

Masking the Systematic Violence Perpetuated By Liberalism Through the Concept of 'Totalitarianism'

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Abstract

Starting from the European conquest in 1492 which established the beginning of colonialism, going through the establishment of liberalism's racial ('social') contract, and coming to present times of neocolonialism and neoliberalism, this paper underscores the interdependence between colonialism and liberalism, and liberalism's systematic violence of oppression, arguing that the term 'totalitarianism' is unable to shed light onto this violence. An analysis of the violence prevalent within social relations is offered here – more precisely, the violence of racism within liberalism- by focusing on the solipsistic historicity and identity of Europe/the West, and its concurrent violence of 'othering'. The colonial dimensions of 'modernity' and its hierarchical binaries become apparent by discussing the ideology of whiteness and its process of absorbing the radical alterity (absolute difference) of the non-European. The Holocaust, thus, is a particularity of colonialism brought home to Europe. There is a need to de-link social relations and (re)presentations, state structures, practices and knowledge from the colonial matrix of power by employing a decolonial approach to history, knowledge and practice.

Keywords

totalitarianism, liberalism, violence, colonialism, neoliberalism, neocolonialism, othering, whiteness, racism.

Starting from the European conquest in 1492 which established the beginning of colonialism, going through the establishment of liberalism's racial ('social') contract, and coming to present times of neocolonialism and neoliberalism, this paper underscores the interdependence between colonialism and liberalism, and liberalism's systematic violence of oppression, arguing that the term 'totalitarianism' is unable to shed light onto this violence. The paper is organised into three sections. Firstly, I make the case against liberalism's congratulatory self-assessments, contending that colonialism has always already co-existed and been perpetuated through liberalism. I highlight the futility and liberal characteristics of the term 'totalitarianism', to then unsettle Hannah Arendt's account of it as an allegedly unexpected, unique and unprecedented abnormality of modernity. It will be seen that her linking between imperialism and colonialism lacks a comprehensive analysis of the violence prevalent within social relations: more precisely, the violence of racism which persists under liberalism. In the second part, attention is shifted to the solipsistic historicity and identity of Europe/the West, and its concurrent violence of 'othering'. The colonial dimensions of 'modernity' and its hierarchical binaries will become apparent through an analysis of the way in which the ideology of whiteness characterises this violence and absorbs the radical alterity (absolute difference) of the non-European. The Holocaust, it will be argued, ought to be considered a particularity of colonialism: it is colonialism brought home to Europe. The third section stresses the need to de-link social relations and (re)presentations, state structures, practices and knowledge from the colonial matrix of power by employing a decolonial approach to history, knowledge and practice.

1. Liberalism and its use of the term 'totalitarianism' as an exemplar to shut immanent critique

1.1. Liberalism's violence of oppression

One of the values invented by the bourgeoisie in former times and launched throughout the world was *man* – and we have seen what has become of that. The other was the nation (Césaire 1955/1972: 74).

A reading of liberalism against the grain and against itself, as well as making visible its racialised and colonial tenets hidden within its discourse and practices, is necessary in order to reveal its contradictions, inconsistencies, incoherences, abstract universality and white supremacist elements. It is important not only to look at what liberalism claims to hold as ideals, but at its history and *real* material and ideological effects and legacies (Losurdo 2011: 322). From its beginning, liberalism

embodied the self-consciousness of a class of slave owners who, through laws, created a 'sacred' space for themselves *only*, to enjoy private property and rights; it has been 'characterised more by the celebration of the community of free individuals that defined the sacred space than by celebration of liberty or the individual' (Losurdo 2011: 309).

Colonialism refutes the liberal Western self-presentation: liberalism became a possibility due to the existence of colonialism, and even in present times it is complicit and converges with neocolonialism. Liberalism and racial (chattel) slavery have indeed a unique 'twin birth' - contrary to the assumptions that racism continued 'despite' the Western revolutions in the 18th Century, they were implicated in the creation of contexts for an expansion of racialised domination (Losurdo 2011: 35). For instance, the slave population in the Americas grew from 330,000 in 1700 to over six million in the 1850s, Great Britain having been the possessor of the largest number of slaves in the mid-eighteenth century (Losurdo 2011: 35).

