is contrary to representational realism that takes an absolute reality beyond appearances for granted, but it also should not be mistaken for a focus on the independence of abstractions, nor for an understatement of the importance of realness or degree of realization. While the model denies all truth, that is any "single, authorized version of reality", it also affirms an "excess of realities".⁵⁵ The reality posited by Western ontology, is therefore, simply one possibility among infinites of others.

What is called Western ontology here has a lot in common with what CCRU dubs The One God Universe, or OGU⁵⁶ for short, in their schematic. It is the dominant reality-making control program characteristic for denying and ignoring the manifoldness described above and propounds that there is only one reality on which it has ultimate monopoly. The fictions OGU employs to produce reality are deemed facts while shunning different fictions as deceptions or delusions. It hails homogeneity and abhors multiplicity, it favours a universal, unitary Truth. Its goal is to impose control and predictability so absolute that its ideal is a state of deathly stupor in which any newness, change, or movement cannot make a difference.⁵⁷ OGU too, however, is only utilising signs to mould reality, but it obfuscates this role by misconstruing its influence as nothing but a mechanism to represent the Truth. Treating its exclusivity as self-evident and incorporating every alternative into itself as invalid impostors are all

⁵¹ Latour, B., (2004), p. 454.

⁵² Ibid., p. 455.

⁵³ Cybernetic Culture Research Unit, or CCRU for short, was a collective of Warwick University scholars engaging in experimental philosophy.

⁵⁴ CCRU (2017), *Writings 1997-2003*. see: Lemurian Time War, Hyperstition.

⁵⁵ CCRU (2017), see: Lemurian Time War, The One God Universe.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ CCRU (2017), see: Lemurian Time War, Escaping Control.

among the tactics of OGU that fall into its overall modus operandi: defining in advance how foreign entities can be approached and what can possibly be real through the denial of alternatives.

Robert J. C. Young finds similar motifs in the works of Levinas, who wrote about the need for totality that permeates Western philosophy. The convergence of patriarchal and colonial oppressiveness happens along the line of this desire and seeps into imagination and thought.⁵⁸ The need for totality fuels the drive to define self as a positive to the negatives of the Other, but Manichean dualism is certainly not the sole aspect. Far from peripheral, the favouring of totality and unity informs even the core driving ideas of Western thought. Being itself is defined as a resolution of conflicts, the integration of difference into identity, as an end to becoming.⁵⁹ As different peoples are made part of a single humanity, so does a person become an individual of a particular personhood.

The lives of the people and their past join a singular narrative of History centring Europe; not necessarily geographically or geopolitically, but by reading all history through the values and tropes of the West, seeing them as part of a unified development.⁶⁰ Violent incorporation into the linear narrative of progress happens through imposition of History, an example would be the movement from slavery to liberty⁶¹ as a standard to measure history with. It made European history into a grand story of progress, equipping those who keep its memory with idealizing lens and a baton to discipline stories yet unaligned.

In anticipation of future unity towards which history moves both teleologically and theologically, all otherness we encounter presently needs to be assimilated and appropriated by the active, possessive self. In this necessarily violent, reductive, and appropriative activity of ontological imperialism, identity is protected, which enables the identical to have more power to act unconstrained, freely. Freedom, according to Levinas, is therefore predicated on making same, making mine. By being synonymous with the protection of identity, freedom is to be achieved by encompassing everything under a totality pre-defined by the West. The ongoing history of colonial planetary arrogation and Western ontology mirror each other.⁶²

All knowledge, similarly, is to be subsumed into one; localized particular is reduced to a timeless, uprooted universal that is, however, no less historically Western. There is a gap between that which is subjected to change and the absolute Truth beyond, a gap that was productive for Western thought across its history.⁶³ The distinction between phenomena and things-in-themselves following this pattern affirms the idea of a single nature being perceived differently by different cultures, but nonetheless encompassed by Western science and method posturing as neutral knowing that predefines this whole arrangement.⁶⁴ Other needs to be robbed of its alterity if it is ever to be recognized, made relatable, or even thought, because it would otherwise contradict the basic expectation of Truth as a definitive, immobile, neutral object already present in the world. As Latour writes, the Western civilization is fixated on the idea of movement without deformation, on constants beyond the fuzziness of time, space, and life.⁶⁵

Imposing abstract ideals is the philosophical domestication of the other, be it female or non-Western, it is a matter of control that is the main ordering principle of contemporary societies.⁶⁶ As

⁵⁸ Young, R. (2004). *White mythologies: Writing History and the West*. Routledge. p. 34-37, 42.

⁵⁹ Young, R., (2004), p. 44.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 33, 42.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 33-34.

⁶² Ibid., p. 45.

⁶³ Jullien, F., (2009), p. 4-7.

⁶⁴ See: Law, J. (2015). What's wrong with a one-world world? *Distinktion*, 16(1), 126–139.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1600910x.2015.1020066>.

⁶⁵ Latour, B., Trains of Thought. The Fifth Dimension of Time and its Fabrication. In: Perret-Clermont, A. (2005). *Thinking time: A Multidisciplinary Perspective on Time*. Hogrefe and Hupher Publishers, p. 179.

⁶⁶ In the sense established by Deleuze in his "Postscript on the societies of control".

CCRU writes: “Power operates most effectively not by persuading the conscious mind, but by delimiting in advance what it is possible to experience⁶⁷.” By regulating time, reducing any temporal movements and rhythms to separate static segments, the craved constants that withstand the turmoil of history can be realized, processes can be turned into actualizations of these constants, and the world, just like the humans and things in it, can be brought closer to the transcendent Ideal it represents.⁶⁸

Inhibited synthesis

To appreciate the power of Western ontology, we should discuss how the thinking it informs prefigures political arrangements. That is why I turn to Nick Land’s early work, in which he describes how the arrogating dynamic discussed in philosophical terms through Levinas and the OGU functions in more concrete historical terms.

According to Land, even though enlightenment societies are more dynamic and outward-looking than their feudal predecessors, they still cling to a transcendent ideal that is markedly patriarchal and identity-oriented.⁶⁹ Modernity therefore engenders a paradoxical desire to continuously expand, improve, and remain open whilst remaining the same, retaining its identity despite its growth (movement without deformation, change without vulnerability). That is why enlightenment societies need to be occupied with its outside. Encounter with otherness is a necessary part of any learning experience or expansionary endeavour, which comes with a promise of growth hand in hand with the anxiety-inducing threat of violating the sacrosanct identity.⁷⁰

Similarly to Young through his reading of Levinas, Land characterizes Western modernity as “appropriative.” Because it seeks a relationship with the Other, but does not want any vulnerability a relationship entails, it needs to act one-sidedly from a position of mastery. Because the outside is both attractive and repugnant, being both promising and threatening, the basis of the relationship has to be exploitation. Land likens the enlightenment society to a rapist acting on desire mixed with hatred⁷¹; a comparison which brings together patriarchal and nationally or culturally chauvinistic themes that mix in Sinophobic discourse as well (e. g. fetishization of Western-aligned Asians simultaneously with demonization of the non-aligned). With the shift from feudalism to capitalism, but also with civil rights shifts that resulted in further inclusion of non-Whites in Western societies, “it became impossible to simply exclude novelty, it could only be appropriated, stamped with a constant form, and integrated into an immutable formal system”.⁷² After all, race science and taxonomy have a shared history, Linnaeus himself have been developing them side by side.

Since the kind of globality we live in was set up by enlightenment societies through colonialism, modernity’s paradox has been imprinted into the global system we find ourselves in. Land explains the post-war global setup on South African apartheid which was itself an encapsulation of the neo-colonial order, its microcosm. Both the global system and the South African apartheid predicates the relation between the White, developed core and non-White exploited periphery on simultaneous political

⁶⁷ CCRU Writings, *Lemurian Time War, Escaping Control*. Furthermore: Formatting time and enforcing uniformity is based on gendered and racialized standards. To read more about the concrete manifestations of this, I recommend Joe Zadeh’s article that draws from Nanni’s book I previously cited: <https://www.noemamag.com/the-tyranny-of-time/>.

⁶⁸ Latour, B. In: Perret-Clermont, A., (2005), p. 86.

⁶⁹ Land, N. (1988). Kant, capital, and the prohibition of incest. *Third Text*, 2(5), 83–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528828808576206>. p. 85.

⁷⁰ See: Parisi L. & Dixon-Román, E., (2020). https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/recursive-colonialism-and-cosmo-computation/.

⁷¹ Land, N., (1988), p. 87.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 89.

distance and economic proximity.⁷³ The core profitably imports labour and resources that allows for placating comfort within their societies, and in turn exports political and social instability.

France, for example, exerts influence over Françafrique through financial control the region and ownership of local resources and infrastructure. The resulting economic hardships in the periphery are usually paired with interventionism in the form of military deployment or sanctions, which form a baseline of political instability upon which other imports can be piled up. Among these imports is Euro-American conservatism that usually comes in the guise of traditional values that in fact has no local history, as is the case in Uganda, where evangelical preachers from the USA popularized anti-LGBT rhetoric. In certain echelons of Western society, guaranteeing LGBT rights is seen as a trait of a civilized society with which Third World countries often can be contrasted; racist content can be properly demarcated and assigned to actors which can be blamed, no mind is however paid to current influence of Western anti-LGBT proponents in those countries or the historical influence of European colonizers on the livelihoods of queer people, for complexity dissolves in the moral arena, in which neat boundaries between the racist and not-racist can be drawn.

It works similarly in the case of climate crisis. While Western countries are at the same time the biggest polluters historically and installed the global systems that endanger global ecology, they still find the gall to blame colonized countries. Not to mention that Third World countries are usually more struck by the calamities caused by climate change and that the damage caused by Western consumption is usually offshored to the Global South.⁷⁴ Put simply, “class positions within the global economy are being distributed on a racial basis, which implies an effective, if not a juridical, apartheid”.⁷⁵ Land even suggests another view of racism as “regulated, automatic, and indefinitely suspended process of genocide,⁷⁶” because the global distribution of risk is dispensed along racial lines. This is contrary to both the image of genocide as a disruptive event and of racism as an active moral failing.

While the West affects, intervenes, but also owns critical resources and infrastructure in the Global South and exports instability through different channels, through media, through off-shored hazardous production and risks, or through otherwise, its responsibility is secondary to the international order that formulates the interaction between nation-states as that of legal equals. An order inscribing national sovereignty enables the redistribution of blame for the domestic situation caused by Western interference and influence on the given state itself – this de-iure distance which discards the interpretation of much of Western influence as an aggression (and any outright aggression redefines as a pedagogical or police operation) legitimizes the patronizing attitude of the West towards its periphery and feeds into the narrative of its superiority.⁷⁷

Land dubs this interplay of patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist logic and its correspondent global political and economic system the inhibited synthesis.⁷⁸ The philosophical foundation of inhibited synthesis rests upon fixing a stable relationship with the Other in a manner repeatedly described in this chapter. If we already know what our relations to alterity will be, it cannot affect us as it cannot even assert agency outside the terms set out by sameness.⁷⁹ Not an arbitrary sameness, but one rooted in an abstract masculine subjectivity, as testified by Sadie Plant, and operating within an economic system in which capitalism and consumerism deflect our sensitivity to objects. When Kant,

⁷³ Ibid., p. 84.

⁷⁴ Hickel, J., Dorninger, C., Wieland, H., & Suwandi, I. (2022). Imperialist appropriation in the world economy: Drain from the global South through unequal exchange, 1990–2015. *Global Environmental Change*, 73, 102467. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2022.102467>. p. 5.

⁷⁵ Land, N., (1988), p. 91.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 92.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 84-85.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 86.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 87.

in whose thought, according to Land, this cultural intellectual project culminates, sought to develop a conception of knowing solely concerned with forms of appearance, or as Land writes, “the unchanging manner in which things must be if they are to be for us”, he reduced objects of knowledge to items that need to be “marketed” to the Enlightenment mind in order to be of concern.⁸⁰ Therefore, any new object of knowledge that is encountered can only be registered using preestablished gendered and economic categories as “a commodity with an owner”, or in other words, much of the ways we are able to relate is modelled on historically European trade and ownership relations.⁸¹

After Kant established this epistemological framework, he built an axiological one on top of it. If there is some limited space for negotiation regarding knowledge of the outside, in realm of morals there cannot and in fact must not be a relation to outside. That is because morality, for Kant, is defined by unconditionality, on universal validity for all rational being regardless of any context or difference. The only interaction morality can have with its outside, then, is to command. Land explains the implications of this proposition vividly, he mentions Kant’s own terms, “categorical imperative” and “Empire of Ends” and later variates on them by describing a moral subject following such precepts “a deaf Fuhrer barking impossible orders.”

Just as is the case with CCRU’s calling Western ontology authoritarian and dogmatic, Land’s use of provocative language to destabilize a feature of the Us vs Them narrative that reinforces the side we belong to as fundamentally righteous. They describe the circumstances of Western thought with words reserved for its Others, words loaded with moral implications that often serve to condemn and contrast with dominant liberal values. The goal of this practices, shared by this thesis, is to destabilize this self-assuredness, problematize the Western identity and also heighten the sensitivity towards the historicity of things otherwise though as common, natural, or universal. Or in other words, to create a productive discomfort in which denialism would have less chance to successfully deflect critique.

Young, through Lévinas, also employs provocative language when he writes “the imperialism of the same” is “the whole essence of freedom.”⁸² The choice of words is not accidental and means to highlight critical connections; the choice of terms links Western philosophical desire for oneness to Eurocentrism that incorporates everything into its universal narrative and to actual policies of the West qua its Others.⁸³ Freedom synonymous with the protection of identity and solved by bringing all under a totality pre-defined by the West is a trope that can be recognized outside just philosophical discourse, especially in discourses related to foreign policy or migration crises for example.

In summary, Western ontology treats reality as interchangeable with universal and unitary Truth over which it has supreme epistemological authority. The reproduction of this dogma is achieved through denial of difference and subsumption of otherness. On an axiological level, Western thought wishes to promote universal values with which to unify the world, but the only way it can do that is through unilateral violence to which there is no legitimate opposition. In the next chapter, less abstract ramifications of this logic will be discussed as the focus will shift towards political and axiological discourses.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 88.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 90.

⁸² Young, R., (2004), p. 45.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 44-45.

Ideological context: Defining the West through values, identity, and praxis

Liberalism as context

While liberalism may be hard to neatly define for political or social theorists, for the purposes of this thesis, keeping its definition broad and vague will be helpful. I intend to use the term liberalism in its most nebulous meaning so that it can encompass the system of values and set of assumptions shared (in whole or in part) by a diverse array of political actors and treated as given across Western(ized) countries. Consequently, I do not wish to present a picture of liberalism that would reduce its diversity or place it neatly on a left-right spectrum, nor do I wish to present a definitive and exhaustive history of it. My goal here is to look at the dominant political ideology in the West and trace how it draws upon ontological racism. Two dimensions of liberalism will need particular attention: 1) The entrenched view of the Third estate elites as the principal political subject and its project of regulating political pressures from the government and other citizens alike, i.e. civil rights. 2) A set of values that are in some measure shared across the political spectrum. Those values include property rights, freedom of speech, representative democracy, and concern for the free individual as the crucial political unit.

Because it draws on the philosophical toolkit explored in the previous chapter, liberalism presupposes its universal applicability, and therefore tends to impose itself. To appreciate its role within ontological racism, we need to discern how its self-image differs from a perspective that contextualizes it as an ideology of the colonialist West. Additionally, I hope to make the implications of liberal order's dominance clearer by assessing not just the racist bias, but more importantly the racist logic in the thought of its coryphaei.

Let us, then, approach liberalism as a range of possible accentuations of core liberal values. For example, the "liberal" label is used both for political actors advocating for and against government intervention⁸⁴. Libertarians, being on one end of this spectrum, would stress personal responsibility and negative liberty and would frown upon government intervention accordingly. Social democrats, on the other end, would probably view government as a guarantor of liberty and favour a welfare state. Both, however, come from the tradition of liberalism, deal with the same political questions and assumptions, and often differ only in inflection of the same values. Social democrats are also interested in curbing excessive power of the government and define their ideal state as congruent with liberal values. They too would invoke images of authoritarian governments to contrast their vision with. Likewise, libertarians' celebration of autonomy can be overshadowed by associating liberty with aristocratic aesthetics, with education and genteelness, while coincidentally depicting lower classes as unfit or unable to exercise liberty, associating lack of education and wealth with servility.⁸⁵

Resistance to autocracy and distaste for servility are understandable features of liberalism, since it was conceived as an ideology by and for burghers, members of a property-owning class that emerged when feudalism started to give way to capitalism. Liberalism championed a subjectivity that stands in opposition to the oppressive authority from above and to the servile, dependent and vulgar elements dwelling in society's lower strata.⁸⁶ As was previously established through the discussion of J. Diamond, the division between wealthy and poor has been naturalized by Social Darwinism and its precursors⁸⁷, or later by environmental determinism. Precisely because the history of liberalism is also

⁸⁴ Garton, V. *Language Inhuman* (2023), *Urbanomic.com*. https://www.urbanomic.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Documents_59_Garton.pdf. p. 1.

⁸⁵ Losurdo, D. (2011). *Liberalism: A Counter-history*. Verso. p. 243-244.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 213-215.

tied to the development of these naturalizing arguments, we must not disregard how the concept of race was used to legitimize stratification.

Liberal thinkers of the 19th century such as Lecky or Tocqueville warned against immigration as a danger to society's health, as an issue of race and blood. Through mixing of people, that is the introduction of alienness to a unified social body, Tocqueville argued, a population risks losing its innate nature. The loss of purity of one's blood was perceived as an obvious source of danger. Tocqueville's argumentation conflates the social with biological, setting stage for race to determine the political and social fate of the racialized, but his warnings also echo the immunological obsession with the protection of self-identity detailed in the previous chapter. Especially his statement "What frightens me is the prodigious number of foreigners that makes of you a new people," betrays how the ontological haunts the political.⁸⁸

Such stance is not dissimilar from that of Arthur de Gobineau, an influential formulator of scientific racism, or Herbert Spencer, one of the fathers of social Darwinism. He too voiced his support for the ban on miscegenation, a policy that, he asserted, was backed by biology. Benjamin Disraeli shared this predilection for racial purity, even stating that race is "the key to history", the ultimate tool to explain all historical events.⁸⁹ Disraeli was not just an influential thinker, but also a British prime minister and therefore an influential politician. It is important to bear in mind racism was not just an academic topic, but also an engine for policies targeting the colonies, immigrants, or most notoriously, the non-Whites in the United States of America. In summary, liberal subjectivity has political, social, but also ethnic connotations⁹⁰, the latter being focal for my thesis.

Racialization of freedom

So far, I have mentioned thinkers that, while contributing to the tradition of liberalism and representing countries where liberalism moulded politics, could be also described as conservative. This is not the case for the great liberal philosopher John Stuart Mill, who was by all means progressive with his pioneering of socialist and feminist causes. Nevertheless, he was also championing the enslavement of non-Whites for the purposes of civilizing them. He has seen the majority of humankind as idle savages that need to be "magnanimously" forced to work for their own good, for there was no other means to instil industriousness necessary for modern men.⁹¹ All our supposed to progress towards the ideals Europe has realized following the same historical pattern, for the other civilizations, indigenous peoples, and non-sedentary peoples are always lacking something that the west is obligated to provide.

This integration into the civilized world is not just spatial and cultural, but has a temporal and specifically historicist, Hegelian bend. Apart from narrativizing history as a progress towards liberty, it also treats it as a single, universalizing entity which dictates indelible rules any particular instance needs to follow. While Mill elevated self-rule as the highest political ideal, he also believed Africans or Indians are simply not ready yet to assume liberty, as they have not yet reached the necessary developmental stage.⁹² The validity of this progressive trajectory is based mostly in Eurocentric mythology and has little justification for being transposed outside of Western civilizational context other than a colonial one.⁹³ Race is i.a. a facet of time and History has a racial dimension. This applies to freedom, the

⁸⁸ Losurdo, D., (2011), p. 266.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 270.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 245.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 226.

⁹² Chakrabarty, D., (2008), p. 8.

⁹³ Amin, S. (2010). *Eurocentrism*. NYU Press. p. 249, 251.

Hegelian purpose of history, as well. Just as much as is the Western idea of liberty subject to appropriative ontology as written by Levinas, it is also subject to racialization.

Freedom in this racialized view is a biological, cultural, and also environmental trait indicating Whiteness. In a 1772 court case in England, a slaveowner was held responsible for bringing a slave from the colonies back home. The reasoning was that colonial laws, such as that allowing for slaveholding, were deemed applicable only for colonies, not for the “land of the free”. Slavery was to be reserved for the empire’s periphery, for it would only pollute the English air described in the court as “too pure for a slave to breath”. The motif of keeping the homeland pristine is present in contemporary politics too, although it is usually part of more explicit xenophobic statements. Historically, however, the abolition of slavery was followed by introduction of subtler institutions functioning as its replacement.⁹⁴ Since slaveholding was a matter of private property, it was to be protected as a civil right,⁹⁵ and the idea that the comfort of the people in the global core should be protected at the expense of the global periphery⁹⁶ has a certain continuity with this logic and usually communicates racism in more implicit manner.