One of liberalism's claimed tenets is 'freedom' which is conflated and subsumed under the logic and policies of 'security'; freedom is said to be of two kinds: 'freedom to' and 'freedom from' (Bogues 2013: 209). This binary conceptualisation of freedom privileges the conquering subject in order to maintain the violent ideal of 'security' which is the '*supreme concept of liberal ideology*' (Neocleous 2007: 142 – emphasis in original). 'Freedom from' protects the private property and the person who dominates; 'freedom to' justifies colonial domination. Thus, liberalism can be called 'property-owning individualism' or 'possessive individualism' (Losurdo 2011: 120) because the individual and their rationality are portrayed as intrinsically private, individualistic, inward-looking and raceless (Nicolacopoulos 2008: 6), and intrinsically bound to the state which either 'secures' the interests of the 'worthy', or dominates them. Liberals claim to want the state not to interfere with individuals' lives, although liberalism itself relies on the existence (and appropriation) of the state.

Within liberalism, the nation-state is said to be established on the basis of a 'social contract' and on the separation between the 'public' and the 'private'. This contract is in effect a racial contract which maintains the racialised ordering of identities, social relations and affectivities. In other words, liberalism's universalistic claims pretending that society is not organised on a socio-political ordering give a 'sanitized, whitewashed, and amnesiac account of European imperialism and settlement' (Mills 1997: 121). Liberalism is colonial, and pretends that individuals are equal *only* within the rules and parameters of ('benevolent' liberal) law, ignoring the radical equality between all people *as people*, outside of state institutions. The presentation of the state as a 'subject of liberation' is a belief held which reifies identities and divides socially constructed groups (Bonefield 2014: 127).

The public-private mythical liberal dichotomy emerged with the colonial appropriation of knowledge and land of the indigenous and enslaved people by the West, and the focus on individualism justifies colonial expansion and European conquest. This dichotomy serves colonialism as it situates the European/Western within the 'political' and 'public' 'realms', whereas colonialism is placed in the 'social' and 'private' 'spheres' where violence is justified by liberalism. In short, liberalism recognises as '*political* violence' (read: worthy of being tackled) the violence which occurs in the (liberal construction of) the 'political' and 'public' sphere, whereas the violence which occurs in the (yet again, liberal construction of) 'private' or 'social' spheres, is deemed invisible - it is not 'political'. Slavery became the mechanism for the possibility of 'the political' (white) sphere and its self-determination (Losurdo 2011: 40). It was within liberalism that enslaved people were regarded as 'private' properties of the system of colonialism – a system protected by the state, as it represents the interests of property owners/ the elite. In the private sphere of slavery, it is assumed that politics and the possibility of *change* are non-existent, as the colonial subject is reified: 'colonization = thingification' (Césaire 1955/1972: 21). Through liberation, the "thing" colonized becomes a man' (Fanon 1965: 2). However, liberation is perceived within liberalism as an attack to its own 'security' and a challenge to its global distribution of violence. Anti-colonial resistance, which has liberation at its core, has been depicted as violent, barbarous (McMichael and Morarji 2010: 234), whilst the Euro-American notion of a 'free world'

frees one from moral responsibility and yet insists that borders that are not one's own should be free to trafficking by multinational corporations and arms dealers (Lal 2005: 222).

It is in this context of ethical and political void that 'totalitarianism' is used by liberalism as exemplar of violence in Europe which *overtly* reaches 'public' and 'private' spheres, threatening 'individual security' - whilst, I argue, the invasion of the 'private and public spheres' by liberalism seeks to be more *covert*.

1.2. The liberal fable of 'totalitarianism'

'Totalitarianism' is one instance in which liberalism universalises its particularity through dichotomisation: the term is used as an exemplar presented as the polar opposite of liberalism, standing in as an enemy represented by particular state violence. Most importantly, the term cannot be used to critique its discursive creator: liberalism. Thus, liberalism hides and denies its discriminatory tenets and presents its analysis of 'totalitarianism' in a decontextualised, 'depoliticised' (i.e. in a 'neutral', 'objective') manner.

Totalitarianism does not exist; the abstract universalist signifier ‘totalitarianism’ is a term established as a weapon which can be used to justify liberal hegemony, ‘dismissing the Leftist critique of liberal democracy’ as the ‘obverse, the “twin”, of the Rightist Fascist dictatorship’ (Žižek 2001: 3). Even the division into subcategories, to make the case for a distinction between fascism/Nazism and Soviet communism as different forms of ‘totalitarianism’ is in vain because ‘the moment one accepts the notion of “totalitarianism”, one is firmly located within the liberal-democratic horizon’ (Žižek 2001: 3), a horizon under which the status quo of liberalism is reproduced. The concept of ‘totalitarianism’, it follows, is a ‘stopgap’, as it ‘relieves us of the duty to think, or even actively prevents us from thinking’ (Žižek 2001: 3), impeding the analysis of socio-political and historical contexts. The Holocaust, for instance, is presented as incomprehensible and impossible to even be discussed - this approach produces a hierarchy of suffering which does not recognise systematic liberal/colonial violence as such. Furthermore,

it disqualifies forms of Third World violence for which Western states are (co)responsible as minor in comparison with the Absolute Evil of the Holocaust [...] it serves to cast a shadow over every radical political project (Žižek 2001: 67).