Classical liberals advocated for an exclusionary liberty, they consciously maintained a natural hierarchy of people, a pyramid of races that decides which people are most capable of being free and which are inherently subservient. When asserting the quality of English colonists to the ones back in the Isles, the Founding Father John Adams exposed this sentiment in his proclamation: “We won’t be their negroes⁹⁷!” As noted before, this pyramid has a geographical component. Another influential liberal thinker, Montesquieu, wrote that people of the North had a spirit of independence the Southerners lack⁹⁸, a claim reiterated ad nauseam by many others. This schematic, however, is pragmatically malleable, it chooses and sidelines its targets according to necessity. The Prussian-American philosopher Lieber even excluded the French from the proper community of the free, blaming their “Celtic spirit of being swayed by masses”.⁹⁹

By now it is likely apparent I am centring the Anglo-Saxons. I do not do so accidentally, Mill himself drew the line between Britain and continental Europe later in his life, following a saying of his countrymen at the time: “Negroes start at Calais¹⁰⁰.” Furthermore, Anglo-Saxons have often featured as liberalism’s idols, the people in whom the spirit of individual independence supposedly has its highest manifestation. Even the French liberal Montesquieu hailed England as the freest country with the freest people, an epitome of liberal values. It remained so for Popper who idolized the British Empire as a force for freedom¹⁰¹, and there would be countless contemporary liberals who would hail the USA as a beacon of freedom, it is after all, even dubbed the “Leader of the Free World”. Not to mention these two great empires of recent history represented liberalism intellectually and likewise politically.

⁹⁴ Losurdo, D., (2011), p. 223-224. Typical example would be the replacement of slavery with convict leasing and penal labour within the context of racially biased mass incarceration.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 47.

⁹⁶ E.g. through the offshoring of damage caused by consumption in the Global North as mentioned in the previous chapter through a citation of Hickel et al., (2022).

⁹⁷ Losurdo, D., (2011), p. 49.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 268.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 264-265.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 264.

¹⁰¹ Hacoen, M. H. (1999). Dilemmas of Cosmopolitanism: Karl Popper, Jewish Identity, and “Central European Culture.” *The Journal of Modern History*, 71(1), 105–149. <https://doi.org/10.1086/235197>. p. 136.

So far, we have established that the community of the free has the Anglican race at the helm and is entitled to dominate people who are unable to govern themselves. Racialization legitimized the colonial enterprise and unprecedentedly severe forms of slavery, all in the name of forcible universalisation.¹⁰² This righteous domination must be protected, therefore, when the colonized fight back, it is interpreted as an attack on liberty itself, an act of uncivilized savagery.¹⁰³ And even acts of judicially sanctioned terror by Britain in 18th century India, which the British themselves acknowledged as unprecedentedly brutal, could still be interpreted as actions of a freedom-loving civilization commendably defending itself.¹⁰⁴

US president T. Roosevelt stated that if an inferior race attacks a superior one, the latter would be in the right to react by exterminating the former,¹⁰⁵ a warning not to be taken lightly by a representative of a country founded on the genocide of Turtle Island's indigenous inhabitants. Indeed, many modern intellectuals considered it merely natural for the superior race to annihilate its inferiors.¹⁰⁶ The lesser race is a victim to these natural laws, for the savages are not just servile, but passive, made to be acted upon. They are, in this sense, dehumanised, made part of nature, which is itself thought of as a standing reserve¹⁰⁷ waiting for commands and demands of humans, whose humanness Enlightenment associated precisely with standing above nature.¹⁰⁸ It is man who is truly free and therefore truly active, creative, and productive. Nature, on the other hand, can only reproduce, mimic, copy, its potential vast but untapped until man settles it and tames it. A reminder of how the patriarchal and the colonial is both driven by the desire to retain self-identity and yet control and own completely the Other.¹⁰⁹

It could be argued that issues listed above could be dismissed as things of the past on the grounds that they have been overcome. Leaving aside their overcoming was seldom peaceful and definitive, it is chiefly important to mention an aspect of liberalization that has the gravest implications for neocolonial setup: Emancipation in liberal context oftentimes takes the form of inclusion to systems of oppression.¹¹⁰ Inclusion of individuals can serve to deflect from systemic issues. The integration of past movements seen as hostile to the liberal order into the hagiography of the West can reaffirm that progress happens through gradual liberalization rather than through struggle and agency of the oppressed. To paraphrase scholar Jana Cattien, the institutional co-optation of "diversity" rhetoric helps maintain that West is indeed a consistently improving, progressive force which has supreme agency over changes that happen, not a system engaging in realpolitik responding to outside pressures, to the agency of the abject.¹¹¹

¹⁰² Losurdo, D., (2011), p. 249.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 250.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 251.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 330-331.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 332.

¹⁰⁷ Heidegger, M. (1977). *The question concerning technology, and other essays*. Facsimiles-Garl. p. 17.

¹⁰⁸ Nanni, G., (2012), p. 73.

¹⁰⁹ Plant, S., (1995), p. 60-62.

¹¹⁰ Losurdo, D., (2011), p. 342-343.

¹¹¹ Cattien, J. (2022). On not becoming Chinese: The racialisation of compliance. *Radical Philosophy*, 2.12, Spring, 3-9. <https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/commentary/on-not-becoming-chinese>. p. 3. Direct quote: „...the institutional co-optation of 'diversity' rhetoric continues to locate agency squarely within the 'West': 'we' must diversify what we teach, because 'we' have progressively come to understand the value of a diversified curriculum. This story suppresses an alternative reading, in which Western institutions 'diversify', not because they are progressively becoming better versions of themselves, but because they simply can no longer afford to ignore the economic, cultural and political importance of 'non-Western' nations...“

Racism and human rights

Human rights discourse is indispensable for defining the role of the West on the global scene, particularly qua the non-West. Although the human rights are predicated on their universal validity, their formulation is Eurocentric, they are rooted in the heritage of liberalism and Christianity, and the human rights discourse itself is predominantly produced by Western actors. Consequently, it carries with itself the will to impose, not negotiate, universal values pre-formed in the West in a civilizing mission of sorts.¹¹² Human rights discourse usually invokes a story about a battle of good and evil¹¹³, a simplification made dangerous precisely because the human rights corpus falls “within the historical continuum of Eurocentric colonialism.”¹¹⁴ The concept of human rights is not neutral, nor is the conception of human, that describes humanity as unified, every human an iteration of the universal, and yet prescribes a Eurocentric hierarchy.¹¹⁵

Human rights are the moral core of the international order, which entrenches Western paradigms and biases through its institutions.¹¹⁶ They are entrenched and therefore invoked by a spectrum of parties, by progressives and conservatives alike, sometimes their invocations even contradict each other.¹¹⁷ As we know from Land’s writings, the order distributes accountability along the lines of sovereign nation states, shifting focus away from existing power structures. In human rights discourse, states are depicted as either the guarantors or violators of human rights. But despite being explicitly presented as actors within human rights issues, they are not the source of the problems human rights discourse implicates. Scholar Makau Mutua argues that the discourse in question considers states instruments, neutral on their own. What decides whether a state is “good” or “bad” are the cultural traits upon which the state operates.¹¹⁸

The political anthropologist Nicola Perugini and academic Neve Gordon explain on the example of Italian invasion of Ethiopia (1935-1936) how the recognition of sovereignty and integration to the international order facilitated the military action. While in previous colonial invasions, it was the inapplicability of international laws on the “savage” that legitimized the colonizer’s actions, in this case it was the applicability of it that was cited as a pretext. Of course, the legitimation of aggression was made possible because Ethiopia, despite its recognized sovereignty, was still racialized, understood as yet incompletely civilized. This way, the inclusion in international community perpetuates colonial exclusion on racial basis.¹¹⁹

Mutua explains that human rights concerns are perceived through a triadic relationship between metaphorical savages, victims, and saviours. Savage is that which contradicts Western civilizational values and drastically deviates from its norms of political organization. Victims are those at the receiving end of savagery, they are depicted as helpless and innocent, essentially at the mercy of saviours, who are represented by Western governments, NGOs, and other institutions. Saviours

¹¹² Mutua, M. W. (2001). Savages, Victims, and Saviors: the metaphor of Human rights. *Harvard International Law Journal*, 42(1), 201–246. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=727197>. p. 221, 233-235.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 202.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 204.

¹¹⁵ Wallenhorst, N., & Wulf, C. (2023). *Handbook of the Anthropocene: Humans between Heritage and Future*. Springer Nature. p. 666.

¹¹⁶ Mutua, M., (2001), p.214.

¹¹⁷ Perugini, N., & Gordon, N. (2015). *The human right to dominate*. Oxford University Press. p. 6.

¹¹⁸ Mutua, M., (2001), p. 202-203.

¹¹⁹ Perugini, N., & Gordon, N. (2019). Between sovereignty and race: the bombardment of hospitals in the Italo-Ethiopian War and the colonial imprint of international law. *State Crime*, 8(1), 104–125. <https://doi.org/10.13169/statecrime.8.1.0104>. p. 121.

safeguard the victims and restrain the savages.¹²⁰ They bring positive cultural values and promote political organization modelled on the West, all of which is meant to correct civilizational ills, establishes rightful authority over the victims, and redeem that which is savage.¹²¹

Human rights are apparently reproducing the philosophy and ideology written about thus far. They radicalize the Us vs Them division, they treat Western values as universal, they expect submission and subsumption, and finally, they legitimize an international order in which the West can be both the policeman and the pedagogue. Benign ideals modelled on the abstract quickly break character when met with lived issues.¹²² Since human rights norms and the institutions that disseminate and enforce them are usually considered neutral saviours, they contribute to the quashing of agency of the colonized.¹²³ The neutrality of the norms is supported by ignoring existing geopolitical power relations and the racial connotations of the three metaphors Mutua lists.¹²⁴ By equating human rights violations with departure from liberal values and using their accounts to shame Third World countries, the superiority of the West is reestablished within the frame of this neutrality, as is the abject position of the non-West.¹²⁵

Finally, the thin line separating the victim from the savage is most apparent by human rights discourse necessitating their innocence and powerlessness, an entire fantasy without which they could not raise the sympathies and interest of the Western saviours.¹²⁶ Victim has to be helpless and rely on the saviour, only a savage uses violence (the illegitimate violence that threatens liberal values and institutions). Rejection of victimhood features in propaganda legitimizing Western aggression. Fascist¹²⁷ Italy blamed the destruction they caused on Ethiopians because they claimed it was them who first broken the standards of civilized conduct¹²⁸, ignoring power imbalance and the overall context of the conflict. Italy portrayed Ethiopia as unable to comprehend proper cultural norms due to their race¹²⁹, which was further corroborated by journalists¹³⁰ or another ostensibly neutral Western institution, the Red Cross.¹³¹ And so is legitimized the civilizing violence which targets the illiberal, the savage aggressor, the non-Western and non-White, its excesses ignored,¹³² or minimized. For example, the violence of the saviour is often portrayed as precise, surgical, clean, able to dispense justice according to its intention, and therefore justifiable.¹³³

Even in the 21st century, Amnesty International (AI), a pre-eminent human rights NGO, campaigned against the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, so that the saviour can keep using its “humanitarian” violence to protect human rights from the savage. To make the continuity of colonial

¹²⁰ Mutua, M., (2001), p. 203-204.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 205.

¹²² Davies, G., & Davis, G. (2007). Habermas in China: Theory as Catalyst. *The China Journal*, 57, 61–85. <https://doi.org/10.1086/tcj.57.20066241>. p. 81-82.

¹²³ Mutua, M., (2001), p. 237.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 207.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 224-225

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 229-230.

¹²⁷ If the inclusion of *Fascist Italy* as an example for the conduct of liberal West seems odd, I recommend Ishay Landa's *The Apprentice's Sorcerer: Liberal Tradition and Fascism*. I believe it to be counterproductive to dismiss fascism as part of Western intellectual tradition, in the very least in the assessment of colonialism's impact of Western thinking.

¹²⁸ Perugini, N., & Gordon, N., (2019), p. 107.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 107-108.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 113.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 117.

¹³² Ibid., p. 113, 117.

¹³³ Perugini, N., & Gordon, N., (2015), p. 4. Also: Davies, G., & Davis, G., (2007), p. 80-81.

thinking apparent, let me rephrase it as such: According to AI, Western countries are supposed to keep protracted interventions in former colonies to promote civilized values. Interestingly, AI refused to adopt a political prisoner, because they did not renounce violence as means to fight against apartheid. The name of this “terrorist”, as he was dubbed by Western countries and officially listed as such by the US until 2008, was Nelson Mandela.¹³⁴ Amnesty International is quick to sanction the violence of the saviour, but a communist black man using violence against settler colonialism and apartheid needs to be whitewashed before he can be seen as anything but a savage, or a victim at best.

Put simply, the agency of the abject is always policed in the discourse structured by Mutua’s triad. The only times a victim can fight back without losing its victimhood is when they are white, or at the very least strongly aligned with Western values and interests. Invoking rights has become an important part of elite discourse, because they can “frame events legally and morally”, which helps “legitimizing certain interpretations of domination while delegitimizing others”.¹³⁵

Liberalism and the supremacy of language

The theorist Vincent Garton suggests another angle to try understanding liberalism and its interpretations with, which is to focus on liberalism’s privileging of language above all.¹³⁶ Even if language supremacy cannot encompass liberalism completely, it can help see how all the various phenomena I tried to shed light on so far interconnect.

An obvious example is the importance liberalism attributes to freedom of expression, of speech. It is tied to the preferred political practice¹³⁷, to places where issues are resolved through speech driven by reason, be it literally the parliament itself, or an agora, a public sphere where rational discourse may be cultivated. According to Habermas’ ideal model, a public sphere is a kind of arena in which issues can be resolved through a competition of arguments and where the better one wins because it does not matter who utters it, all participants are equal as rational rhetors.¹³⁸ Habermas’ debating is similar to Kant’s philosophizing, where object is secondary to method which reduces objects to rearticulations of the favourable practice. Garton cites Kojève to aptly explain this: “To speak with Kant is to speak forever without ever contradicting oneself.”¹³⁹

Notably, free expression is not merely about stating one’s opinion, it is a performative and enactive act, it conveys something about oneself and does something to the world. The weight of stating an opinion only grows if people are expected to have opinions and voicing them is considered an integral part of public practice, a way to belong in a liberal society. By expressing oneself, one is becoming a free individual, one acts in accordance with liberal values and can participate in liberal organization, i.e. engage in “non-physical” political action using speech. Not just through any speech, but through rational speech, because to act on reason is to have agency that comes from within, to act on impulse is to be servile, influenced by the outside that harms the integrity of the enclosed individual.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ Perugini, N., & Gordon, N., (2015), p. 3.

¹³⁵ Perugini, N., & Gordon, N., (2015), p. 10-11.

¹³⁶ Garton, V., (2023), p. 1.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

¹³⁸ Dean, J. (2003). Why the Net is not a Public Sphere. *Constellations*, 10(1), 95–112.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.00315>. p. 96.

¹³⁹ Garton, V., (2023), p. 3.

¹⁴⁰ Lester, Q. (2021). Bio-orientalism and the yellow peril of yellow life. *Catalyst*, 7(1), 2–20.

<https://doi.org/10.28968/cftt.v7i1.34382>. p. 4. Liberal subjecthood will be described more in a later chapter.

Political, or intellectual, action enclosed in specialized spaces have specific historical connotations (as in reality, such spaces were usually exclusive and made possible through the exploitation of those not included¹⁴¹) and is tied intimately with the middle class and its “obsession” with the freedom of speech¹⁴², it is not a neutral ideal. In liberalism, demonstration is supposed to be a contained collective expression. In Czech, “to vote” literally means to voice (an individual’s viewpoint) or to give voice, to allow another individual to speak in my stead, to represent me just like “language represents the world”. Individuals are making their will known through speech, expressing oneself or voting is both a political action and an act of reproduction of one’s identity. Apart from being an expression of individual authenticity, voting is supposed to be a rational input within the political system where politics are done through discourse that is ideally as respectful and contained as possible, so that violent can stay outside of the political.¹⁴³

Being able to act with one's speech, enact reality through speech, is a matter of political power and authority.¹⁴⁴ Not just in the conception of Habermas, to prevent individuals from harming or overpowering via speech, participants of discourse should anticipate that they can arrive at “a mutual understanding in which the same utterances are assigned the same meaning.”¹⁴⁵ The possible understanding of an utterance’s meaning is a priori constricted by universals, which are meant to guarantee a definitive consensus, but given they are anchored in Western colonial history, they also encode racialized premises.¹⁴⁶ Even when the universality is not treated as given and relies openness towards the outside which needs to be incorporated if the universalist ideals are to be realised, this openness is predicated on a predefined relationship to otherness and any act of inclusion can be reinscribed as realization of an ideal that was always already there, integrated as part of a progressive narrative of history, and employed again to exclude anything that can only be emancipated by being brought into this universality, not on its own terms.

Public sphere is not a quintessentially neutral political space. It can be described as a place where opinions can be exchanged, a marketplace of ideas, which are metaphors that draw on the experience of burghers, chiefly by and for whom liberalism was formulated. Politics displaced into the marketplace by this logic¹⁴⁷ reinforces the idea of an individual, who is in equal measure a political and an economic agent. Bolstered individualism boosts a libertarian sensitivity that frowns upon drastic systemic changes (that disturb both individuals and individualism) and fosters preference for a sort of GoFundMe-campaign solutionism that simulates agency through the market. Any acts that affirm the control and responsibility of the individual, be it donating to charity or battling climate change by reducing one’s carbon footprint, can thrive in a liberal environment.¹⁴⁸

Marketization commodifies political issues, which helps with their sublimation into the abstract. Privileging of abstract thought is congruent with idealistic values, with the pursuit of transcendent purity. Creating enclosures such as that of a public sphere or a debate distance one from materiality and its chaotic malleability and undefinition. Another such ideal enclosure is the individual who, defined by free will and free expression, interacts with the outside world solely by rational argument.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴¹ Dean, J., (2003), p. 96.

¹⁴² Garton, V., (2023), p. 2.

¹⁴³ Garton, V., (2023), p. 2.

¹⁴⁴ Butler, J. (2021). *Excitable speech: A Politics of the Performative*. Routledge. p. 85.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 87-88.

¹⁴⁷ Land, N., (1988), p. 84.

¹⁴⁸ McGary, H. (2009). Liberalism and the problem of racism. *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 47(S1), 1–15.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2041-6962.2009.tb00135.x>. p. 11-12.

¹⁴⁹ Hayles, N. K., (1999), p. xii.

Perhaps the quintessentially liberal philosophy can be found in the analytic tradition prominent among the Anglo-Saxons. Its liking towards thought experiments and imagined scenarios that illuminate problems through reason alone, unbothered by hurdles of context, all illustrate a dispassionate interaction. What these also illustrate is the reduction of materiality, as analytic philosophers quickly impose their models on reality riddled with context and excess.

Commenting on liberal thought, the Jamaican philosopher Charles W. Mills explains that it cannot be detached from an epistemological ignorance integral to White identity; to become successfully White, one has to perceive the world through a racialized simulation that obfuscates the racial dimension of universality.¹⁵⁰ He describes the resulting epistemological opacity of racism as evasive and self-deceptive, because in racialized simulation, the production and communication of knowledge relies on denial or scepticism towards materiality precisely because it intends to represent, express, engage with the world on the level of sign, and because it intends to keep the identity of Whiteness intact. When slavery was reserved for the colonies, or when international system masks neo-colonial relations, it is an example of a world being inscribed within a simulation that maintains a performance or expression of morality over its practice.

An appeal to universal humanity, to bare human dignity outside of geopolitics, outside of history, outside of racism, is a way of defaulting to preestablished, colonially imposed notions, schematics, and categories. By separating case from context, one is invited to reduce experience to a standard, ignore the experience of the other, and translate any new knowledge into premediated narratives of good and evil based on racialized hierarchies, no matter if they are biological or cultural in form. Decontextualization, generalization, and universalisation operate as tactics of denial, for remaining in the realm of the abstract is beneficial for reinforcing identity, keeping it intact, and validating its saviour role. This defensive denialism subsequently robs the opposition of legitimacy and agency, they cannot express themselves through speech, not can they act within the world through it. On top of that, blaming any sort of outside exculpates and cleanses the self so that its fundamental goodness can be assured both by reinforcing the sameness of identity and its distance from its opposites. I would hypothesize that this is how Western philosophical dynamics and liberal ideology form the basis for denialist discursive practices van Dijk describes.

To inscribe the world in a linguistic simulation¹⁵¹ is to privilege speech over action¹⁵², abstract over concrete, ideal over material, while conflating them at the same time. The simulation overrides other possible lived experiences in much the same way the OGU does with other realities.¹⁵³ It dissolves other realities within its system of signs and being backed by an ultimate reality beyond the linguistic, it can rhetorically champion equality and justice while trivializing the brutality of the material mechanisms (no matter if ancient or contemporary) sustaining the simulation in various ways. The obsession with language simulation is most apparent in analytic philosophy I mentioned earlier, its need to transform every issue into signs that can be infinitely analysed through unparadoxical language in the realm of sole reason, which reproduces representational philosophy¹⁵⁴ and appropriative worldview.

The interconnectedness between liberalism and white supremacy is not accidental, it's rooted in history and in its still operating logic. To finalize our exposition of Western racism, we need to shift

¹⁵⁰ Mills, C. W. (2014). *The racial contract*. Cornell University Press. p. 17-19.

¹⁵¹ Garton, V., (2023), p. 2.

¹⁵² The supplanting of action with language can be observed at its most obvious in performative utterances about issues of climate change.

¹⁵³ Garton, V., (2023), p. 3.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

attention to how history and the way its narrativized constitutes the Western identity. We will look more generally how the Western ideology of history developed after the pivotal events of WW2 and we will reserve special concern for the schematic of Czech national history and its particular “Us vs Them” formula.

History of White protagonists as context

Holocaust and the Morals of History

The Holocaust is a pivotal event that marks a shift from the colonial register of formulating Western identity to the neocolonial one. To be clear, the reason I focus on the Holocaust is less to understand the event itself, but rather show what its narrativization can tell us about what kind of story Western history tells. In the second half of the 20th century, the grandiose rhetoric of White Man's burden gives way to a more benign talk of universal values and a new order devised to keep the world as far away as possible from the immorality represented by the ultimate evils of Holocaust. After the WW2, the West rebranded itself to maintain its role as the saviour and its position as the protagonist of history in light of the shock that the WW2 was and any moral failings that could be attributed to the West afterwards. Crucial is the common understanding of Holocaust as an aberration, a perversion of enlightenment, or even a particularly German matter, which all exemplifies a "strategic blindness to the violence intrinsic to Western culture."¹⁵⁵

This problem was perhaps most famously formulated by the intellectual Aimé Césaire, who indicted the West for being indignant and shocked by the conduct of Nazis, which did not differ in its evil compared to the conduct of the colonizers and was therefore consistent with the character of the West. What made the actions of Hitler and the Nazis unforgivable in the eyes of the West, Césaire adds, is that he applied the colonialist procedures to Europe.¹⁵⁶ Césaire questions the belief that Holocaust is an outlier by setting it firmly within the history of Western colonialism. Mere three decades before the genocide in Europe, the Germans have perpetrated another genocide in modern-day Namibia.

The core issue in discussing the Holocaust, that is debated yet influential, is the claim of its uniqueness, or to be exact, its externality to history and the impossibility to understand it.¹⁵⁷ This "sacralisation" makes the authoritative moral narrative of the West the key context within which the Holocaust should be perceived. Declaring the Holocaust is "the" genocide among genocides, a "total trauma that is un(re)presentable",¹⁵⁸ does not just limit the possibilities of its representation, but the possibilities of discourse; in other words, the Holocaust delimits how identities are formed and understood, and what kind of actors we can identify within history.¹⁵⁹ The symbol of Nazi genocide offers an interpretative frame that can position its user as persecuted, threatened and depict the opposition as the ultimate antagonists.¹⁶⁰

The narrativization of Nazi Holocaust, and the extermination of the Jews in particular, as an event beyond historical comprehension, a narrativization which turns the specificities of it into homogenized abstractions, has become formative for the Western postmodern experience.¹⁶¹ After postmodern scepticism started flourishing with the decline of modern imperial powers and the dissolution of their old regimes, the Holocaust came to serve as the last moral absolute of the West that stands above relativization, its transcendence allowing to still distinguish between Good and

¹⁵⁵ Young, R., (2004), p. 164.

¹⁵⁶ Césaire, A. (2001). *Discourse on colonialism*. Monthly Review Press. p. 36.

¹⁵⁷ Finkelstein, N. (2000). The Holocaust industry. *Index on Censorship*, 29(2), 120–129. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03064220008536696>. p. 121.

¹⁵⁸ Stratton, J. (2000). Thinking Through the Holocaust. A discussion inspired by Hilene Flanzbaum (ed.), *The Americanization of the Holocaust*. *Continuum*, 14(2), 231–245. <https://doi.org/10.1080/713657704>. p. 231.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

¹⁶⁰ MacDonald, D. (2007). First Nations, residential Schools, and the Americanization of the Holocaust: Rewriting Indigenous history in the United States and Canada. *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 40(04). <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0008423907071107>. p. 995.

¹⁶¹ Stratton, J., (2000), p. 231.

Evil.¹⁶² The Holocaust was not just made an unique event, but also a universal trope which can be applied to different events¹⁶³, making them instances of a certain moral pattern which can be fitted into the narrative that calls for the international protection of human rights.¹⁶⁴

Holocaust is thus a significant part of the universalizing motion of Western thought. Indeed, it has been described as an attack on fundamental Judeo-Christian axioms, or as the only instance in which genocidal violence has been turned against humanity itself.¹⁶⁵ But as J. Stratton writes, it is namely in “Christian America, [where] this Jewish event now serves as the lowest common moral denominator”.¹⁶⁶ The American reception of the Holocaust needs to be examined closely, not just because of the overall cultural impact America has on the West¹⁶⁷, but also because America very explicitly integrates the Holocaust as a component of the moral history of the West.

Americans interpreted the Holocaust through Christian and liberal lens, emphasising the Jews as martyrs to human liberty.¹⁶⁸ An American stage adaptation of Anne Frank’s diary managed to decontextualize her story and remake it into a morality tale thematizing human rights with a happy ending, making her “the patron saint of liberalism”.¹⁶⁹ Through popular media, Americans are outsourcing the failings of modernity by projecting them onto others that can function as antagonists. Nazi Germany then becomes an allegory for the failure of the West, which sets up a story where America can play the role of a heroic rescuer.¹⁷⁰ But the most glaring example of America integrating the Holocaust into its history¹⁷¹ is the creation of federally funded United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM).

It is located in the US capital, in the National Mall, a place filled with landmarks and memorials carrying heavy symbolical weight for the nation. Placing a museum commemorating a genocide that did not happen on American soil already indicates the significance and universality Americans attribute to the Holocaust. Like the other memorials, they are not only places of memory, as they also instantiate a moral, ideological statement.¹⁷² The reason for including the USHMM in the company of other identity defining monuments was made clear by its council, when it decried racism and genocide as utterly un-American and condemned the Nazis as contrary to American values. The Holocaust has been presented as antithetic to what America represents.¹⁷³ By presenting the Holocaust as an ultimately anti-liberal deed, inconceivable for Americans, the museum engenders the portrayal of America as a moral protagonist in the world’s story.

The Holocaust as a unique event is part of greater moral narrative of history in which the liberal West, represented first and foremost by America, is the protagonist. Other genocides and violence at large, if it is to be made part of this story, needs to be evaluated according to these parameters. It cannot come as a surprise that anyone, from either side of the political aisle, will minimize Western atrocities,

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 233-234.

¹⁶³ Huyssen, A. (2000). Present pasts: media, politics, amnesia. *Public Culture*, 12(1), 21–38. <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-12-1-21>. p. 24.

¹⁶⁴ MacDonald, D., (2007), p. 998.

¹⁶⁵ Stone, D. (2010). *Histories of the Holocaust*. Oxford University Press. p. 207.

¹⁶⁶ Stratton, J., (2000), 234.

¹⁶⁷ Stiegler, B. (2011). *Decadence of industrial democracies*. Polity. p. 4-7, 14.

¹⁶⁸ Stratton, J., (2000), p. 233.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 239.

¹⁷⁰ Hansen, M. B. (1996). “Schindler’s list” is not “Shoah”: the second commandment, popular modernism, and public memory. *Critical Inquiry*, 22(2), 292–312. <https://doi.org/10.1086/448792>. p. 311.

¹⁷¹ MacDonald, D., (2007), p. 997

¹⁷² Stratton, J., (2000), p. 236.

¹⁷³ MacDonald, D., (2007), p. 998.

if they base their identity on the superiority of the Western culture, which is at the same time predicated on a moral superiority. That is why genocide of indigenous populations and the destruction of their civilizations is often being banalized or even justified because it introduced liberal values, Western culture, and rooted out barbarism, and the “savages” are somehow “better off” now,¹⁷⁴ or that thanks to their exploitation, we were able to refine and enjoy our culture.¹⁷⁵

The main problem with claims of uniqueness is that they can have a racial dimension. By denying similarities¹⁷⁶ or by being deliberately selective, one can prevent comparison, especially with colonial violence, minimize any relations or similarities with deeds perpetrated by history’s protagonists, and ultimately maintain the fundamental goodness of the West.¹⁷⁷ In short, uniqueness of the Holocaust can be specifically aimed to make comparison and contextualization impossible, as it would hurt the protagonist’s narrative. Justifying Western atrocities is necessary to maintain this historical narrative in which the West (and/or its values, Christianity etc.) can be posited as the ultimate good and its actions, however clouded by “mistakes”, has always contributed to “the” greater good. This narrative can be adopted by any society that adheres to the tenets of Enlightenment and its representatives, who stand in opposition to its political and racial others. It is a matter of belonging and participation in a moral community, to the rank of “saviours” as defined by Mutua.

Indeed, when I write about the Holocaust here, I do not mean the Nazi genocide of Jews or any other of its victims, but an episode within the great White story. Rebecca Jinks that in Western representations of genocides (especially those other than the Holocaust), it is usually the Western outsider who occupies the central position within the narrative.¹⁷⁸ The perspective of the victims is likewise schematised, abstracted, allowed to be only in a certain way, made same.¹⁷⁹ Atrocities are presented through “stock” stories, familiar images, anything that fits an already known narrative and forecloses engagement with anything other, with a difference the victims speech could present. The victims’ experience is aestheticized, their testimonies must be made same, generalized in order to be easy to consume for an emotional payoff and validation of values of the target audience, the White protagonists, who can self-identify with the sublimated remains of the victim.¹⁸⁰

Stories about the abuse of human rights too tend to be formatted in such a way that the different circumstances, testimonies, and cultural specificities meld into uniform, homogenized accounts framed by the culture of the narrator, that is the White protagonist. The empathetic identification they are meant to evoke is predicated on the reduction of differences into interchangeable and generic tropes. The resulting effects were well put by Birgitta Höijer who stated that “Compassion is often dependent upon ideal victim images,” to which Rebecca Jinks aptly adds that “perhaps the compassion evoked is also itself of a rather generic nature”.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁴ Stannard, D. E. In: Rosenbaum, A. S., (2009), p. 297-298.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 299.

¹⁷⁶ David E. Stannard disputes many of the arguments for uniqueness, whether they are based on quantitative or qualitative claims, intentionality, victimhood status of those who fought back, or the role of deprivation. See: Stannard, D. E. “Uniqueness as Denial: The Politics of Genocide Scholarship”. In: Rosenbaum, A. S. *Is the Holocaust Unique?* (2009), Routledge. p. 300-313.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 316. Also in Finkelstein, N. (2000), p. 121.

¹⁷⁸ Jinks, R. (2016). *Representing genocide: The Holocaust as Paradigm?* Bloomsbury Publishing. p, 106. I would argue that the reason why Holocaust narratives focus more on the victims themselves is precisely because they are being universalised, abstracted, and offered for self-insertion of the White audience. Non-White victims of genocide can mostly only be interpreted as victims in the sense defined by Mutua’s triad.

¹⁷⁹ Jinks, R., (2016), p. 129-130.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 130.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 131.

That the Western understanding of history, its own identity, and the philosophical foundation is crucial in regards to Western involvement with the world was well formulated by Petar Ramadanović as cited by Jinks: “This ‘West’ is not only its governments and NATO; this West is also the liberal, self-conscious but not self-reflective, subject who speaks ... who pretends to know what he sees, and who pretends to be able to use power ... without himself being affected by it.”¹⁸²

History, especially that of atrocities, is narrated from the vantage point of its White protagonist, which not only creates distance from the other, from specificities of events, but it precludes West’s historical role from being apprehended without resorting or drawing on the authoritative morality narrative. West, its intellectual and organizational systems, are all de facto exculpated, because even the recognized evils of the West can be resolved in a linguistic simulation happening in a moral arena, resignified as mistakes West is eminently equipped to absolve. Schematizing history then allows to interpret all events through prisms such as Mutua’s triad.

I would like to stress that building the USHMM and giving it such prominence, while also rhetorically distancing themselves from the Nazis, does not only function to associate positive traits with the ingroup and expel or denounce negative traits on a universal level, it also works on a particular level to by making the connections and similarities between America and the German Nazi project seem implausible, however substantiated they might be. Although they are not linked by rhetoric alone, it should not be dismissed Nazis used American westward expansion as metaphor to justify their annihilative violence.¹⁸³

Detailing the connections between Nazis and the USA is beyond the scope of my thesis, but I will provide a concise list of several of these connections so that readers can get an idea of the relation between the American settler colonial and the Nazi projects¹⁸⁴, and to offer the chance to engage in further reading: Both the practice and the logic behind using Zyklon B on people¹⁸⁵; Nazi inspiration in US race laws, treatment of Indians, and the idea of Manifest Destiny¹⁸⁶; American influence on the field of eugenics, a science much more alive than it might seem.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, it should not be taken lightly that the WW2 is often presented through myths that take antagonisms between Nazi Germany and the rest of the West as way more self-evident that can be reasonably argued and narrates the War precisely as a moral crusade, a chapter in West’s moral history.¹⁸⁸ Finally, to provide an example of how the framework of moral history may affect media practice, I would recommend an article by Barbara Ann Scott that succinctly showcases media spinning of US regime’s criminality, an article from 1997 which is perhaps even more interesting now in hindsight.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸² Jinks, R., (2016), p. 138.

¹⁸³ Rosenbaum, A. S., (2009), p. 314. Also see MacDonald, D., (2007), p. 1010.

¹⁸⁴ Let me also reference relevant passages in works already cited before: Losurdo, D., (2011), p. 338-339; Mutua, M., (2001), p. 213-214, 217.

¹⁸⁵ See: Romo, D.D. (2014). *Ringside seat to a revolution: An underground cultural history of El Paso and Juárez*. El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos Press., p. 240-243. Also see p. 226-227 for more context.

¹⁸⁶ See: Whitman, J.Q. (2018). *Hitler’s American model: The United States and the making of nazi race law*. Princeton University Press; Miller, R.J. (2020). Nazi Germany’s race laws, the United States, and American Indians, *SSRN Electronic Journal* [Preprint]. doi:10.2139/ssrn.3541009; Kakei, C.P. (2011). *The American west and the Nazi East: A Comparative and Interpretive Perspective*. Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁸⁷ See: Kühl, S. (2002). *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American racism, and German National socialism*. Oxford University Press.

¹⁸⁸ See: Shipley, T.A. (2020) *Canada in the world: Settler capitalism and the colonial imagination*. Fernwood Publishing, especially p. 131-173.

¹⁸⁹ See: Barbara A. S. (1977). *Peace Research*, Vol. 29, No. 2, p. 25-41.

Western Imperialism's Immoral Others

The Western liberal conception of the world has undergone its greatest crisis after the WW2. Racist ideology and its potential to mobilise for violent ends has been experienced by the Europeans themselves, which necessitated a reconsideration of racial thinking and discourse. Instead of racism becoming an atavism in Western societies, however, I argue it became updated to new circumstances. So, while we have seen a shift on the societal and institutional levels of racism, the civilizational and particularly ontological level has managed to survive without revolutionary changes. The West keeps its moral role in the world and is met with differently understood, but nonetheless immoral others.

Among the most influential codifiers of the image of history as a fight between liberal and illiberal forces is certainly the liberal ideologue Karl Popper.¹⁹⁰ In a true paradox of tolerance, he advocates for the violent imposition of Enlightenment values through imperialism. The empires he highlights as representatives of cosmopolitanism, liberty, equality, and individualism, are the Athenian and British ones; a selection that already betrays he is mainly interested in an idealized abstraction they can represent, namely a White supremacist phantasy of moral superiority.

Just like the British empire was, ancient Athens were idealized not just by Popper, but also other liberal intellectuals, who saw it as a model of an egalitarian, free, cosmopolitan, and individualistic society. Although Popper went as far as to invent an Athenian abolitionist movement to mitigate issues with this vision, with Athens' lack of openness. Without Athens being always already open, they could not be the sworn enemy of totalitarian Sparta and threatened by the conservative aristocrats at home. The story would lack its ideal protagonist. His denialist efforts to defend the pretence of moral superiority which can testify to the superiority of cultural values also betray what kind of community matters in his project and what kinds of violence are permissible – points made much clearer by the political theorist Hannah Arendt in her own political thought.

Arendt's signature philosophical move is to create and keep strict boundaries between concepts,¹⁹¹ arguably to police unwarranted nuance. She placed one such significant border between the political sphere and the private and social dimensions of life.¹⁹² While the political sphere, akin to Habermas' public one, is meant to be a common space of rational discourse, its well policed boundaries suggest more explicitly it is also an exclusive space. In fact, it can be argued that it is founded on the absence of others.¹⁹³ As we shall see in the following paragraphs, this absence is exploited both at the political and at the social and private levels.

According to Arendt, to be able to orient oneself in the common realm, one needs judgement, which she describes as an ability to see not just from one's own point of view, but through the eyes of all others present in the political space.¹⁹⁴ What is crucial for Arendt here, is that we can make different views present in our mind, and therefore represent them. This way, we can even represent the standpoints of those absent in the political sphere and cannot speak or be heard within. Representation of a view, however, is not about adopting the views of others, empathizing with them, or attempting

¹⁹⁰ In the two paragraphs dedicated to Popper, I draw on Hacoen, M. H., (1999), p. 135-138, 143-144.

¹⁹¹ Kautzer, C. (2019). *Political Violence and Race: A critique of Hannah Arendt*. *CLCWeb*, 21(3).

<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.3551>. p. 4.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁹³ Gines, K. T. (2014). *Hannah Arendt and the Negro Question*. Indiana University Press. p. 124-125. For detailed explanation see p. 43-58.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

to perceive an issue through their perspective, it is about “being and thinking in my own identity where I actually am not”.¹⁹⁵

The identity is supposed to become an immobile mobile, move through different contexts unchanged and affirm itself by appropriating the views of others. Representing a standpoint is displacing it and inserting one’s own. The stated goal of becoming impartial and disinterested is defined by the act of affirming and imposing one’s identity by an act of representation, which amounts to claiming ownership and authority over an essence and origin of what pertained to the other. Finally, by cultivating this “disinterestedness”, this ability to become same and interchangeable, make differences irrelevant, through the power of disembodied reason, one can make themselves “the representative of everybody else”.¹⁹⁶ This rational political actor has a special faculty to speak “in stead”, to represent, anything and everything, because she can move entities beyond situatedness, beyond embeddedness, to the realm of the abstract, to a place of speech and expression. If any such political participant had her preconceptions founded on liberal and white supremacist premises, like Arendt did, they would be conveniently equipped to reproduce them, defend her positions, or deny the validity of attacks against her by using her supreme impartiality as a shield.

So much for the exploitation of absence in the political sphere, now let us focus on the situation outside of it. For Arendt, violence is necessary to not only maintain, but to even establish a non-violent political enclosure. Only there should equality be practiced, because enforcing it in private realm would be crossing the sacred boundaries between spheres and infringing on freedoms. Battling inequality in private and social spheres would, according to her, contradict the very notion of human freedom from necessities of life which is to be achieved by exploiting the reproductive labour of women and productive labour of workers, for it is only natural and right for the strong to stomp on the weak. Indeed, the exclusive political space should be dedicated only to this heterogenous elite which is entitled to use violence in private spheres so they could establish an enclosure of equality for themselves, where they could develop their virtues after a hard day of denying the dignity of others. By now it should not be surprising Arendt also asserted Americans should be free to engage in their customs of racial discrimination and this freedom of theirs should be protected, as equality only belongs in politics (and as we shall see, because she legitimizes White supremacist racism specifically).¹⁹⁷ One has to commend Arendt for her intellectual honesty; unlike the likes of Popper, when she modelled her political ideal on Athens, she did not shy away from including the slavery part.

Now I will argue that she conceived of this theory precisely to maintain the racist thought the West has been building throughout its colonial history, to vindicate it even after fascism, whose evil she can relegate to a general source of evil found outside the West and outside Whiteness. To develop my argument, I will present her discussion of rights of Black people in the USA and her understanding of Africa and the roots of White racism.