‘Totalitarianism’ makes it difficult to recognise that an ‘anti-Semite is inevitably anti-Negro’ (Fanon 1986: 122), acting as a barrier for conceiving non-hierarchical, multidirectional connections between forms of violence, dividing, rather than bringing together the abused. The uncritical acceptance and use of ‘totalitarianism’ (and Arendt’s conceptualisation of it) by the Left (themselves often accused of holding ‘totalitarian’ views) is problematic and has contributed to

perhaps the clearest sign of the theoretical defeat of the Left – of how the Left has accepted the basic co-ordinates of liberal democracy (‘democracy’ versus ‘totalitarianism’, etc.) (Žižek 2001: 3).

To avoid the reproduction of liberal conceptualisations of violence and politics, an analysis of power relations and violence is needed, assuming that politics is everywhere, not only in particular imagined ‘spheres’.

1.3 Hannah Arendt’s role in shaping the meaning of ‘totalitarianism’

Hannah Arendt is one of the most prominent Western scholars who discussed the nature of ‘totalitarianism’ whilst also making the link between ‘imperialism and fascism, colonialism and genocide’ (Stone 2011: 47). Arendt’s starting point is 19th Century imperialism, her concern being to find discontinuities and ruptures which make ‘totalitarianism’ in Europe unique and different from

other violent practices. In doing so, she does not acknowledge the continuities of oppression over centuries, and the annihilating dimensions of colonialism, recognising 'violence' only in relation to the state, in Europe. An analysis only concerned with the *extent* to which there are discontinuities between Nazism and colonialism, formulated within a Western scholarly framework, materialises into apologism and eradication of the memory of colonialism. In exploring imperialism, Arendt is (too) careful to distinguish between European atrocities in non-European countries and Nazi genocide in Europe, to argue that the Holocaust was unprecedented and unique (Stone 2011:47).

Throughout the 2nd part of the *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1966) it is apparent that Arendt sees the progress made towards the elimination of formal colonial and imperial rule as benevolent acts of the West, obscuring for instance, the organised resistance of the enslaved which was the main factor in the 'colored delegates' sitting in the French Parliament (Arendt 1966: 129). She is too optimistic and uncritical of the way in which the administrators of the British Empire talked about the colonies, as she states that the colonial rule of the British was 'voluntarily' liquidated by themselves (Arendt 1966: xvii). Furthermore, the fact that the British claimed to want 'the African to be left an African' (Arendt 1966: 130) does not mean that they respected Africans. She also attributes the will to imperialism of the Western nations as solely a desire for economic growth (Arendt 1966: 147), ignoring the other causes related to racism and going as far as to state that 'imperialism is not empire building and expansion is not conquest' (Arendt 1966: 130). By locating imperialism between 1884-1914 and defining colonialism as a substantially different predecessor (i.e. the European colonisation of America and Australia) (Gines 2007: 39), Arendt denies colonial continuity and the fact that colonialism started with the European expansion in the 15th Century, permeating imperialism and being sustained by liberalism.

Arendt instrumentally makes a distinction between 'race-thinking' and 'racism' to justify her argument that racism occurred as a by-product of the period she refers to as imperialism, not as a result of 'race-thinking' (Gines 2007: 42-3), thus isolating the Holocaust from its Western historical context (Bernasconi 2007: 57). In her view, imperialism precedes racism (Arendt 1966:123). I contend, as we shall see in the next section, that the very identity of Europe, since its creation in the 15th Century, has been part of the dichotomised construction which places the European as superior, and the non-Western subject as dehumanised. This hierarchical ordering has informed and become integral to the colonial/ imperial/ modern mentality, practices, systems of power and organisation of societies. Not only did colonialism pave the way for economic and territorial expansion, but it also

defined and relied on the domination of social relations and annihilation of the non-European mythically presented as 'barbarous', to justify Western violence.

Furthermore, as she is preoccupied primarily with the economic and territorial justifications for imperialism (Arendt 1966: 152-4), Arendt does not make use of resources and ideas held by anti-colonialists. When she discusses competition between countries for economic growth, she never mentions how the colonised countries reacted to the expansionist policies of European countries. She regards imperialism as a purely expansionist European project (Bernasconi 2007: 58) undertaken by white Europeans who were not aware of their destructive practices upon the non-Europeans. Her presentation of the enslaved naturalises the racism of the colonisers (Bernasconi 2007: 61); the forcefully imposed social identity of the enslaved is also naturalised, subjugating their agency (Moruzzi 2000: 61-2). On the other hand, the agency and experience of the Jew is much more prevalent in her work, whilst her analysis of (what Gines calls) 'the Negro question' has racist implications (2014: 1; 2007: 38). Her 'delineation of the Negro question as a social issue prevents her from recognizing that anti-Black racism (like Jew hatred) is a political phenomenon' (Gines 2014: 1-2). She is complicit with the myth of the superiority of the West which, by holding power, is considered by Arendt not violent – this is because in her work, she makes a distinction between power and violence as opposites (Gines 2014: 94-5).

In short, by not going far enough in time to account for colonial violence and by accepting liberalism as her political location and framework, Arendt does not acknowledge otherness as a violent, annihilating creation of colonialism which is also linked to the Holocaust. Her analysis is state-centric and racist, constraining the possibility for an immanent critique of her time and of contemporary neocolonialism and neoliberalism, and the social reproduction of violence within them. Moruzzi puts it masterfully: 'Arendt forcibly identifies herself with those who inhabit the world of politics as she understands it, as a world of language, and not with those who are silent or silenced' (2000:65).

Brief conclusion

Against the liberal presentation of 'totalitarianism', I contend that the term is redundant, as it is charged with racialised biases which claim false whitewashed 'neutrality', limiting any constructive discussion and critique of social relations and systems of domination above and beyond the state. The nation-state emerged on the basis of colonial social relations, and it has been rooted in oppressively violent racism (Bhambra 2007: 117; Gines 2007: 51) before, during and after Nazism and Soviet Communism (the bearers of 'totalitarian' markers in liberal thought). My aim is to draw attention to the colonising/ reifying social relations perpetuated by the West in the past five

centuries, to show that taking them into account provides a more nuanced, contextualised and rich understanding of the history and politics of oppression, making visible the link between colonialism, liberalism, fascism and contemporary neoliberalism and neocolonialism. As we shall see, the spectre of colonial 'othering' has haunted colonialism, liberalism and Nazism, as well as contemporary neoliberalism. The question of the spectre is, following Derrida, 'a question of repetition: a spectre is always a revenant. One cannot control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back' (1994: 11). A particular focus will be placed on the repetition and reproduction of the ideology of whiteness and practices of 'othering' which have consolidated systems of thinking, acting and legislating on the basis of violence. Put simply, Europe and the West would not have reached the current status and power, were it not for the exploitation of the non-European people, their land, memory and history. Finally, due to space constraints, the universalism, modernism and violence of Soviet communism will not be discussed here; there are similarities with Western regimes of domination, as the Soviet Union saw itself as a nation of civilisers and modernisers (Sahadeo 2014; 2010).

2. Euro-Western historicity: the co-creation of the geopolitical 'West' and the violence of 'othering'

2.1 Othering and representation in the creation of the European identity

The 15th Century represents the genesis of expansionist European conquest, the appropriation of non-European land, knowledge and people, and the violent practice of 'othering' (Hall 1992: 281). The radical alterity of 'the other' was suppressed and fixated as non-European *subaltern* identity, Europe presenting itself as sovereign subject through this dichotomy of social relations and systems of power (Young 1990: 174; Spivak 1999: 199). The self-representation of Europe as innocent reproduces a colonialist discourse which places the West as sublime, civilised, modern, superior, although colonialism made Europe barbaric (Bernasconi 2007: 55). By not acknowledging the intrinsic link between the past and present and the historical contexts in which violence has occurred, histories of suffering become overwritten by technologies of forgetting which perpetuate white amnesia, ignoring non-European/non-white individuals' suffering.

Othering is a violent epistemic and material practice which creates hierarchised, reified social relations, maintaining the myth of the superiority of Europe, and the ideology of whiteness which have been, to this day, present in discourses, practices and institutions. Through racialisation, essentialisation and enclosure of identity, systems of exploitation emerged, and values of 'worth' and

'humanity' were unevenly distributed according to the interests of the colonisers. A *coloniality of power* emerged as key to the success of the colonial project, as it 'was conceived together with America and Western Europe, and with the social category of "race" as the key element of the social classification of colonized and colonizers' (Quijano 2007: 171), reducing 'the other' to the subhuman and narrating this practice as justified normality.