That racism (and classism for that matter) was not an accidental part, but an integral one to her project, should be clear not just from her exclusivist conception of politics, but her entire philosophical outlook which privileges the ideal over the material. This sentiment of hers is encapsulated in a statement she made in reaction to Black Americans fighting against discrimination in jobs, housing, and education: “This is understandable; oppressed minorities were never the best judges on the order of priorities in such matters and there are many instances when they preferred to fight

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 125.

¹⁹⁶ Gines, K. T., (2014), p. 125-126.

¹⁹⁷ Kautzer, C., (2019), p. 5-6, 9, 11.

for social opportunity rather than for basic human or political rights.”¹⁹⁸ Indeed, fighting for particular interest is never as virtuous for Arendt as fighting for universal interests detached from life’s necessities, interests that fit well within moral arenas and linguistic simulations, and which can be afforded by political actors for whom political issues are matters of performance and play. She made this clear when she put White and Black student protesters in clear opposition: While White students’ claims are “disinterested and usually highly moral”, their violence merely “a matter of theory and rhetoric”; the violence of Black students is serious, it backs their “silly and outrageous”, their actions guided by self-interest.¹⁹⁹

Her racial thinking about the social and private spheres does not only have implications for the political sphere, however. Arendt warns of the consequences the activity of non-Whites can have on those former spheres themselves. For example, she frames Black students’ protests for better access to education as a protest for lowering of academic standards, implicating the admission of “commonly” intellectually inferior Blacks decreases the quality of education.²⁰⁰ This of course, fits into a broader framework of Arendt’s racial thinking that permeates her political theorizing and ideals at large. This can be observed on the importance for humanness she attributes to language: She called Swahili a “no-language”, an anti-thesis of it, and African literature as belonging to “nonexistent subjects”. While Westerners are truly human through language, Africans are not truly human through its lack; they are not rational, not political, not endowed with volition, outside of history, and at the mercy of givenness.²⁰¹

Arendt deemed it a fact that because Africans cannot master and transcend nature, they cannot create culture, create “a human world, a human reality”, and are therefore in an important sense unhuman. That is why she thought racist thinking and oppression are legitimate, because it was an understandable and rational response of Europeans who encountered the “frighteningly” and “humiliatingly” inhuman Africans. She dubbed racism an “emergency explanation” justified because it was directed against beings who were different than them not because of their skin colour, but because of their inability to “act human”.²⁰² To formulate it with the ontological context in mind, Arendt believed that the existence of abhorrently radical difference can be legitimately considered an attack on the true identity and makes violence reasonable.

Her theorizing about the “imperial boomerang”, the way colonial oppressive practices have been later adopted against citizens in Europe and inspired fascism²⁰³, is, in light of her choice of words and arguments, imbued with yet another dangerous implication. If our reason leads us to react to their savagery with oppression, are they not to blame for the blowback? If racism is reasonable, is it not the consequence of the innate nature of the racialized? Do slavery, segregation, and colonialism not result

¹⁹⁸ Gines, K. T., (2014), p. 35.

¹⁹⁹ Johnson, C. S. (2009). Reading between the Lines: Kathryn Gines on Hannah Arendt and Antiracist Racism. *the Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 47(S1), 77–83. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2041-6962.2009.tb00140.x>. p. 78-79.

²⁰⁰ Johnson, C. S., (2009), p. 78. Gines, K. T., (2014), p. 114, 119, 129.

²⁰¹ Johnson, C. S., (2009), p. 80-81.

²⁰² Owens, P. (2017). Racism in the Theory Canon: Hannah Arendt and ‘the One Great Crime in Which America Was Never Involved.’ *Millennium*, 45(3), 403–424. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829817695880>. p. 9. Also see: Gines, K. T., (2014), p. 128.

²⁰³ Arendt is notably only interested in the blowback suffered by metropolitan societies and can be contrasted with anti-colonial thinkers’ conception of imperial boomerang that cannot aid in politically convenient separation of Nazi atrocities from European Christian atrocities against the colonized. See Temin, D. M. (2019). “Nothing much had happened”: Settler colonialism in Hannah Arendt. *European Journal of Political Theory*, 21(3), 514–538. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474885119893077>. p. 6.

from natural inequalities? Arendt answers all these questions by drawing dividing lines between concepts in service of specific political motivations.

By treating the violence used to maintain the racist status quo in America justified and peaceful, while also depicting Whites as fundamentally civilized, she could easily interpret Black resistance against it as unprovoked, ungrateful, and unjustifiable. Arendt defines violence and power in such a way so that she can render systemic racist violence unproblematic, or even reasonable and defensive, while dismissing violent resistance against it as impermissible. For Arendt, the brutal violence which shaped the conditions of non-White people's lives is not worth considering. Maybe even more dangerous is her justification of future White violence; she wrote that Black violence could lead to a "transformation of white prejudices into a full-fledged racist Ideology" and a violent backlash, for which the lawlessness of blacks is implicitly to blame.²⁰⁴ In fact, when she wrote about Boer settlers, she noted that because they used the natives as "raw materials", they became like the natives who vegetate on fruits of wild trees, they live "beside and together" with them, and through all that, they become unlike the Whites (no matter their whiteness) who turn nature to culture.²⁰⁵

Indeed, she also draws a clear line between colonial "race thinking" and imperialist "racism" by which she can conveniently exculpate favourable parts of the system she represents and condemn and expel any unfavourable excess without having to face their commonalities critically, simply put, she can disavow racism as un-Western and deny attacks against its role as moral protagonist.²⁰⁶ Black people's problems are private issues because they pertain to their racialization and not to universal human experiences modelled on the lives of Whites. She separates colonialism and imperialism, so that she can imbue the latter with Otherness and use it to condemn Totalitarianism by associating with savagery, while keeping the political models she espouses intact from unwanted critique. She is salvaging British imperialism and US settler colonialism as projects which enable the founding of a political sphere in which the performance of liberty can be practised, which in itself delegitimizes discussion of colonial violence.²⁰⁷ Classifying violence in general can help denialist efforts; since she is preoccupied with direct, overt violence as a political evil, she can more readily ignore socio-economic rights and their violation.²⁰⁸

Ultimately, Arendt sought to delink American racism from its wider context to exalt American republic as the new lineage holder of the West, the bastion of post-totalitarian and anti-totalitarian politics. Also, by removing totalitarianism from its Western context, she can renew the colonial Us vs Them division in which the non-Western world works as an antagonist in a moral story.²⁰⁹ In sum, she tried to vindicate the USA as immaculate so that it can represent the West, its civilization, distance it from its failures and maintain it as a bulwark against the great enemy: The Third World, the source of inhumanity and totalitarianism, which can infect the minds and bodies of cultured whites with the wildness of nature that overrides one's agency. Arendt renews the colonial Us vs Them division that asserts the moral superiority of the West through the narrative of a fight between the Totalitarian and the Democratic. This I believe, help delineate how the ontological, ideological, political, and historical thinking intertwines and where its racist intersections can be found. Nor Arendt, nor Popper are the originators of this thinking, nor do they encompass its every variation and nuance, but they have been

²⁰⁴ Kautzer, C., (2019), p. 2, 9-10.

²⁰⁵ Owens, P., (2017), p. 11.

²⁰⁶ Kautzer, C., (2019), p. 9-10 (particularly the footnotes). Also see Temin 2019, p. 10.

²⁰⁷ Temin, D. M., (2019), p. 2, 11, 20.

²⁰⁸ See: Hayden, P. (2007). Superfluous Humanity: An Arendtian perspective on the political evil of global poverty. *Millennium*, 35(2), 279–300. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298070350021001>.

²⁰⁹ Owens, P., (2017), p. 5, 7, 12-20.

influential codifiers of it and their models help illustrate the complexity of racism which cannot be resolved through mere condemnation.

Before concluding this subchapter, I would like to mention scholars such as Kwame Nkrumah²¹⁰ or Walter Rodney²¹¹, who have contributed a lot to a discussion about the role of colonialism in the formation of the West and the development of its system, and they too address how in the conditions of neo-colonialism, the responsibility of the West in global affairs is being shifted and whitewashed.²¹² The liberty and comfort of the First World have been and are conditioned by expropriative economic models past and present and their obfuscation in Western discourses leads to ineptitude in addressing contemporary crises.²¹³ The crises arisen after the WW2 and the dissolution of old imperial system have been answered by Arendt and Popper for they have offered solutions that enabled civilizational continuity for the Western colonial empires and the Western identity, which has come at the cost of not being able to integrate the critique and scholarship of those like Nkrumah and Rodney that would pose a more serious challenge.

The Czech Story

Although the West is a powerful figure within Czech discourse, narratives, and identity, and it is a great influence on them, there are Czech specificities that should be addressed if we are to analyse Czech media in more detail. Czechs thematize the precarity of their inclusion in the West as historically German dominated post-Soviet country. While it also understands the affairs of the world through a civilizational prism, it applies its own narrative tropes and schematics to make sense of events and phenomena. Central is the self-understanding of Czechia as located between East and West and as a moral underdog threatened by a larger yet ignoble nation.

The Czech historian Kamil Činátl outlines the bundle of tropes utilized and varied on within the Czech “imagined community” by analysing the historiographical work of Palacký, who supplied Czech nationalism with its story, that endured through its ideologization as a narrative schematic into the future. The schematic operates with the idealist view of unitary, universal History, of which the Czech particular history is a (perhaps even superior) representation. History there, is seen a conflict of polarized opposites, not just of good against evil, but also of spirit against matter. The Czech side represents goodness, spirit, fundamental peacefulness, and virtue. The opposite side, originally represented by Germans in the Czech national story, is identified with aggressivity, the need to expand material possessions, and general spiritual lowliness.²¹⁴

Another part of the story serves as an explanation of why Czechs occupy a peripheral position within the European continent. Because of historical circumstances, namely the Hungarian invasions, Eastern Europe could not become unitary with Western Europe.²¹⁵ Through this, Palacký access a topic that captures the attention of Czech discourses up until today, the relation of Czechia to the West, its spiritual belonging to it that has been historically repeatedly barred. It presupposes a certain superiority of the West, the desirability of belonging there, that can have various motivations spanning from economic to ideological ones, all of which intersect. There is also a sense of own inferiority that needs to be grappled with, usually by stressing the moral import Czech nation or culture can offer. The

²¹⁰ Nkrumah, K. (2022). *Neo-colonialism: The last stage of imperialism*. African People’s Conference.

²¹¹ Rodney, W. et al. (2018). *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*. Verso.

²¹² <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2018/12/19/how-britain-stole-45-trillion-from-india>.

²¹³ <https://tribunemag.co.uk/2021/04/how-the-british-empire-built-the-food-system-that-is-destroying-the-planet>.

²¹⁴ Činátl, K. (2011). *Dějiny a vyprávění: Palackého Dějiny jako zdroj historické obraznosti národa*. Argo. p. 47-56.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

most pertinent aspect of this issue for our thesis is however the Czech attitude towards colonialism, in which claims of innocence mix with the celebration of the institution.²¹⁶

The formulaic polarity schema simplifies history into a generally applicable dichotomy that enables Czech perspectives from different historical circumstances view their situation as analogous to the overarching formula and affirms their identity as that of morally superior underdogs. This schema applies even on a personal level: a good German is Czech internally, a bad Czech is internally a German, since Czech-ness is identified with spirit and morality, transcendence and peacefulness.²¹⁷

In the contemporary, mainstream iteration of the Czech story, Germans have been replaced by Russians. Because of this, the antagonist of the story can combine other negative traits that coincide with the recent historical narratives. Firstly, the mainstream Czech culture sets itself in opposition to the previous socialist regime, Russians are then seen as sponsors of that regime, continuers of its legacy, and the ones that maintained and represented an order to which we were subjugated²¹⁸. The motif of subjugation in particular plays an important role in the Czech story and featured in Palacký's work too, particularly in a trope of fundamentally peaceful Czechs being invaded by aggressive (German and Eastern) others, which also has a more spiritual dimension (the protection of Czech national spirit from being Germanized, Russified, made Eastern).²¹⁹

Besides being a political opposite, a Russian antagonist also fits the mold of a civilizational one. This helps integrate the Czech narrative onto more general Western ones, map its Us vs Them moral polarity onto the differences and struggles between First and Third worlds.

Analyses: Thinkability of the West

Let me present two analyses that could help illustrate the lacking interpretative repertoire that inhibits a more complex understanding of our planetary situation as formed by Western colonialism. First, it should be noted that colonialism is not seriously thematized in the Czech national stories, even the attempts at introducing the topic usually treat colonialism as a metaphor, or as a performative Western academic trend. More generally, colonialism is a delicate topic for the West whenever it cannot be reduced to a problem of symbolic recognition and solved through linguistic performance. Since there was not, and for the most part cannot be, a reckoning of the colonial and neocolonial facet of the West, its thinkability is limited by the postulation of Western moral supremacy.

This multidimensional model of Western context should help us understand how the Western perspective is naturalized in Czech discourse. A sense of belonging to the collective West does not only inform, but also limit how an event or a phenomenon can be perceived and thought about. I would like to illustrate this on another media example from Czech Public TV (ČT), a representative of both an authoritative information source and one strongly identifying Czech values with the West.

On the 1st of March, ČT has dedicated a segment to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the largest American nuclear weapon test.²²⁰ Apart from scientific facts about the bomb and its detonation conducted in Marshall Islands, the segment presents a picture of the US as a responsible entity; the

²¹⁶ See: Rampley, M. (2021). Decolonizing Central Europe: Czech art and the question of 'Colonial innocence.' *Visual Resources*, 37(1), 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01973762.2022.2087168>.

²¹⁷ Činát, K., (2011), p. 109.

²¹⁸ It is of course worth mentioning that shunning communism, the guiding ideology of the former Czech political regime, also helps with identifying with the liberal West, to whom communism was the primary Cold War enemy.

²¹⁹ Činát, K., (2011), p. 101.

²²⁰ <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/1096902795-studio-6/224411010100301/>.

Americans did what they could, but because of surprisingly bad weather conditions the radiation spread in an unwanted direction. The fact that inhabited islands were irradiated is mentioned offhandedly and the only mentioned casualty, apart from the mention of people ending up in hospitals, is a Japanese fisherman that was irradiated by the explosion alongside his crew, although it was quickly questioned whether radiation itself caused the fisherman's death.

Either ČT actively chose to omit further information about the Marshallese, or simply did not find it relevant or interesting. Whatever the case, caring about the impact on the inhabitants could provide a more complex picture of American involvement, a picture most likely contrary to which ČT painted. Americans purposefully let the natives suffer from radiation so they could study the effects of it on human bodies. A US official even stated: "While it is true that these people do not live the way that Westerners do, civilized people, it is nonetheless also true that they are more like us than the mice." Yet ČT does not seem to care much about less common narratives, nor does it seem to be too interested in the lives of Pacific Islanders. Describing the utter destruction of someone's homeland by nuclear explosion as a scientific curiosity or conveying this story to reproduce the typical theme of nuclear weapons' frightening power with universal significance²²¹, shows the limits of what can be thought and with whom can be empathized.

Interestingly, the dome that was built to keep in radioactive waste is at risk of collapsing due to climate change (for which the USA is infinitely more responsible than the Marshallese), yet the US refused to help as they consider the dome a responsibility of the Marshallese government; shifting responsibility by shuffling with sovereignty can legitimize action and inaction alike. Universal values informed by ontological racism direct the actions motivated by them; Amnesty International's decision to campaign for interventionism and US officials' decision to decline to intervene in Marshallese affairs both grow from the same axiological substrate that racially stratifies reality.

In the chapter on method, I have written about EU's High Representative Josep Borrell's speech about European garden being surrounded by a jungle. Now let us look at the website EUvsDisinfo that tries to debunk disinformation about Josep Borrell being an advocate for European supremacy or an outspoken racist. They have dedicated at least two pages for this, and I am going to primarily focus on the later one.²²² While the disinformation case to be debunked in the earlier page²²³ does not amount to more than a reading of Borrell's words as evidently racist, the later disinformation case consists of lies and conspiracies added to the original reading. EUvsDisinfo is part of EU's diplomatic service, which is led by EU's High Representative.²²⁴

Borrell's own explanation of intentions behind his speech is provided as the main counterargument in both pages. Borrell assures us that his metaphor was misinterpreted as "colonial Eurocentrism" and that the difference between jungle and garden is that between the rule of the strongest and a the liberal world order based on rules. Even if we accepted that his explanation is more than just damage control excusing the use metaphors with obviously controversial connotations and look at this statement at its own merit, within the contextual framing constructed over the last few chapters, it should be obvious that such a view is not neutral, nor does it overcome racist biases.

Mutua have already told us about how the rules-based order always had a notably racist character and Mutua is very much a moderate, liberal voice at the end of the day. Racializing worldview is intrinsic to the liberal order and certain components of Borrell's speech even beyond the garden-

²²¹ Tchen, J. K. W., & Yeats, D. (2014). *Yellow Peril: An Archive of Anti-Asian Fear*. Verso. p. 291.

²²² <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/the-eu-is-racist-and-josep-borrell-advocates-european-supremacy/>.

²²³ <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/josep-borrell-does-not-hide-his-racist-vision-of-the-world/>.

²²⁴ <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/about/>.

jungle metaphor are a testament to that. While it is true, as the EUvsDisinfo pages highlight, that the main focus of Borrell's speech is Russia's breaking of international law in relation to Ukraine specifically, the speech in its entirety cannot be reduced to this argument.

He indeed does say Europe is a garden because "we" built a place where "everything works" and which is "the best combination of political freedom, economic prosperity and social cohesion that the humankind has been able to build." After he continues, that "the rest of the world ... is not exactly a garden. Most of the rest of the world is a jungle." Because of this goodness of Europe, migrants come to us, not Russia, he adds much later.²²⁵ It is European greatness that makes it a positive force in the world, and it is a natural fact that the rest of the world is a jungle we should be responsible for if we wish not to be run over by it. No space is left for a discussion that would complicate this self-understanding.

EUvsDisinfo makes sure the identity is left untouched by explicitly pairing statements about EU being a racist, neocolonial entity with the "disinformation" label. Borrell's metaphor, according to them, "has nothing to do with racism, colonialism, slavery or golden billion"²²⁶. The reference to golden billion conspiracy theory is most notable, as it allows for dealing with a strawman that reduces the economic role of Europe and the West within the world to a simple schematic which conspiracy theories provide. It is easy to conflate valid critique with Russian propaganda and disinformation, but it is also unproductive for academic discussion. There are plenty of academics dealing with the topic of exploitative relationship of the West towards its outside, starting with the aforementioned or cited Kwame Nkrumah, Walter Rodney, Jason Hickel, and Nick Land, but names such as Samir Amin, Arghiri Emmanuel, Michael Hudson, Vijay Prashad, or Mike Davis can be added and that is just scratching the surface.

The importance of cheap labour in the Third World and of the Third World immigrants for Western economies should not be understated, so should not be the privileged Western access to resources in the Third World, the Western sway over Third World economies, or the role of exploitation of the colonies in creating and even enabling the Western economies in the first place. Even without taking neocolonialism into account it seems wholly improbable that colonialism would just vanish without a trace less than a Borrell's lifetime ago and left no lasting impact on the structure of the global system. To Borrell, Western influence is simply seen as natural, good or at least neutral. If the West cannot properly face its colonial past and neocolonial present, not only will this continue to be weaponized against it, but it will also lack an important tool with which to think itself and will be unable to have a genuine understanding of how it is or can be viewed by others.

²²⁵ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-diplomatic-academy-opening-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-inauguration-pilot_en.

²²⁶ A conspiracy theory about Western elites exploiting the rest of the world.

Western Sinophobia and its functions

Delineating Sinophobia

The main topic of this thesis is Sinophobia, particularly the stereotypes, biases and preconceptions it consists of and its expressions in Western, and especially Czech, media environment. While it is not wrong to understand Sinophobia as hatred towards China or the Chinese, it should not be defined as an isolated disdain. By focusing only on China, its culture, people, or institutions, we would limit Sinophobia to an issue of (wrong) representation, and therefore of ideals and identities, of voices in the moral arena and symbols in cultural production. I propose to situate Sinophobia within the context of ontological racism, so that we can trace its connections to Western (neo)colonial mentality at large.

As with any other xenophobic tendency within the matrix of ontological racism, the logic of Sinophobia isn't neat, and its borders are permeable. It associates with other images and prejudices; it bolsters its claims by connecting to other racializing and marginalizing models. It is unhelpful to enclose racism in borders, an essentialist view of racism can even lead to adverse or ineffective anti-racist virtue signalling and the reproduction of racializing reifications.²²⁷ Like racism in general, Sinophobia connects to a web of other preconceptions and images, it is fuzzy, multifaceted, it lacks contours. An example of this malleability and porousness can be anti-Semitism; layers of sedimented prejudices formalized and popularized by texts such as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* or *The International Jew* have been sublimated into conspiracy theories invoking vague global elites.

Racialized peoples, whether Jewish, Chinese, or yet other, threaten the pre-existing order "We" represent. Subscribing to values that are eternal, transcendent, and therefore naturally superior, makes negotiations impossible, for the only solution to a Manichean dilemma is extermination, either physical or civilizational. Racialized scapegoats are used as an excuse to exert force without having to accept oneself as an agent; all oppression can be deemed self-defensive or simply the responsibility of the oppressed. Racialized others are associated with bad habits of all sorts that imply a threat for the core populace, whether that threat is sexual, hygienic, health-related, drug-related, one stemming from a lack of work ethic or an excess thereof, or from an insidious political influence; this threatening wrongness of the Other is an explication for the anxieties of the Self and an exculpation for Own actions.²²⁸ That is not to say there are not differences between distinctly targeted forms of hatred, but rather that they reverberate the same logic in varying situations.

There are also blurred lines between Sinophobia and anti-Asian racism, since Western audiences do codify Asians through stereotypes and do not readily distinguish between people or between people and institutions. That is the case especially with instances of racially motivated harassment and violence. A notorious example follows the tragic story of Chinese American man Vincent Chin, who was murdered in revenge for Japanese automobile companies stealing American jobs. But using the label "anti-Asian" does not exhaust the problem either, as the very conception of Asia or the East is not a straightforward one. Instead, the point is to understand China/Asia/East as a figure through which certain thoughts and values gain concrete shapes, gain their form of expression.

²²⁷ Murji, Karim. (2006). Using racial stereotypes in anti-racist campaigns. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 29:2, 260-280.

²²⁸ See: Renshaw, D. (2016). Prejudice and paranoia: a comparative study of antisemitism and Sinophobia in turn-of-the-century Britain. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 50(1), 38–60; Xiang, S. (2022). Sinophobia, American imperialism, disorder without responsibility. *Sartre Studies International*, 28(2), 42–66.
<https://doi.org/10.3167/ssi.2022.280204>.

Fundamentally, Sinophobia is an act of Othering, a mechanism that pervades the Western civilizational imagination. Through Othering, political and moral values and their associated xenophobic fears can input any fact into their network of meaning and explain it through its terms. Philosopher Karen Barad mentions an example of this, a news story about a blob of merged amoebas, that associates this biological topic with Red Scare motifs of a leftist political threat to individualism.²²⁹ The recurring theme of communist “brainwashing” that robs an individual of their ability to exercise free will has Orientalist overtones²³⁰ and is crucial to understand the Othering feature of Sinophobia. The anxiety stemming from the threat to individual selfhood, an immensely important aspect of Western identity, has had less “comical” effects than moralizing and politicizing amoebas; a hundred years ago, a book called *The Mongol in Our Midst* argued that Down Syndrome is a form of “racial degeneration” resulting from the presence of “lesser” Asian genes whose presence induced enough fear to inspire pro-sterilization and anti-immigration sentiments.²³¹ A photo of a young person with Down syndrome sitting in lotus position can be found in the book, which imbues the condition with another racializing meaning by associating it with Buddhism, which was in earlier times representative of the Other Asiatic civilization contrasted with the West as the Christian civilization, or a civilization formed by Judeo-Christian values, as attested to by the drawing *Völker Europas, wahrt eure heiligsten Güter* which depicts Buddha sitting in the lotus position as a fantastically evil threat whose darkness can only be dispersed by the light of the Cross.²³²

In the chapter on method, I borrowed a bare Us vs Them formula from van Dijk’s scholarship so that I could provide it with new contexts that are lacking from the perspective offered by Edward Said. Orientalism, in a limited definition I use here, is the approach West has towards its Outside that relies on projecting the negation of its own ideals onto the Other, it is a set of stereotypes and fetishes historically connected to colonialism concretely. To focus precisely on how Orientalist othering works in respect to the Far East, I will help myself with conceptions of orientalism dedicated to particular areas of racialization. This way, I wish to eschew Said’s reliance on representationalism and colonial humanist thought more generally and his underestimation of the material Western intervention within the current Third World. Finally, I wish to explain the role played by the Yellow Peril metaphor which relays the idea of West being endangered by the looming danger of burgeoning Asiatic hordes or swarms and its political significance.

Contextualizing Sinophobia

Firstly, I wish to introduce Lester Quinn’s work, as it connects Yellow Peril imaginary with the recent surge of anti-Asian sentiment during the Covid-19 pandemic. He offers two concepts to put western Sinophobia into wider philosophical context: “bio-orientalism” and C. B. Macpherson’s “possessive individual”. Bio-orientalism marks the distinction between normal, default life and the racialized Asian one in Western racist discourse. It depicts Asian life as existing in multitudes of rapidly reproducing de-individualized units, connecting it to images of swarms, diseases, or inexhaustible labouring masses. While it seemingly contrasts with techno-orientalism, which presents Asians as mechanical, AI-like, intrinsically hypo- or hyper-technological, they nevertheless coexist and complement each other, creating a complex picture of an Asiatic anti-life mirroring the white supremacist norm and ideal.

²²⁹ Barad, K. (2003). Posthumanist performativity: toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter. *Signs*, 28(3), 801–831. <https://doi.org/10.1086/345321>. p. 25-27.

²³⁰ Tchen, J. K. W., & Yeats, D., (2014), p. 303; Kim, M., (2019), p. 24-25, 306.

²³¹ Tchen, J. K. W., & Yeats, D., (2014), p. 247.

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 12-13. The compendium also discussed other layers of meaning of the drawing, namely patriarchal and imperialistic.

Here enters the concept of “possessive individual²³³” which defines this ideal and norm of life and subjecthood. A possessive individual relates to their body and the world around them as properties. Making ownership the quintessential relationship of a human agent results in the assessment of their foundational separation from their outside, their self-reliance and ultimate individual responsibility. The possessive individual is an enclosure closed off to the messiness of reality external to them, their stability uninfluenced by all the motion. In summary, the possessive individual constitutes their identity on a fantasy of independence, that is understanding oneself as a result of solely one’s own agency, and on relating to one’s outside in terms of ownership, that is of entitled mastery. The need to reaffirm this independence correlates with an obsession with immunity, with policing the enclosure that the individual is within their environment, keeping the identity intact and unaffected by an incursion, invasion, penetration, or infection of otherness.²³⁴

Macpherson’s concept of “possessive individual” pairs nicely with the concept of “sovereign fantasy” presented by Mel Y. Chen. While the former focuses, as its name suggests, on the individual, the latter is concerned with a project of absolute authority, control, and immunity on a national scale. On the example of lead panic in the US, Chen explains how the threat of lead was mediated as a racial one and became part of an immunological narrative, of a sovereign fantasy. The target of the threat by media were the bodies of middle-class white children, the holy possessions of the racial and national project, although it was usually non-whites in poorer places who were more vulnerable to toxicity of lead. The threat was also imagined as coming from outside, the lead was thought of as an invasion from non-White countries, especially from China whose manufacturing capacities have been seen as dangerous even outside of particular panics.

Tying the origin of diseases medical threats, whether caused by lead or Covid-19, to racialized others by invoking their practices, behaviour, or habits, shows the danger as sprouting from civilizational inferiority, by which the superior is inherently threatened and called to action. All complexity of lead’s origins and environmental issues are reduced into mobilizing mental shortcuts operating with racial objects. Moreover, the image of a pressing threat of an invasion from the outside lets culpability for domestic neglect or mismanagement be obscured, or in the extreme, allows one to project own misdeeds onto the evil other and simultaneously deny moral bankruptcy and reaffirm inherent goodness of one’s own: in the 90s, the US has intentionally exposed public-housing residents (with special focus on children) to lead toxicity, conducting experiments on a racialized population it deemed lesser.²³⁵

The concept of sovereign fantasy shows how any threat can be racialized, how racial imaginary can be used to explain a crisis and reinforce the Self. Racism provides orientalising tendencies as scapegoating, explanatory methods that can adapt to various threats. Just like bio-orientalism could help racialize Covid-19, “fiscal orientalism”, as coined by Fan Yang²³⁶, could help promulgate misinformation about China’s ownership of US national debt and by extension reinforce the undue victimization of US and fuel the fears of becoming “weaker” than or subservient to a racialized other.²³⁷

²³³ It is also well explained in Hayles, N. K., (1999), p. 4-5. She also points out that by „possessing“ rather than „being“ a body, the possessive individual removes any markers of bodily difference and lets them cling to the transcendent Ideal.

²³⁴ Lester, Q., (2021), p. 2, 4-5.

²³⁵ Chen, Mel Y. (2007). "Racialized Toxins and Sovereign Fantasies," *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture*: Vol. 29: Iss. 2, Article 9, p. 367-383.

²³⁶ Yang, F. (2016). Fiscal Orientalism: China panic, the indebted citizen, and the spectacle of national debt. *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 19(3), 375–396. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jaas.2016.0032>.

²³⁷ Tchen, J. K. W., & Yeats, D., (2014), p. 355.

Jana Cattien shows that the colonial old tropes are still very much in use to explain current affairs. The bundle of tropes in question in her example has to do with depiction of cultures of East Asia as unfree, authoritarian, its people as servile, collectivist, essentially presenting the same old image of Oriental despots with their enslaved masses. This stereotype resonates even today and it was most notable in the framing of Covid-19 pandemic news events. For example, the initial successes of East Asian countries in containing the virus was cast as a result of an enforced and ingrained obedience of uncritical Asians, therefore as successes “tainted by the evilness of the culture which produced them”.²³⁸ The critique of lockdowns in the West was also connected to “racializing imaginary of compliance as otherness”. White people having to follow the safety measures necessitated by the pandemic raised anxieties of becoming less like the Self (liberal, democratic, White) and more like the Other (illiberal, authoritarian, Chinese), the inherent threat of losing the treasured freedom by becoming infected by a racialized contagion that mixes viral disease with the spread of unfreedom.²³⁹

The 19th century liberal thinker referred to earlier in the thesis, J. S. Mill, too warned of the Eastern disease of despotism, the risk of Whites becoming like Asians if they are too compliant and conformist, ie. losing their defining individuality. He accentuated the difference in mental faculties between West and East by describing the Chinese ruler as “intoxicated with power”, drawing the line between the legitimate authority of the West and the illegitimate, “delirious tyranny” of the East. By describing both the leaders and the people of Asia as lacking the necessary mental capacity to be independent, rational agents and thinkers, Mill and others racialized the ideal of proper political agents. This racialisation and subsequent marginalization of political subjects only intensifies by lumping all othered entities together; the Western orientalist depictions of the East showcase it as “crazed gathering of all manners of people and animals”, that is as chaotic, excessive, queer, inhuman.²⁴⁰

Mill was not the only liberal thinker to see unfreedom as an Asiatic infection that endangers the Whites. Lieber and Spencer (the latter of whom is the father of social Darwinism) both feared Chinese immigrants in the West Coast of the US. Lieber warned the area could become overrun by a “mongolizing” swarm, because the immigrants multiply “like mice”. Spencer was concerned with miscegenation that would inevitably produce “bad hybrids”, as though the dilution of whiteness would come hand in hand with decreased capacity for exercising individual freedom. His remedy was keeping the Asian immigrants excluded and subject to slavery.²⁴¹ Of course, similar anxieties about race-mixing are connected to all races White supremacists deem lesser and are not exclusive²⁴² to Chinese or Asians for that matter as they pertain to keeping the boundaries between the Same-Self and the Other.

The horror of becoming like the other underscores the urgency to maintain the border between Us and Them.²⁴³ This self-reinforcing function is activated, as Cattien writes, by pointing at “Chinese virus” and “Chinese authoritarianism” to contrast Self with the Other a re-affirm the ideal: the West is the force that progresses and improves continually while remaining the same, it distances itself from China and the threat of becoming like it. Racism defends liberal exceptionalism by asserting the only way to be strong and to flourish as a society, is to be like “Us”.²⁴⁴ Who could sum the implications up better than Mill himself: “[The Chinese] have become stationary — have remained so for thousands of

²³⁸ Cattien, J., (2022), p. 3.

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

²⁴¹ Losurdo, D., (2011), p. 265.

²⁴² The othered entities are to an extent fungible, their variations stem from the need to adapt to concrete niches of racializing discourses.

²⁴³ Cattien, J., (2022), p. 5.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

years; and if they are ever to be farther improved, it must be by foreigners".²⁴⁵ It is only logical Mill would then found his other assessments on racist premises, such as when he legitimized the Opium Wars as a "crusade for liberty" because China violated the British right to deal drugs.²⁴⁶ Racist understanding of the world procures political justification for Western intervention even in this century; for example, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo advocated for westernization of China as the only way the country can progress, stating it would need to be colonized for 300 years in the very least.²⁴⁷ As he exemplifies, White supremacy is not an exclusive domain of the white.

In summary, the existence of the Asiatic Other is on a basic level an attack on individualism, on individual's possessions and capacities, their racially coded positive traits. The greatest threat posed by the very existence of "Yellow Life" therefore is not death, but loss of Whiteness, that is the assumed rational agency that guarantees the ontological superiority of White subjects.²⁴⁸ The answer to this threat is threefold: exclusionary, expropriatory, exterminatory.

What I have yet to properly highlight is the exculpatory function of Sinophobic discourse, which ties back to the denialist character of Western racism. As mentioned, by understanding Westerners as inherently freedom loving and the Chinese as inherently freedom-lacking, the Opium Wars could be interpreted as primarily a moral endeavour, rather than an act of callous greed, and China as the ultimately culpable party. The failings of the West are either obscured or reduced to a hurdle that can and will be overcome, while the failings of others are integral to how they function. A logic that firmly asserts the virtual infallibility of the ingroup allows for racism to be weaponized for political and geopolitical goals, a recent example is a clandestine anti-vax campaign run by the US to undermine China.²⁴⁹

Any evilness done by the ingroup can be reinterpreted as a "drama in the white man's soul"²⁵⁰, as a story of "Us" steadily improving by correcting our wrongs, our moral foundation unshaken after all. Racism is, in this sense, a never-ending negative feedback loop designed to maintain the moral superiority of Whiteness and render its ontological foundations untouchable. In short, this is the Us vs Them division at its core, it helps interpreting anything related to Us in a good light and to Them in a bad light. Every misdeed of ours can be justified by an underlying good will, even the unjustifiable deeds can be reimagined as mistakes we have overcome, but anything They do is always driven by ulterior motives, has an evil effect no matter the seeming character of the deed. Their side can even serve to project our own misdeeds or responsibility for them on an Other.

Crucially, the dynamic described above is not a failure of the system. Racism/racist thought is part of the process through which the identity of the West is being formed, it cannot be solved with introspection or self-reflection, let alone self-flagellation, as those only affirm the Self. Considering racism a problem, rather than a feature, will result in it being another act in the drama for the White soul. The question of racism will always imply the question of identity.

²⁴⁵ Losurdo, D., (2011), p. 247.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 249.

²⁴⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/dec/15/nobel-winner-liu-xiaobo-chinese-dissident>.

²⁴⁸ Lester, Q., (2021), p. 6; Chen, M. Y. (2007), p. 377.

²⁴⁹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/6/14/pentagon-ran-secret-anti-vax-campaign-to-undermine-china-during-pandemic>.

²⁵⁰ Bellah explains this motif on the example of narrativization of abolitionist sentiments in the US. See Bellah, R. N., (1992), p. 55.

Overview of literature concerned with the effects of “Yellow Perilist” thought

So far, we have seen how China, as a figure of Sinophobic, features as a racialized mirror image the West needs to avoid. A supposedly inscrutable, delirious state of affairs paired with despotism, lack of freedom, and a civilizational drive towards making everybody compliant and devoid of individual traits came to represent China and the East as an Othered whole. Such Orientalism goes hand in hand with scapegoating, seeing one's issues as originating from the Other. Malthusianism also enters the fray, a belief which holds that economic issues within the world are caused primarily because of overpopulation, inventing biological reasons for why standards of living are dissatisfactory somewhere while completely ignoring the socioeconomic realities.

Let me now offer a concise overview of literature that is meant to illustrate extent and range of Sinophobia's effects, although it should be noted is only a simple digest providing a cursory picture of what can be dealt with when approaching the problem of Sinophobia. **Lyman**²⁵¹ offers a summarization of the Yellow Peril trope, how it helps focus the racist imagery of amorphous hordes and swarms to different targets according to current needs, how enduring it is in its purpose of formulating an existential civilizational enemy to the West. Another good summarization offered by **Blue**²⁵² focuses on the connections Yellow Peril motifs have with racial science, with modern European politics, ideology, and imperialism. **Smith**²⁵³ too attests that Sinophobia had political import for colonial powers and had linkages to anti-Semitism. Sinophobia can be seen as inextricable from imperialism, as suggested by the previously mentioned articles. **Eskridge-Kosmach**²⁵⁴ and **Mahoney**²⁵⁵ expand on this issue, the former discussing Tsarist Russia's imperial ambitions and the latter those of the United States. Both are also focused on the role of press in legitimizing the imperialist drive, while Mahoney also discusses the philosophical conditions for the racializing outlook in the West and poses the American public as shareholders in their country's imperial ventures, which I would argue, implies them as stakeholders in subscribing and maintain said racializing outlook.

Sinophobic imagery and rhetoric are perpetuated and readapted as Yellow Perilism proves its usefulness for communicating political stakes. We can observe it within corporate communication, as documented by **Nyland & Thomson**²⁵⁶ and within political agitation. Campaigning discourse tends to be rich with tropes, and Yellow Peril is not an exception. **Yang**²⁵⁷ examines Romney's presidential campaign, whose Sinophobia echoes the scapegoating tactic reminiscent of blaming Japan for stealing jobs decades prior, but also the deep-seated anti-communist fears that were being ingrained since the

²⁵¹ Lyman, S. M. (2000). The “Yellow Peril” Mystique: Origins and Vicissitudes of a Racist Discourse. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 13(4), 683–747.

²⁵² Blue, G. (1999). Gobineau on China: Race Theory, the „Yellow Peril“ and the Critique of Modernity. *Journal of World History*, 10(1), 93–139.

²⁵³ Smith, B. (2017). Colonial emulation: sinophobia, ethnic stereotypes and imperial anxieties in late eighteenth-century economic thought. *History of European Ideas*, 43(8), 914–928.

²⁵⁴ Eskridge-Kosmach, A. (2014). Russian Press and the Ideas of Russia's ‘Special Mission in the East’ and ‘Yellow Peril.’ *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 27(4), 661–675.

²⁵⁵ Mahoney, J. G. (2015). Orientalism, “Yellow Peril,” and the “New Yellow Journalism.” *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 9(1), 123–146.

²⁵⁶ Nyland, C., Forbes-Mewett, H., & Thomson, S. B. (2011). Sinophobia as Corporate Tactic and the Response of Host Communities. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 41(4), 610–631.

²⁵⁷ Yang, M. M. (2016). At War with the Chinese Economic Yellow Peril: Mitt Romney's 2012 Presidential Campaign Rhetoric. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 45(1), 45–69.

Cold War.²⁵⁸ **Del Visco**²⁵⁹ also follows the link between Yellow Peril and Red scare, the conflation of the racial and political Other. **Heale**²⁶⁰ focuses on Reaganite Yellow Perilism as a way to identify another perceived threat other than the Soviet Union, that time aimed at Japan.

This construction of Japan as an enemy is useful for us nonetheless, as we have a structurally similar and otherwise related case of it nowadays with China as the rising economic and technological rival. **Xie & Page**²⁶¹ analyses Americans' perception of China's rise, **Gries & Crowson**²⁶² considers their attitudes towards China more generally. **Chen & Hao**²⁶³ survey Czech students' views on China's ascendancy. **Ratuva**²⁶⁴ focuses on the Sinophobic imagery that follows responses to the expansion of Chinese sphere of influence. **Alami & Dixon**²⁶⁵ likewise show how Western reactions to China's geopolitical significance tap into older grand narratives, such as the Cold War, and frame the geopolitical situation as a simple story of a protagonist pitted against an antagonist. Geopolitical anxieties also feed into how Chinese technology is viewed, an issue explored on the example of Tiktok by **Bernot, Cooney-O'Donoghue, Mann**²⁶⁶ and **Lin & De Kloet**²⁶⁷.

Mahubhani²⁶⁸ is another voice relating hostility towards China to civilizational fears. **Brautigam**²⁶⁹ focuses on this double standard specifically in relation to China's activity in Africa and warns against politically convenient simplifications. On that note, it is interesting to read **Sautman & Hairong**²⁷⁰ on African attitudes towards China for comparison with Western perspectives. **Peerenboom**²⁷¹ dedicates a robust text on the double standard China is held to. Peerenboom's work shows that the West was quicker to condemn China rather than a state more congruent with its values and similar means of governance such as India, despite India's own violations. He counsels against the

²⁵⁸ Bae, M. and Tseng-Putterman, M. (2022). The geopolitics of Anti-Asian violence: Cold War contradictions in the era of "building back better". *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 25(3), 411–430. doi:10.1353/jaas.2022.0034.

²⁵⁹ Del Visco, S. (2017). Yellow peril, red scare: race and communism in *National Review*. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 42(4), 626–644.

²⁶⁰ Heale, M. J. (2009). Anatomy of a Scare: Yellow Peril Politics in America, 1980–1993. *Journal of American Studies*, 43(1), 19–47.

²⁶¹ Xie, T., & Page, B. I. (2010). Americans and the Rise of China as a World Power. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 19(65), 479–501.

²⁶² Gries, P. H., & Crowson, H. M. (2010). Political Orientation, Party Affiliation, and American Attitudes Towards China. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 15(3), 219–244.

²⁶³ Chen, Y. W., & Hao, Y. (2019). Czech perceptions of the rise of China: a survey among university students. *Asia Europe Journal*, 18(1), 157–175.

²⁶⁴ Ratuva, S. (2021). The Politics of Imagery: Understanding the Historical Genesis of Sinophobia in Pacific Geopolitics. *East Asia*, 39(1), 13–28.

²⁶⁵ Alami, I. and Dixon, A.D. (2020). The strange geographies of the "new" state capitalism. *Political Geography*. doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2020.102237.

²⁶⁶ Bernot, A., Cooney-O'Donoghue, D. and Mann, M. (2024) 'Governing Chinese technologies: Tiktok, foreign interference, and technological sovereignty', *Internet Policy Review*, 13(1). doi:10.14763/2024.1.1741.

²⁶⁷ Lin, J., & De Kloet, J. (2023). TikTok and the platformisation from China: Geopolitical anxieties, repetitive creativities and future imaginaries. *Media, Culture & Society*, 45(8), 1525–1533. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437231209203>.

²⁶⁸ Mahubani, K. (2022). A 'Yellow Peril' Revival Fueling Western Fears of China's Rise. *China and Globalization*, 129–130; Mahubani, K. (2022b). Is China Expansionist? *China and Globalization*, 131–140.

²⁶⁹ Brautigam, D. (2019). A critical look at Chinese 'debt-trap diplomacy': the rise of a meme. *Area Development and Policy*, 5(1), 1–14.; see also: Brautigam, D. (2011). *The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa*. Oxford University Press.

²⁷⁰ Sautman, B., & Hairong, Y. (2009). African Perspectives on China–Africa Links. *The China Quarterly*, 199, 728–759.

²⁷¹ Randall Peerenboom. (2005). Assessing Human Rights in China: Why the Double Standard. *Cornell International Law Journal*, 38(1), 71–172.

double standard regarding human rights if we want to seek greater cooperation on the issue and better assessment of the human rights situation altogether.

Plenty of research has been done into the effects of Sinophobia on minorities, with Covid-19 being a catalyst for anti-Asian violence and prejudice. Immigrants in particular are those who tend to bear the brunt of fear and hatred generated from images of invading hordes. **Ross**²⁷² with **Ang & Mansouri**²⁷³ and **O'Connor**²⁷⁴ write about the anxiety of Asian immigration to Australia and New Zealand respectively. **Lee**²⁷⁵ ties Yellow Peril to exclusion of Asians throughout the American continent. **Kawai**²⁷⁶, **Li & Nicholson**²⁷⁷ and **Shim**²⁷⁸ connect Yellow Peril with another Asian-related stereotype, the model minority myth.

The pandemic of Covid-19 has been quickly associated with China as a place of its origin and is marked by a subsequent rise of anti-Asian hate-crimes. **He et al.**²⁷⁹, **Shen**²⁸⁰ and **Sakki**²⁸¹ all focus on anti-Asian racism online, with **Nghiem et al.**²⁸² specifically interested in hate speech. A general approach explaining the history and systemic issues of anti-Asian racism and criminality can be found in **Gover et al.**²⁸³, **Han et al.**²⁸⁴ and these **here**²⁸⁵. **Nam et al.**²⁸⁶ focuses on experiences of Asian university students with racism during the pandemic. Survey presented by **Lantz & Wenger**²⁸⁷ shows that considerable percentage of Asian-Americans and Pacific Islander respondents have been victimized during the pandemic or know someone who was, whilst also examining the prejudice and

²⁷² Catriona Ross. (2006). Prolonged Symptoms of Cultural Anxiety: The Persistence of Narratives of Asian Invasion within Multicultural Australia. *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, 5, 86–99.

²⁷³ Ang, S., & Mansouri, F. (2022). Racialized (Im)mobilities: The Pandemic and Sinophobia in Australia. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 1–20.

²⁷⁴ O'Connor, P. (2001). Keeping New Zealand White, 1908–1920. *The Shaping of History*, 284–305.

²⁷⁵ LEE, E. (2007). The “Yellow Peril” and Asian Exclusion in the Americas. *Pacific Historical Review*, 76(4), 537–562.

²⁷⁶ Kawai, Y. (2005). Stereotyping Asian Americans: The Dialectic of the Model Minority and the Yellow Peril. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 16(2), 109–130.

²⁷⁷ Li, Y., & Nicholson, H. L. (2021). When “model minorities” become “yellow peril” —Othering and the racialization of Asian Americans in the COVID-19 pandemic. *Sociology Compass*, 15(2).

²⁷⁸ Shim, D. (1998). From Yellow Peril through Model Minority to Renewed Yellow Peril. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 22(4), 385–409.

²⁷⁹ He, Bing, Ziems, Caleb, Soni, Sandeep, Ramakrishnan, Naren, Yang, Diyi, & Kumar, Srijan. (2020). Racism is a Virus: Anti-Asian Hate and Counterspeech in Social Media during the COVID-19 Crisis. *Cornell University - ArXiv*.

²⁸⁰ Shen, Xinyue, He, Xinlei, Backes, Michael, Blackburn, Jeremy, Zannettou, Savvas, & Zhang, Yang. (2022). On Xing Tian and the Perseverance of Anti-China Sentiment Online. *Cornell University - ArXiv*.

²⁸¹ Sakki, I., & Castrén, L. (2022). Dehumanization through humour and conspiracies in online hate towards Chinese people during the COVID-19 pandemic. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 61(4), 1418–1438.

²⁸² Nghiem, Huy, & Morstatter, Fred. (2021). “Stop Asian Hate!” : Refining Detection of Anti-Asian Hate Speech During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Cornell University - ArXiv*.

²⁸³ Gover, A. R., Harper, S. B., & Langton, L. (2020). Anti-Asian Hate Crime During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Exploring the Reproduction of Inequality. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 45(4), 647–667.

²⁸⁴ Han, S., Riddell, J. R., & Piquero, A. R. (2022). Anti-Asian American Hate Crimes Spike During the Early Stages of the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.

²⁸⁵ <http://www.onepacificnews.com/2021/11/07/beyond-stopasianhate-understanding-the-roots-of-systemic-anti-asian-racism/>.

²⁸⁶ Nam, B. H., Marshall, R. C., Tian, X., & Jiang, X. (2021). “Why universities need to actively combat Sinophobia”: racially-traumatic experiences of Chinese international students in the United States during COVID-19. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 51(5), 690–704. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2021.1965957>.

²⁸⁷ Lantz, B., & Wenger, M. R. (2022). Anti-Asian Xenophobia, Hate Crime Victimization, and Fear of Victimization During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 38(1–2), NP1088–NP1116.

xenophobia of non-Asian respondents. The research strand of **Gao2021**²⁸⁸, **Zhang2020**²⁸⁹, **Chan2020**²⁹⁰ investigates different ways the very thinking about the latest pandemic has been marred by racism, which resulted in racialization of behaviours, normalization of Orientalizing knowledge production. The articles largely echo each other, all adding a piece to the mosaic of Sinophobia with its limited repertoire of multitudinous danger, contagiousness and deceitfulness.

What deserves mention is polls conducted on Czech and European sentiments regarding China during Covid pandemic. Czech respondents have a predominantly negative view of China. Czech Republic is now one of the most China-negative European countries, China being their third most negatively perceived country. The associations Czech respondents had regarding China were communism (in the first place unlike most European respondents, that associated primarily with Covid-19), massive population and massive production of low-quality goods as well as Covid-19.

The negative sentiment towards China is predominant throughout Europe, however, as the Europe-wide survey demonstrates. Most negative respondents were those from Northern and Western Europe. Similarly, it is the respondents from Western European countries who declared their perceptions of China have worsened recently. Overall, China is perceived by the respondents as more economically powerful when compared to the U.S., Russia, and the EU and its most negatively viewed impacts are that on global environment and democracy in other countries. Many respondents also agreed with the statements that Covid was artificially made in a Chinese lab and intentionally spread internationally or that Covid originated due to Chinese people eating wild animals.

Other articles focus primarily on discussing the role of media in reproducing Sinophobia. **Yue**²⁹¹, which elucidates the ways 19th century American press influenced a traveller's perception of China. **Stone & Xiao**²⁹² recounts the shift of American news coverage after the fall of USSR towards China as an enemy. **Ban & Dutta**²⁹³ explores the interplay between Orientalism and neoliberalism in NYT. **Pietrzak-Franger et al.**²⁹⁴ brings attention to Western popular press and its blaming of China for the pandemic. Their strategies of blame allocation go hand in hand with the idea of an invading China and exploit the anxieties that a China poses in the current times.

Deo et al.²⁹⁵ focuses on American TV shows and their framing of Asian and Pacific Islander Americans. **Tahmasbi et al.**²⁹⁶ delved into Twitter and 4chan to describe Sinophobic behaviour of their

²⁸⁸ Gao, Z. (2021). Sinophobia during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Identity, Belonging, and International Politics. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science*, 56(2), 472–490.

²⁸⁹ Zhang, Y., & Xu, F. (2020). Ignorance, Orientalism and Sinophobia in Knowledge Production on COVID-19. *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie*, 111(3), 211–223.

²⁹⁰ Chan, K. (2020). Racial Phantasmagoria: Asians and Asian Americans in the Era of COVID-19. *CEA Critic*, 82(3), 208–211.

²⁹¹ Yue, Isaac & 余文章. (2010). TRAVEL WRITING, IMPERIALISM, AND THE AMERICAN PRESS : THE POLITICS OF BAYARD TAYLOR'S (PRE-)CONCEPTION OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY CHINA. *Journal of Oriental Studies*, 43(1/2), 13–29.

²⁹² Stone, G. C., & Xiao, Z. (2007). Anointing a New Enemy. *International Communication Gazette*, 69(1), 91–108.

²⁹³ Ban, Z., Sastry, S., & Dutta, M. J. (2013). "Shoppers' Republic of China": Orientalism in Neoliberal U.S. News Discourse. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 6(4), 280–297.

²⁹⁴ Pietrzak-Franger, M., Lange, A., & Söregi, R. (2022). Narrating the pandemic: COVID-19, China and blame allocation strategies in Western European popular press. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 25(5), 1286–1306.

²⁹⁵ Deo, M. E., Lee, J. J., Chin, C. B., Milman, N., & Yuen, N. W. (2008). Missing in Action: "Framing" Race on Prime-Time Television. *Social Justice*, 35(2 (112)), 145–162.

²⁹⁶ Tahmasbi, F., Schild, L., Ling, C., Blackburn, J., Stringhini, G., Zhang, Y., & Zannettou, S. (2021). "Go eat a bat, Chang!": On the Emergence of Sinophobic Behavior on Web Communities in the Face of COVID-19. *Proceedings of the Web Conference 2021*.

respective communities, with Twitter bringing the blaming of China for the pandemic to the forefront and 4chan developing new racial slurs related to pandemic's imagery. Lin et al.²⁹⁷ also looks at covid-related hate-speech on Twitter but employs methods of data science to analyse the matter.

Western Sinophobia undergoes shifts and changes in the current times in reaction to China's economic rise and increasing geopolitical influence, but very significantly also in response to Covid-19 pandemic and its association with the country and Asian minorities alike. Western perception of China is predominantly negative, this perception being reinforced by media that oftentimes give in to biases and racist stereotypes. Importantly, this perception is steered by historical narratives and images about China and Asians that have developed alongside colonial thought. Chinese have been portrayed as a gendered and racialized Other, an animalistic, weak yet treacherous threat that acts like a swarm made up of units devoid of individuality and ability to think freely, that menaces the civilized world with its massive population, cheap production and disease.

Reinforcing this image of China and following the biases it offers only perpetuates the white supremacist dimension present in Western cultural make-up. Western countries' ways of engaging with China journalistically and academically or approaching China politically and diplomatically are then limited by assumptions that wish to maintain a planetary order built on racist hierarchy. Furthermore, the way China is portrayed and talk about inevitably leads to racialized violence in societies operating on said assumptions, leaving already marginalized groups more vulnerable.

²⁹⁷ Lin, H. et al. (2022). Multiplex Anti-Asian Sentiment before and during the Pandemic: Introducing New Datasets from Twitter Mining. In *Proceedings of the 12th Workshop on Computational Approaches to Subjectivity, Sentiment & Social Media Analysis*, pages 16–24, Dublin, Ireland. Association for Computational Linguistics.

Analysing cases of Sinophobia in Czech media

I chose examples of Sinophobic racism in mainstream, elite discourse, because it is where racist content is often communicated in subtle, implicit ways, and where stakes in maintaining the Western identity and image are most apparent. Racist content in elite discourse is a crucial, if underestimated, example of ontological racism being tapped into. I want to demonstrate that ontological racism can be reproduced in such a way that racist expressions, content, or mere racist implications, can be ignored because they simply seem common-sense, ie. they are congruous with Western beliefs about the world and they affirm Western identity. I aim to do so by situating them in the philosophical, ideological, and historical context of the West, the logic of which is chiefly communicated through a racial Us vs Them division that interprets reality as a dichotomous story.

Translations from the Czech originals are mine; they are indicated either by using cursive or by using quotation marks; the parts highlighted in bold are my own emphases.

Short essay on a public TV website: Racializing the Antagonist

In the first case study, I wish to examine how Asian traits signify evilness and call Whiteness (and by implication goodness) into question. Specifically, I will look at an article published on the webpage of ČT art, a channel of the Czech public TV dedicated to cultural topics. The headline of the article is as follows: *The transformation of Putin's face within the span of a year is an encapsulation of a drama: a short essay.*²⁹⁸ Its author is Josef Chuchma, the project manager of ČT art, and it was published 3 months after the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

I will compile the relevant portions of the article and analyse them closely and in detail before relating them to scholarship that could help elucidate them further. Let us start with the lead paragraph:

*I noticed it inadvertently. I was going through the Russian leader's current photos and suddenly it struck me: his face is so different; it underwent certain transformations. It grew older, more robust, and became more – **Eastern**. His eyes moved closer together and they gaze beyond this world, they peer through us to see somewhere outside.*

The indispensable context of the author's analysis is the Russian invasion of Ukraine that have sent ripples across Western media, cultural, and political discourse. As will be discussed later, the author himself admits that he may have been influenced by this event, but rather than focusing on this influence, he focuses on how instinctive his observation was instead. After all, the author starts by saying he did not have to try to make the observations, but that it came to him spontaneously, he simply has been attentive enough to start noticing (he mentions elsewhere in the article that he frequents the official website of the Russian president). The author also provides photographs for the readers so they can try and see for themselves, judge how evident the changes of Putin's face are.

Face and eyes, the only facial feature mentioned specifically in the text, are crucially associated with an individual's identity, and in the case of Putin's face in Chuchma's article, they become the site of his racial transmogrification. Prominently, Putin's facial changes are explicitly described as "Eastern" and in the very next sentence, his gaze is described as fixed on otherness, beyond our world and violently beyond us [*his eyes ... peer through us to see somewhere **outside***]. Putin's facial transformation moves him towards the East, the wholly, incomprehensibly other entity, making him effectively monstrous.

²⁹⁸ <https://art.ceskatelevize.cz/inside/glosa-promena-putinova-obliceje-behem-jednoho-roku-je-dramatem-v-kostce-ZjWg0>.

A bit further on, the author describes more about Putin's becoming Asian: *There are more grey hairs on his head, his lips are thinner and droop to a scowl, his eyes have sunk deeper into his face and moved closer together. Putin's inner self has definitively adjusted to the mode of a khan – physiognomy included.*

Here, his monstrosity is given even clearer contours. The text explicitly likens Putin to an oriental despot, and even claims that he is undergoing a physical, bodily transformation into this anti-Asian trope. The author describes a revelation of Putin as a ruthless khan (his ruthlessness attested to by his mouth becoming locked in a scowl), an Asian warlord, a scourge of Western civilization, the head of a horde that threatens to swarm us. The language of Yellow Peril is mobilised to communicate his threat. His monstrous metamorphosis makes him lose any remaining White features, by crossing the line of his evilness, his inner Asiatic ego becomes apparent. Morality emerges through physiognomy, culture merges with biology. The division between moral Us and Immoral them manifests itself in its racial fatality.

After the description, the author immediately admits, that his view of the Russian president can be affected by the fact "he sent his army to Ukraine", that it can be a result of "suggestion and projection." He is apparently aware that his assessment is strange, even problematic, but by admitting it explicitly, he gets to invite us into his perspective. He wants us to give his racial mysticism a chance, but he first needs to deny his responsibility for doing it by expressing the obvious critique his rhetoric could be met with and sideline it thusly. He then proceeds to completely ignore this critique and presents his dubious methods as producing almost obvious conclusions.

In the very same paragraph where he admits possible criticism, he writes the difference between old and new photos of Putin is "indisputable". In the next paragraph, he legitimizes his claims further by appealing to another suggestive description of Putin's face by the Russian writer Vladimir Sorokin: *The president's face has turned into an impenetrable mask overflowing with cruelty, maleficence, and bottomless insatiability. He now communicates mainly relying on lies – small and large, naively superficial or, on the other hand, consistent and complemented by various tones of self-deception.*

After the author associates Asian features with villainy and compares Putin to an Oriental khan, he adds more racist stereotypes to describe Putin's evil by citing Sorokin. He is inscrutable, lavishes in wanton cruelty and greed, he is so utterly dishonest that he is also delusional. It's almost as if Putin becomes a variation of Fu Manchu, the famous fictional supervillain threatening the Western civilization as a whole, an anti-Asian racist caricature.

Finally, the last sentence betrays just how much is it relevant for the author to take his own assessment with a grain of salt: *But from the photographs taken last year it is possible to observe that the essence of his mask is becoming clearer, its true meaning is noticeably altering his physical traits.*

Backing his claims with Sorokin, the author sheds any pretence of doubt and uses expressions such as **possible to observe, clearer, essence, true meaning, noticeably**; focusing rather on making his observations appear grounded, as opposed to far-fetched, and making claims about some fundamental reality of the world. The true meaning of Putin's mask is perceptible, and we are invited to take a look. The inner evil of Putin is so strong it transforms his face, his identity, and this evil has an implicitly racial character as Eastern, Asian, as though it was belonging to a khan of a horde, as though it was representative of Yellow Peril, or even Yellow Peril incarnate. Putin loses the traits because of which people could mistake him as White and the more he does, the more obviously evil he is.

Fundamentally, this essay has two central messages. Firstly, author's claims are legitimate; they originate from his attentive observation, they are due to the object of his observation being somewhat evident, they are thought-out (for the author admits possible influence of the recent events), they are backed by another authoritative observer (Sorokin) but fundamentally, and that constitutes the second message, it speaks to the expected shared understanding and conviction of the reader and to the underlying moral reality of Putin's character, the Russian regime, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Although there are segments of the Czech society that have a more positive attitude towards Russia, majority of Czechs have a negative view, especially those in the mainstream, who are, presumably, also the likely average visitor of the ČT art website. What is of interest to my thesis is that this common, shared understanding of Putin as an international criminal and a political tyrant, Russia as the aggressor in the current conflict, an immoral actor on the world stage, and finally, a civilizational enemy of the West, is communicated by the author through a racial dichotomy that pits virtuous Whiteness against an Eastern, Asiatic evil. The conduct of Russian army in Ukraine, Russian political culture etc. are an evil that is being conflated with some inner Oriental despotic essence.

The interconnectedness of evilness with Asian essence is reasserting the Us vs Them division as a civilizational, racial, and ontological one. The connection between the Yellow Perilist image of a barbarous horde and Asian facial traits is treated as self-evident enough to publish an article in public media in which one states someone's race is changing due to a surfacing of inner evilness. What is necessary to note here is that Chuchma's article is not an outlier in Western discourse, but part of a continuing tradition.

Jana Cattien²⁹⁹ explains that dealing in essences, Asian and White, Eastern and Western, offer an insurance policy that no matter how much the West is influenced or infected by the East, it can never succumb fully (and why East needs to be viewed with suspicion even when seemingly aligned). It is their immutable inner core that dictates their being and when danger arises, what is needed is reestablishing the identity of the Self and the distance from the Other. This fundamental difference determines how phenomena are viewed and contradictions resolved in Western discourses, a process Cattien highlights when addressing face and its importance as a site of expression of (white liberal subject's) individuality.

Face covering is generally seen as an affront to liberal freedom and subjecthood and tends to be racialized too, take for example the Islamophobic discourse about hijab, niqab, and burqa, or more recently and more pertinently, the scepticism about wearing facemasks during Covid-19 pandemic. Mandating facemasks was criticized precisely as an infringement on an individual's freedom, as an imposed conformity that is common to the compliant, de-individualized Orientals, an authoritarian measure. Indeed, Western media often used photos of East Asians wearing facemasks when reporting about the pandemic, further associating it with Asians and China using less explicit means than calling it China virus.

But even when Westerners wear facemasks or adopt the same lockdown measures, it can still be interpreted as contrasting by reestablishing the distance between Us and Them. A liberal subject can always rely on their unique interiority, they possess and transcend their face and their body, their subjecthood is Ideal. Even when they wear a facemask, it does not have to be a sign of succumbing to conformity, but a reaffirmation of personal, individual choice. No matter what happens to the liberal subject, their inner core is protected from change, and they will therefore never be the same as the

²⁹⁹ Cattien, J., (2022), p. 7-8.

authoritarian Orient. Keeping the distance between racialized civilizations helps remain their inner core essences intact and structures their traits and actions along racial lines.

In the ČT art essay, Putin's face is also described as a mask, it deceives us from seeing the Asiatic inner core and is unlike the face that expresses the otherwise transcendent inner self. The changes of his face affirm the dichotomic racial and civilizational distance between the West and the East. Notably, that which is perceived as part of the East can always extend, not just to include Russians, but Slavs in general too, their Whiteness can be and has been called into question.

In the beginning of the 20th century, when Japan won in a war against Russia, Americans were quick to resolve the contradiction of Asians defeating Whites. They did so by casting Russians as Slavic Whites, inferior to Anglo-Saxons, un-Christian, stagnant, and autocratic, and Japanese as victors thanks to adopting Anglo-saxon institutions and civilization.³⁰⁰ That the seeming Whiteness of the Russians is deceptive has been reiterated in many ways: They were said to not be pure due to their Mongol blood, of being only outwardly civilized semi-savage Tartars, as blond Arabs, disguised Chinese, and Oriental people. Perhaps most suggestively was this superficial, deceptive Whiteness of the Russians expressed by a quote attributed to Napoleon: "Scratch the Russian and you will find a Tartar."³⁰¹

Napoleon's sentiment was shared by anonymous contributor to the student newspaper *Harvard Crimson*, who wrote about Soviet expropriation of private property in a commentary stylistically reminiscent of a Reddit post. There, he makes the distinction between West and East clear; while Western European countries have "the tremendous shadow of Roman civilization" standing behind them, "Russian civilization, at least its representatives ... show all the characteristics of the wandering, nomadic tribes of the Steppes."³⁰² The image of Soviets as a mixture of political and civilizational others, as an onslaught of animalistic Asiatic hordes threatening Christian civilisation with communism, was used by Germans who tried to reintegrate themselves to the West again after WW2, casting themselves as victims of both Nazi and Soviet totalitarianism, but otherwise proper representative of the Western Christian civilization.³⁰³

Both belonging to the West and the threat of the encroaching East or of becoming Eastern are constitutive of even the contemporary Czech political consciousness, they are invoked by conservatives and progressives alike, they are used to comment on the situation in Central European countries' politics. The influence of this sentiment cannot be underestimated, and when it is fuelled by a great crisis, its urgency heightens. The author of the examined essay used a common narrative and intensified to reflect on deep political anxieties raised by the Russian invasion.

This essay is an extreme example with its imaginary bordering on hate speech, as it associates Asian traits with the most pressing political threat and Europe's main geopolitical enemy, this needless and rather explicit racialization is something most criticism of Putin's criminality seldom resorts to. However, it is less extreme in its engaging in a sort of conspiratorial thinking that answers valid anxieties with pseudo-intellectualism and Sinophobic tropes (similar to how other conspiracy theories tap into the substrate of anti-Semitism).

The problem is that, although it makes sense to be extremely defensive towards the enemy, it may nonetheless bring adverse effects: it radicalizes identity, making it more abrasive and

³⁰⁰ Kowner, R., (2006), p. 155-156.

³⁰¹ <https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft3b69n83q&chunk.id=d0e2008&toc.depth=1&toc.id=d0e2008&brand=ucpress>, p. 55-56.

³⁰² <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1922/5/3/scratch-a-russian-pthe-soviets-delegation/>.

³⁰³ <https://journals.openedition.org/rcsar/476#tocto1n2>, paragraphs 3 and 13.

uncompromising; and anything associated with enemy is suspect and can share its negative traits. A conspiratorial narrative polarizes people and information alike, limiting the interaction with and perception of the world, because it reduces complex issues into convoluted arrangements involving the targeting of the marginalized or conclusions that strip the conspirator of any possibility to react.

I would argue that it would be most beneficial to extend the analysis of conspiratorial thinking (in the sense of finding explanations through pseudoscience or superstition) to elite discourse and mainstream media so that inefficient information processing can be tackled even on this front.

Popular non-fiction publication about the DPRK: The phantasy of evil and its role

In the second case study, I want to look at how historical complexities become reduced to narratives supporting White protagonism and the idea of West as default. The text in question is Nina Špitálníková's book *Svědectví o životě v KLDK* (Testimonies about life in the DPRK, *Testimonies* henceforward). As the title suggests, the book is a collection of commented interviews with North Korean defectors the author conducted with Nina Špitálníková is a well-known populariser of the topic of DPRK and has published books, featured in interviews, and started a podcast to inform about the topic. Apart from several accessible non-fiction titles about the DPRK, she also authored a novel (*Severka*) inspired by the experiences of emigres from North Korea that transforms them into a more relatable story with rather universal implications, as the last sentence of its annotation suggests: *The main [question with relevance beyond the Korean peninsula that the novel explores] is: What can an individual sacrifice for their own freedom?* In addition to the novel, she also prepares to publish a children's book teaching about the dichotomy between freedom and totalitarianism, further distilling universal morals from her work and convictions.

In *Testimonies*, the author introduces the typical image of North Korea created by the media environment is evocative of "limitless evil", it is a "dark, inscrutable, scary" place led by "total lunatics" and defined by propaganda "too absurd to be taken seriously". North Koreans themselves are perceived as "people in grey uniforms willing to sacrifice their lives for the leader ... marching in perfect unison with emaciated faces."³⁰⁴ The author perfectly sums up the common stereotype of the country as the fundamental anti-thesis of Us, a Sinophobic trope so pristine even China itself does not match in Western imaginary. North Korea is the ultimate cautionary tale of how evil it is to not be like us, so much it provokes morbid fascination and confirms our fundamental moral understanding of the world.

Afterwards, she challenges it, formulating the purpose of her book. She asks the reader: *But aren't the North Koreans more like us than we think?* In fact, she asks Czech readers specifically, for in the following paragraph, she recalls that "we" (the Czechs) were also living in a totalitarian regime, "scared" and "unwilling to revolt". What more, she also warns the readers that "we are forgetting the real horrors of the past regime" and that "many miss the false securities and comfortable dependence" it provided. The author finishes her address with a strongly formulated message: in the former regime, "we did not lack **anything but freedom**".³⁰⁵

This way, the author offers an interpretative key to the testimonies and appeals to a Czech audience that she wishes to educate on highly moral topics. Instead of sensationalist and political themes, she wants to focus on "normal people" and relay a universally human message, but also a Czech one, that nevertheless, has universal relevance for a certain moral view of the world. She appeals to her fellow Czechs to remember how bad we had it in the past how good we have it now that the

³⁰⁴ Špitálníková, N., (2020), p. 9.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 10.

political system changed. While the wrongfulness of the previous regime is explicit, the goodness of the current is implicit by contrast and by asserting that the goodness Czechs have now is a fundamental good in the last sentence: It is because we have freedom now, a freedom that is posited literally as the all-defining value, as it is the only thing we lacked before and the one thing we have now that changes everything, only now we are true human agents and makers of our own destiny.

The rest of the introduction³⁰⁶ is the author describing the process of conducting the interviews and recording the testimonies as a struggle in a white woman's soul. She learned not to be too quick to judge, because we small people are all faced with tough decisions that we had to face in times of strife. The author learns to become a better person by reinterpreting the lives of North Koreans as universally relatable struggles in an unjust world. Crucially, however, the character of this world is set in advance, it is a world structured by a definitive moral order, with freedom being the defining trait author focused on. Even in the penultimate sentence of the introduction, the author testifies she started to value her freedom more after the experience of working on the book. The author embarks on a journey to learn, but everything is decided in advance, everything exists to be discovered as a confirmation of the moral order. She does not want to provide us with more sensationalism, but she does not thematize what is at the root of the sensationalist desire in the first place.

Let me explain those last two sentences. The world that the author invokes is defined by a sort of "liberal Gnosticism". It is liberal as it is defined by freedom, and hardly is there a value with more symbolic import and mobilising potential than that for liberalism. Because goodness is measured by politico-cultural contents, it is mapped onto the West, that is as good as it is liberal. If its liberalism falters, it is expressed through terms that liken the West to its Other.³⁰⁷ People living in an illiberal regime are genuinely unfree, and it is through some kind of revolt against it and through living in a liberal regime that people can experience true freedom; ergo, freedom and genuine agency are defined by specific political arrangements (in this case by liberalism) within which or for which action takes place. Furthermore, the only framework available to understand the hardships recounted by the testimonies is again the dichotomy of a good and a bad world where the political intersects with the racial. Czech audiences will still predominantly view North Korea as an epitome of an evil place and paired with the sombre graphic design, and they will therefore likely process the presented information through sensationalist lenses.

The author humanizes North Koreans by relating their present with the past of the Czech audience. Their humanity is shackled, just like "ours" was. Now, however, thanks to freedom, we possess the moral superiority to judge right from wrong in their case. In fact, she does not mean to judge the people involved, as their lives are embedded in a messy, complicated reality, she elected to judge the transcendent moral facts that underly that reality. The interviewees are not judged for their actions, their belonging to the right world is judged, so is their simulation and participation on the right values; they escape personal judgement just to be ushered in a world that consists of nothing but a court.³⁰⁸ She does not do away with the same barrier or gap between Us and Them maintained by biological, fatalist racists, she only makes it conditional; just as the idea of a civilizing mission always co-existed with the idea of "exterminating brutes" in the liberalism of the 19th century, so it coexists in complicated ways in our century's liberalism.

Finally, the point here is not to criticise or invalidate the author's approach per se, but rather show that it takes for granted that the most relevant context for the North Korean testimonies (and

³⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 10-12.

³⁰⁷ Cattien, J., (2022), p. 4.

³⁰⁸ Land, N. (2011). *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*. Urbanomic, see chapter "After the Law".

Czech history alike) is a narrative of a universal moral struggle that may manifest itself in a particular clash between liberal democracy and totalitarianism, a scheme that aids in keeping the moral identity of the West intact as it casts it as the ultimate hero in this scenario and all that is bad as an otherness that can affect or infect us, but not change the underlying moral reality.

Perhaps the best for understanding along which exact lines the author's openness and judgement works and how the chosen context creates a complex impression, we can take a look at the introduction to an interview³⁰⁹ with lady "O Mi-ran" (the name was changed to maintain anonymity of the interviewee), an almost 80 years old defector. The author admits that the interview was particularly challenging for her and then writes:

"On one hand, lady O Mi-ran remembered the Japanese occupation, the founding of Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Korean war, and famine. The good and the bad times in North Korea. On the other hand, **her memory was clouded** by her love for the leader Kim Il-song. Her love for him was so strong that when she was escaping the country, she did not take a photograph of her mum, her dad, her children, she took a greeting card signed by the Supreme leader. That was the most prized possession she could not live without. I could not understand how someone, who lives over twenty years in a democratic country, **still does not want to admit to herself** how the North Korean regime was treating people. It made me angry, but I knew I am not there to judge anyone, to evaluate them. After the interview ended, I thought of a question. She would lay down her life for the leader. Would he lay down his life for her, though?"

As is apparent from the third sentence, the assessment of the author is guided by the epistemological clarity of her as a free agent, while the interviewee's ability to speak for herself is impeded by her unfreedom caused by her sentiments or convictions. Her ability to rationally judge is called is not just called into question, but outright denied, because she feels so strongly for the leader. Later in the interview, it is also revealed the interviewee is a believer in Jesus Christ, this strong feeling goes unquestioned, perhaps it would even feel odd to question this belief. That is because having beliefs typically classified as religious or spiritual is seen as a personal choice and therefore can be understood as compossible with individual freedom. But believing in a leader that is understood as an Oriental despot (a leader intoxicated with power and intoxicating through propaganda and a personality cult) is either a sign of a lack of personal agency, or of a presence of personal evil.

Next, Špitálníková wants us to understand the intensity and arguably the character of "O Mi-ran's" love for Kim Il-song. She notes that the interviewee did not take pictures of her family (as "we" would expect or would have) but a memento of her leader. This makes her specifically not relatable to "us". We are likely invited to share the author's indignant anger, as she does not offer us any further interpretation or comment as to why she included this information in the introduction other than to highlight how strange the interviewee was to her and how terribly powerful (and evidently evil) is this belief the interviewee has.

At last, Špitálníková explains why exactly is "O Mi-ran's" inability to see clearly so outrageous to her. She literally writes the interviewee "**does not want to admit to herself**", implying she is mentally pushing back against evident truth and reality. To Špitálníková, it is obvious that living in a free society should enlighten her, that freedom should make her fully agential, fully human. She must therefore be in denial, if she does not see the ultimate goodness of her new situation of being on the good side of the world. Finally, the author reassures us that her judgement is not overridden by emotions, despite her anger, she knew she was not there to judge, perhaps to show us that unlike the interviewee, she

³⁰⁹ Špitálníková, N., (2020), p. 227.

has the ability to transcend herself and that at least in the question of freedom and unfreedom, her vision is unclouded. The introduction is concluded by dramatically, yet not explicitly, repeating that the interviewee's belief is wrong.

We are left with two possible, interconnected views of North Koreans: the common notion of them as an amorphous, unthinking mass, or an alternative one offered by Špitálníková, that they can be seen as victims of the evil other regime who can be embraced by the good regime of the West, and thus copy the trajectory of Czech national history, affirming the universal validity of its narrative. That Western values and institutions are a source of salvation can be observed on the view of South Korea as a society free and democratic enough that it should turn the North Korean escapees by default. This framework of this universal moral narrative reduces all complexity to simpler schematics.

The universal moral narrative is made more pertinent than historical context of western involvement in the peninsula. It protects the comfort of the subject by affirming the morality of their identity instead of putting them into the vulnerable position of a learner whose identity and related view of the world is at stake. History could pose interesting questions instead of providing a Good vs Evil fantasy scenario, for example, whether the Western actions towards the Korean People's Republic (sic!) were justified? How would the simple dichotomous narrative change if the discourse about Korea in the West was better acquainted with the history and character of the South Korean regime? Perhaps the caricatures of North Koreans would be harder to maintain if we acknowledged the genocide US committed on them during the so-called "Forgotten War".³¹⁰

That conditionally humanizing narratives do not defuse dehumanizing ones, they former is not a solution for the latter. Even Vietnam War usually is condemned or viewed negatively, it is still seldom viewed as a genocidal project in which massacres were not a side-effect but the purpose, a standard.³¹¹ It has been retold many times through American trauma, but when was it told alongside the ceaseless bombardment of Laos and Cambodia at that time?

The Americans used race to justify their conflicts even in the case of Korea and Vietnam: American General in Vietnam, W. Westmoreland, said: "The Oriental doesn't put the same high price on life as the Westerner. Life is plentiful, life is cheap in the Orient. And as the philosophy of the Orient expresses it – life is not important."³¹²

Does this make Vietnam about race, rather than politics? I do not think so, because no separation between race and politics ever happened for this to be even possible. William Pietz argued that the concept of totalitarianism served as a tool to racialize the Soviet enemy and justify foreign policy decisions as a way to contain its Oriental threat. Totalitarianism was understood as modernized Oriental despotism, the Russian communist fundamentally incapable of reason, their typically Oriental psyche clouded and unable to perceive reality and admit the truth to themselves, unlike the Western rational, scientific mind.³¹³ This ties to philosophical and civilizational dimension as well; the influential evangelical Christian writer, Dan Gilbert, explicitly linked communism and materialist philosophy with Oriental religions, Yellow Peril with Red Scare, among other reasons, because they threaten the primacy of the individual and of American Christian worldview.³¹⁴

³¹⁰ See: Cumings, B. (2010). *The Korean War: A History*. Modern Library.

³¹¹ See: Turse, N. (2013). *Kill anything that moves: The Real American War in Vietnam*. Metropolitan Books..

³¹² He stated this in a documentary *Hearts and Minds* (1974) directed by Peter Davis.

³¹³ Tchen, J. K. W., & Yeats, D., (2014), p. 293-298.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 298-301.

However, not only were Orientalist stereotypes mapped onto the communists, but they also racialized the totalitarianism as a whole, including the European instances of it. German Nazism could therefore be understood as a loss of Western characteristics that only proves that we truly need to protect Western values and the Western ways which are ultimately pristine.³¹⁵ Holocaust, then, becomes a product of that which is unlike Us, something totalitarian and savage, like our enemies and others. It allows Us to project own evils onto Them; let me quote from the compendium *Yellow Peril! An Archive of Anti-Asian Fear* that deals with American cultural representations: “There is a long American tradition of screening U.S. wars as their opposite. In Westerns, Indians ambush wagon trains, and in war films about U.S. occupations, indigenous enemies ambush American soldiers.”³¹⁶ The victimizer makes himself into a victim through an ongoing stream of cultural representations, creating an entire media environment that corroborates this vision.³¹⁷

The relevance of the moral narrative is so strong that when a Czech historian wrote a book about Czech soldiers in First Indochina War, he still glorified them as heroes fighting for freedom despite listing the war crimes and atrocities they regularly partook in and despite admitting the colonial cause they represented was widely unpopular with the local populace.³¹⁸

Reyling on the White supremacist Us vs Them narrative is intellectually dangerous precisely because it does not allow for learning anything new since everything already exists to be discovered and fit into the moral meta-narrative of the world in which the Western protagonist deals with non-Western antagonists and victims.

Public TV news report: Sinophobia as the primary context

On the example presented in the last case study, I would like to argue that ontological racism lessens the ability to detect misinformation and disinformation, especially in an environment of a constant and fast influx of copious amounts of information. I will return to Czech TV, specifically to its main news program. On 28th November 2022, it broadcasted a segment about protests in China.³¹⁹ The reporter sets the tone for the segment with the first sentence and offers the audience an interpretative key with which to decode the whole situation: ***These are rare moments of Chinese people expressing their opinion openly.***³²⁰ This manipulative statement generalizes the fact of extra-ordinary mass protests into a trope of a dystopian regime inhabited by mindless drones who only exercise agency when their behaviour fits Western narratives.

The opening line is indicative of a bias that leads to journalistic malpractice later in the segment, when a video captured by a mobile phone shows a car ramming into a crowd of people.³²¹ The narration of the reporter at that moment informs us that: ***In Shanghai, the police ... drove their car into [a crowd of] protesters.*** The video is shown unsourced on the screen, but it’s source can be found for example on the YouTube channel of *The News Tribune*, a newspaper based in Tacoma, Washington, USA.³²²

³¹⁵ Ibid., p. 293-298.

³¹⁶ Ibid., p. 313.

³¹⁷ Franklin, H. B. (2000). *Vietnam and other American fantasies*. University of Massachusetts Press. p. 17-18.

³¹⁸ <https://denikalarm.cz/2024/04/hrdinove-ladislava-kudrny-cechoslovaci-ve-francouzske-cizinecke-legii-valecne-zlociny-a-legitimita-valky-v-indocine/>.

³¹⁹ Události (28. listopadu 2022), <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/1097181328-udalosti/222411000111128/>.

³²⁰ Události (28. listopadu 2022), 6:00.

³²¹ Události (28. listopadu 2022), 7:07-7:12.

³²² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMPoTe00vQ8&ab_channel=TheNewsTribune. The clip used by ČT starts at about 0:44.

According to the video's description, the video shows a Tacoma³²³ police car driving through a crowd, and the particular clip used by ČT is apparently a video submitted via Twitter as per a citation shown on screen. I believe it is unlikely ČT took the clip from a news channel that contradicts their description.

However, there are posts on twitter.com that corroborate the claim ČT makes. The first post shows the same clip including the original sound but stating it happened in Shanghai and that videos and pictures of the protests will be taken down by YouTube and Facebook, adding a sense of urgency to the post.³²⁴ The second shows the clip in much worse quality (as it is a footage of a screen showing the clip on TikTok with overlaid Chinese text) and without any sound, the poster also stating it is a recording from Shanghai after prefacing it with a hashtag saying "ChinaProtests".³²⁵ Only the former could have been the source used by ČT, because there is no Chinese overlaid text in their clip, but that does not mean there were no other versions of the clip still, in fact, it is even improbable that there were not, more can be found still by simply searching on Twitter. Either way, it raises a question why did ČT not verify the clip better? In the version of the video with sound, English words can be clearly heard. Except for the versions with very low visual quality, it can be noticed that the car has a big sign saying "POLICE" on it. Although neither of these facts prove that the video in fact was not taken in Shanghai (unless one knows how the police cars in Shanghai look like), they should raise some suspicion. Even if this video was shared by a source that ČT trusts.

I hypothesize that it was the challenges mainstream media face in today's digitized, decentralized mediascape on the one hand, and the negative othering of China on the other, that enabled this misinformation to be broadcasted. Let me expand on this in the following paragraphs.

First of all, traditional, mainstream news providers have to adapt to contemporary information environment characteristic for the sheer volume of content produced and reproduced at hectic pace. Arguably, the traditional media providers navigate the digital, networked space in similar way other news consumers and producers do; their behaviour and cognition fundamentally situated and socially embedded.³²⁶ By approaching Western mainstream media as lodged within ontological racism and as particularly important representatives of elite discourse, we can better articulate the nature of their partiality. For example, while media agencies might scrutinize their behaviour and have their behaviour scrutinized more effectively than in the case of an average social media user, such scrutiny is limited by the available tools of inspection: ČT's sensitivity to racism is defined by its understanding of it. Western mainstream media, including the public ones like ČT, can also be seen as thinking and acting from the position of the societal political and cultural elite; it usually has a specific character and interests that are rooted in White/Western identity.³²⁷

That is why I would argue that the way mainstream media react to current pressures is guided by their sense of identity. Both the pressures of media environment (information overload and speed;

³²³ It is harrowingly ironic that ČT chose a clip from Tacoma, Washington, specifically, as it is a city notorious for a violent expulsion of a Chinese community in the 19th century. There is a site dedicated to the incident of Sinophobic hate and violence: <https://www.tacomamethod.com/>.

³²⁴ <https://x.com/NguyenK68421403/status/1597201004310986752>.

³²⁵ <https://x.com/Freedom77764823/status/1597391533900460032>.

³²⁶ See: Friedman, J. (2023). Post-Truth and the epistemological crisis. *Critical Review*, 35(1–2), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08913811.2023.2221502>; Hassoun, A., Beacock, I., Consolvo, S., Goldberg, B., Kelley, P. G., & Russell, D. M. (2023). Practicing Information Sensibility: How Gen Z Engages with Online Information. Proceedings of the 2023CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3544548.3581328>; Williams, D. (2023). The case for partisan motivated reasoning. *Synthese*, 202(3). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-023-04223-1>. The idea of actors not being situated itself is reliant on liberal ideological and philosophically Idealist concepts and ideals.

³²⁷ van Dijk, T. A., (1999), p. 241-282.

challenges which might intensify with the advent of AI) and their ideological alignment compel mainstream media to rely on major news agencies and traditionally reliable sources, possibly reproducing or even assimilating to their perspective. Perhaps even more importantly, the pressures of information overload and speed require them to rely on quick judgement and instinct even more, to rely on their information sensibility, which is only empowered by the tension between mainstream and alternative media that impels the opposing sides to assert their positions more strongly.

ČT is a mainstream medium with an ambition to be a trustworthy and authoritative news source within the Czech mediascape, and it largely succeeds in this venture. The competition with alternative media impels both to radicalize themselves in opposition to the other. The hostility of media environment only exacerbated by the rising polycrisis reinforces the reliance on value-based preconceptions, intuition, and partisanship-biased cognition, which may lead to polarization and tribalism between mainstream and alternative sources. In these conditions, the mainstream media may function or reimagine themselves more as a bulwark protecting liberal democratic values than just a news source striving for journalistically legitimate output.

In such tense circumstances, the mainstream media may view fake news and reporting bias as related to racial, cultural, or class-based traits of the spreaders, all media camps may resort to relating their struggle to an Us vs Them dichotomy and racialize their enemy, see them as traitors to their values. While this hypothesis remains to be tested, it is worth considering the impact of ontological and epistemological racism on media discourses and discourses about media.

Now, the perspective of China as the anti-thesis to a Western, liberal “Us” tremendously impacts judgement as its totalitarian characterization is, I would argue, the primary context and framework through which information about China is being processed in media. Statements and framings of China are usually presented without substantiation and treated as common sense.³²⁸ Media sociologist Renáta Sedláková conducted research into Sinophobia in Czech public media, Czech radio and Czech TV and provided several examples showing that journalistic standards are lowered when China is the topic. In one of the interviews broadcasted by Czech radio, the interviewer essentially becomes a hype man for the guest because they are in such accord in their view of China.³²⁹ Czech TV would repeatedly emphasize negatives and deemphasize positive/neutral information or reframe it as ultimately negative.³³⁰

Among the examples of journalistic bias, Sedláková also presents a Czech radio interview about the Covid pandemic, which, as she writes, “not only reflects a markedly ethnocentric Western view, but is very close to hate speech.” In this interview, a well-known medicinal doctor and senator is left unquestioned when he says that China has been the source of many epidemics because they are unable to follow basic hygiene, contrasting their behaviour to rules set out by the Old Testament.³³¹ The senator therefore invokes adhering to Judeo-Christian values and Western civilization as a decisive factor in proliferation of diseases or a lack thereof.

It is an example of the implicit ethnocentric logic behind reporting on China that posits China as “them”, fundamentally different from “us”, without explicitly using white supremacist language or slurs. This difference is inscribed with moral judgement as well, with us being culturally right, superior and civilized, while they are wrong, dangerous, inferior and barbaric. The closest to hate speech,

³²⁸ Sedláková, R. (2021). Anti-Chinese sentiment in the Czech public service media during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics*, 17(1–2), 65–86. <https://doi.org/10.1515/lpp-2021-0004>. p. 73.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74-75.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 78-80.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

however, is the same influential person's statement mentioned in the interview and likewise left unquestioned. When commenting on the number of victims of the virus in China, he stated that "when any animal species multiplies, nature begins to correct it".³³² This way, the senator reproduces a Sinophobic trope of Asian lives as too multitudinous, their dying only a natural result of their "animal" lives and their wrong and dangerous cultural behaviour. His statement also evokes the solution proposed by the likes of Kipling and London³³³ when ruminating on the Yellow Peril, the inherent threat posed by the existence of Chinese population — genocide.

³³² *Ibid.*, p. 77.

³³³ Lester, Q., (2021), p. 1-2, 6-10.

Conclusion

What is racism good for?

One of the goals of my thesis is to try tracing a more useful concept of racism that would eschew some of the pitfalls encountered when operating with this term. I took inspiration from the categorisation of racism offered by Scheurich and Young while paying special attention to civilizational racism, especially its ontological strand. This helps avoid certain issues that arise when the term racism is applied, or the phenomenon of racism analysed, and offers alternatives.

1. Treating racism as a structural matter and more

Categorization that identifies several levels ranging from microscopic to macroscopic not only allows to treat racism as something that is not limited to extremists or a result of a personal failing, it allows it to be viewed as a multiplicitous problem that calls for different approaches on different levels. Therefore, theorizing ontological racism will not seamlessly to theorizing the other categories. Institutional level will raise different questions and call for different solutions than interpersonal one, a single issue will change according to which level they are inspected on.

2. Seriously contending with intersectionality of racism

While it is sensible to see that racist discourse develops overtime, proper assessment of the process is necessary to prevent convenient separation. Driving a wedge between old and new racism may obscure the continuity of material processes enabling racism that have adapted to new circumstances, radically delinking the current forms from the past underappreciates their shared logic and may even lead to apologetics of the former by comparing them with the latter. Another example of this is Arendt's distinguishing between racism and race thinking meant to enable her to condemn unwanted racism and vindicate the beneficial one.

Biological, cultural, and yet other forms of racism cannot be neatly separated either, nor can they be simply mapped onto a timeline, the biological and cultural always intersected and it intersects now. Intersections of race, class, gender etc. show that concepts do not float alone but are networked and the concept of civilizational racism helps understand racism in its intertwined character. Ontological racism specifically can be employed the logic founded on tracking the distance from the Ideal, the resulting compulsion to hierarchize, and other characteristics, such as the obsession with purity and the privileging of transcendence, abstraction, symbolism, and simulation.

3. Grounding racism in history

As the previous paragraph suggests, I do not try to make a universally applicable definition of racism, but one firmly historically and geographically rooted. I focus only on racism as a phenomenon originating in the West, the understanding of racism I apply here is genealogical. To detach racism from its context just enough to be applicable universally comes at the cost of not putting the shared logic of the categories of racism at the forefront and reinforces the notion of racism as an aberration, not to mention that it risks lumping disparate phenomena together in an ahistorical fashion.

The point is simple: racism in, racism out. We cannot expect racism not to proliferate if the information provided by media and education reproduce racial viewpoints. This of course extends to tools and frameworks agents within a discourse use to both produce and process information; if those have a racializing function or *modus operandi* themselves, the results cannot go beyond race. If we do not build new and more complex context for information about the Third World to be received, it will have to rely on the racist ones present at hand.

4. Exorcising racism

Likely the most tedious issue is the “taboo” of racism. Racism is generally viewed as a serious label; an indictment one can use to stigmatize another. I would argue that this can be well observed on the discussion sparked by Tomáš Profant’s article about racism in development aid.³³⁴ Apart from a more general lack of clarity on both sides about how the terms are applied and defined, most of the criticism raised against Profant, allow me to simplify³³⁵, boils down to seeing the application of the term “racism” as an attack. Treating racism as a taboo that we need to shun or avoid leads to situations where the application of the term is seen as too serious an accusation. It should not mean racism is to be taken lightly or allow for the application of the term to be frivolous, but being indignant about the usage of the word can take attention away from the pervasiveness of race in thinking, from the political and personal stakes of it for the subjects embedded in the civilizational milieu in question, or even from the impact of racial thought on how the world is structured discursively and materially.

Civilizational racism is not about condemnation because no one can be in a position to condemn from within. It is not about guilt, which itself can be just a way to launder oneself to keep a position of moral superiority. It is an observation of a constituent that cannot be secluded from the rest of Western thought and ideologies. Making a difference between racism and racial thought or racist and non-racist acts might make sense on the lower levels of categories of racism, but for civilizational racism, it is counterproductive, as in its macroscopic perspective all needs to be seen in relation (in relation to the extant material conditions included). What we can talk about on the civilizational level is potentials present in Western thought to think beyond race, or to think otherwise, but other than that, thought stays *in* race.

We need to address how something connects to racist thought and afterwards judge how it is or isn’t harmful without setting prior limitations; then we can differentiate different racist definitions and applications of the term racism either as a strategic or an analytical tool.

5. Understanding the logic of race through embeddedness

Racism structures the way information is processed, how facts are read, and networks of meaning are tangled. This structuring is done by specifically situated agents, embedded within their societal and civilizational environments. I have tried to capture these environments, on their discursive level especially, in the context I developed throughout the chapters on philosophy, ideology, and history. The practice of situating in context may help challenge the dominant preconceptions that make assessment of racism harder. If we are to find alternatives to persistent racism, we need to start viewing information and its processing as embedded, look for techniques that abstractions and simulation, separation from materiality, reliance on information literacy and debate culture cannot provide.

It is necessary to extend the debate so that we can grapple with challenges intrinsic to Western civilization. The assimilative push, supported by its philosophical roots, branches into history through colonial, imperialist, and neo-colonial ventures.

The point, therefore, is not to enclose the ontological concept of racism in a court or an arena, but to understand racism as a guiding principle of Western self-understanding and worldview. Racism is not a bug, but rather a feature of the dominant planetary system and moralization can never be a

³³⁴ Slačálek, O., Krenčeyová, M., Ryška, T., Horký-Hlucháň, O., & Profant, T. (2020). How to Study Racism (Not Only) in Development Cooperation. *Mezinárodní Vztahy*, 55(3), 91–133. <https://doi.org/10.32422/mv-cjir.1722>.

³³⁵ I wish I could dedicate more time to properly address the complexity of the misunderstanding that have arisen around Profant’s article and to clarify how my understanding differs from that of Profant’s critics and Profant’s own, but that would be enough to constitute another chapter.

productive answer to its brutality, that can be only done through thorough assessment and daring ethics. The point is to allow for newness, but also at least to better assess what the misunderstandings are, how else can we look at a problem, genuinely improve our affordances and enhance our studies.

6. Ensnaring that which evades

One of the ways we can embed is to view all speech as affected, as serving both an informational and emotional function. Even the language of neutrality and sterility is evocative and tactical. Emotionally loaded utterances contradicting each other may both be based in facts, just interpreted through different frameworks. Embedding shifts focus to the situatedness of information and to the partiality of the actors. Efforts to contextualize information processing as a social practice have already begun.³³⁶

Grasping the situatedness of specific actors can help us treat the knowledge they produce according to their partiality, accounting for their subjectivity without expecting objectivity. Inquiry into the situatedness of thinking is another avenue for embedding information processing; there are, for example, Buddhist approaches towards the timely topic of intelligence that offer an alternative rearticulation of the problem of information.³³⁷

Racist discourse does not always employ explicitly hateful language, but for example a patronizing one which usually bars people from an open, flexible assessment of the conditions and circumstances of the other, and ultimately, of oneself. The utterances then are not the sole problematic products of racist discourse, another problem is for example a skewed view of what counts as expertise or knowledge of a contentious topic.

Finally, if racism is an integral facet of people's lives, the stakes for its maintenance cannot be taken lightly.

7. Ontological racism as method

Racism can be viewed as tied to identity and vulnerability, the more vulnerable the agent feels regarding their identity, the more they are compelled to resort to racism. If the racial view of the world is integral to their fundamental understanding of the self and the world, the agents lack incentive to not view through a racializing lens. This has tremendous epistemological and axiological implications as well. The concept of ontological racism could help understand the pervasiveness and persistence of racism as a logical product of a particular philosophical and worldbuilding project. After all, racialization and racial hierarchization obscures the material and historical forces that drive contemporary planetary organization, they interpret and construct the characters of Western and non-Western parties and the relationships between them through racist tropes.³³⁸

Intentionality is an inadequate concept for understanding racism especially on an ontological and epistemological level, when the racist acts and perception stem from agency rooted in the identity of the agent, from the motivations and convictions formed by their situatedness.³³⁹ In short, ontological racism identifies the agents involved as stakeholders not because of their racist intentions, but because their embeddedness in a racially structured world that comprehensively codifies their possibilities.

³³⁶ For example the article on Information sensibility from Hassoun et al. mentioned earlier.

³³⁷ Duckworth, D. (2020). A Buddhist Contribution to Artificial Intelligence? *Hualin International Journal of Buddhist Studies*; Promta, S. & Einar Himma, K. (2008). Artificial intelligence in Buddhist perspective. *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society*.

³³⁸ Profant, T., (2020), p. 28.

³³⁹ Friedman, J., (2023), p. 17.

Speaking for the abject, advocacy and attempts at better representation must all grapple with philosophical implications and tools already involved in running the racially structured world. Anti-racist efforts may reproduce the Mutua triad or lock themselves into a linguistic simulation. Ascribing or acknowledging agency is not a straightforward solution either, because it also matters how the agency of all involved is evaluated.

Solutions to ontological racism necessarily require a change beyond simple condemnation, apology, or other symbolic behaviour, it requires a veritably painful change. The West would have to open itself to fundamental, extreme vulnerability. And this whole framing already presupposes that the West will continue to be the supreme agent it is, and this choice will rely on its agency in the future. Whatever the case, one cannot hope to transcend time and matter without feeling the friction with otherness.

Western Media, its Information environment and imaginary

Any analysis of the current situation or prognosis for the future of racism in media needs to see media as likewise embedded in a multi-layered civilizational context. Internet and social media must be thought as part of the economic system in place and their functioning and incentives studied as according to it. The political and cultural is becoming increasingly commodified and structured by consumerism, while being located on internet platforms and infrastructure governed by the logic of private property.³⁴⁰ Attention economy, clickbait advertising, and the use of social media may exacerbate polarization³⁴¹, and a toxic, tribalist environment invites racial thinking that feeds of reinforced identities, intensified emotions, and an increased sense of vulnerability.

Nor should we underestimate the internet as a part of American global hegemony,³⁴² or rather the overarching globality it gives character to.³⁴³ Turning a blind eye to Western and specifically American hegemony, it is possible to see the effects of Western influence as effects of mere natural processes or the full individual agency of the affected (by which I do not wish to imply there is a simple, neutral solution to this, such as tying agency to individuality or authenticity; any conceptualization of agency involves political stakes for those conceptualizing it).

Wendy Hui Kyong Chun has written extensively about how Orientalism, racism, colonial racial thinking, related eugenicist views, and Sinophobia enter the digital media imaginary,³⁴⁴ how they are maintained by ignoring difference on one hand³⁴⁵ and profitably empowering the individual, authentic, and tribalist on the other, rather than being solved by such approaches. In other words, she masterfully

³⁴⁰ See: Greene, D. (2022). Landlords of the internet: Big data and big real estate. *Social Studies of Science*, 52(6), 904–927. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03063127221124943>; Sadowski, J. (2020). The Internet of Landlords: digital platforms and new mechanisms of rentier capitalism. *Antipode*, 52(2), 562–580. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12595>; Chun, W. H. K., (2021), p. 7-16.

³⁴¹ <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-tech-platforms-fuel-u-s-political-polarization-and-what-government-can-do-about-it/>. Also see: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s44271-024-00062-z>; Greene, D. (2022). Landlords of the internet: Big data and big real estate. *Social Studies of Science*, 52(6), 904–927. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03063127221124943>; Sadowski, J. (2020). The Internet of Landlords: digital platforms and new mechanisms of rentier capitalism. *Antipode*, 52(2), 562–580. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12595>; Chun, W. H. K., (2021), p. 6.

³⁴² <https://thebaffler.com/latest/surfin-usa-bevins>.

³⁴³ <https://www.palladiummag.com/2020/02/05/jiang-shigongs-vision-of-a-new-chinese-world-order/>.

Translation of the relevant Jiang Shigong's text can be found here:

<https://www.readingthechinadream.com/jiang-shigong-empire-and-world-order.html>.

³⁴⁴ See: Chun, W. H. K. (2005). *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics*. MIT Press.

³⁴⁵ Galloway, A. R. In: Nakamura, L., & Chow-White, P., (2013), p. 112-113.

connects the civilizational racism of the West to the world of new media.³⁴⁶ She also points to the historical and geographical situatedness of technology that should not be seen as neutral; the sheer impact Silicon Valley has on the rest of the world without being properly accountable is as alarming as its often eugenicist ideological background.³⁴⁷

The vulnerability of (civilizational) identity, the strenuous struggle of Us against Them, impact the way disinformation and misinformation is thought and employed as labels for strategic purposes.³⁴⁸ The polarizing potential of this impact is all the greater if partisanship is a major factor in susceptibility to disinformation,³⁴⁹ and if people can be mobilized through speculative media practices.³⁵⁰ In light of this, the impact of race thinking, racializing frameworks, and racism on information at large becomes all the more ingrained if information becomes hostage to identitarian conflicts and all the more unsolvable if the solution rely on a philosophical basis that feeds those preconceptions in the first place.

If mainstream media's use of hate speech, conspiratorial thinking, misinformation, and perpetuation of harmful narratives (disinformation) cannot be properly analysed, there can be no scientific debate about information that would not end up being a tribalist crusade.

The main reason why it is productive to be able to decode how mainstream media and elite discourses tap into ontological racism is that we can see when they privilege simple racializing narratives over complex examination of a certain case. The goal would be to have interesting, or at least adequate additions to public discourses and hopefully begin to build new, more sophisticated contexts.

³⁴⁶ Chun, W. H. K., (2021), p. 2, 17, 20, 22-23, 27, 49, 57-71.

³⁴⁷ Chun, W. H. K., (2021), p. 10-11.

³⁴⁸ <https://www.mediar.cz/spousta-lidi-nalepkuje-jako-dezinformace-cokoliv-co-se-jim-nelibi/>. See also: Altay, S., & Acerbi, A. (2023). People believe misinformation is a threat because they assume others are gullible. *New Media & Society*, 146144482311533. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448231153379>.

³⁴⁹ Roozenbeek, J., Maertens, R., Herzog, S. M., Geers, M., Kurvers, R., Sultan, M., & Van Der Linden, S. (2022). Susceptibility to misinformation is consistent across question framings and response modes and better explained by myside bias and partisanship than analytical thinking. *Judgment and Decision Making*, 17(3), 547–573. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1930297500003570>.

³⁵⁰ Pan, Weixian. Island Fever: Videated populism and disputed geography at sea. (2021, April 6). *Culture Machine*. <https://culturemachine.net/vol-19-media-populism/island-fever-weixian-pan>.

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