A focus on alterity can help critique both violent practices within states and institutions but also beyond them, recognising the falsity of the 'public-private' dichotomy, and showing that the personal *is* political. Alterity is a dialogic social relation which expresses the particularity of one's history, experience and knowledge, fostering openness to the other's calls. Alterity ensures the irreducibility and ungraspability of one's 'difference' and maintains an ethical relationality as a form of engagement between one and the other. The idea of 'sameness', on the other hand, colonises and assimilates alterity, creating an ethico-political violence towards 'the other', through division, characterisation and assessment against arbitrary criteria of, in our case, the Eurocentrist 'centre' (Young 1990: 12-3; 18; Eaglestone 2007: 211). Through the use of these criteria, an 'imperialism of the same' (Levinas 1961: 39) emerges, envisaging its freedom only through the annihilation of the other. With the constant construction, reproduction and essentialisation of the non-European within a hierarchical matrix of identity, oppression occurs. This is, in essence, the reality at play within the establishment of Europe: through representation, 'the other' was reduced to unilateral dimensions filtered through colonial thinking. This representation produced epistemic violence embedded in science, history and memory, as well as justification for physical and structural violence embedded within slavery, social relations, policies and practices until present. The difference of the other has been partially negated - that is, included in systems of oppression but not recognised as such - and the role of the other as an end in itself has been negated (Levinas 1989: 127).

2.2 The rise, epistemology and historiography of Eurocentric modernity

At the same time as modernity affirms itself as emancipatory, it develops 'an irrational myth, a justification for genocidal violence' (Dussel 1993: 66; Mignolo 2007b: 454). This section makes visible the colonial dimension of modernity and locates Nazism within the historicity of colonial modernity which started in the 15th Century and which continues to date. Modernity was formed 'in and through the colonial relationship', as 'modernity itself developed out of colonial encounters' (Bhabra 2007: 77). There is no modernity without colonial violence, but this violence is hidden in modern discourse (Mignolo 2007a: 162; Escobar 2007: 185). In short, modernity, according to

Dussel, is constituted 'in a dialectical relation with a non-European alterity that is its ultimate content' (1993: 65).

With the rise of the Renaissance which claimed to 'rediscover' history and ancient texts, European scholars portrayed themselves as 'discoverers' of 'facts', explaining and interpreting the world for their own interests; they organised knowledge and historical events selectively, strengthening the ideological sense of the superiority of Europe (Bhambra 2007: 88-105). The 17th and 18th Centuries were characterised by trade and the rise of capitalism, followed by the 19th century which 'became the century of production' (Du Bois 1965: 45-6). The British colonies alone imported over two million slaves between 1680 and 1786 (Du Bois 1965: 54). As enslavement was 'inherited', birth became 'the single most important source of slaves', the reproduction of the enslaved population having been both 'biological' and 'social' (Patterson 1982:132). The Enlightenment continued the sublimation of alterity and the act of racialisation by developing rationalities, binaries, science, the *modern* state and political goals which placed the white, Western, male, heterosexual, able-bodied and anthropocentric person at the centre of perfection. Through modernisation, a particularistic socio-economic organisation of society, as well as the presentation of the self as individualistic were advocated - ideas inherent in liberalism.

Thus, the 'exception' claimed to be the Holocaust is in effect the rule sedimented for centuries in the history and social organisation of Western societies as violence, slavery and the barbaric nature of the colonisers had become normalised and institutionalised (Césaire 1955/1972: 35). Through slavery, differential privileging of the Westerners was possible; the material conditions for a 'modern Europe' were created, which contributed to the flourishing of science, the establishment of capitalism and liberalism, Europe being the creation of the colonised people's labour and exploitation (Fanon 1965: 80-1). I follow Césaire in claiming that 'colonialist Europe is dishonest in trying to justify its colonizing activity *a posteriori* by the obvious material progress that has been achieved in certain fields under the colonial regime' (1955/1972: 45). At the same time, the rejection of democratic alterity had been made *a priori* (Grosfoguel 2012: 97). The colonial project is a project of annihilation through literal killing and the destruction of culture, memory and infrastructures, and through the appropriation of knowledge and land, disruption of economies, agriculture and everyday life (Césaire 1955/1972: 43).

2.3 'Whiteness' as the prevalent hegemonic ideology of Europe and the West

'Whiteness' is a political system and a 'political commitment to white supremacy' (Mills 1997: 126-7); it is 'not really a colour at all, but a set of power relations' (Mills 1997: 127) which historically has privileged white Europeans, leading to the creation of practices, systems of power and institutions which are intrinsically violent towards the non-whites. Whilst 'man' was constructed to be 'the white man', the 'black' identity has been made visible through the hierarchical organisation of racialised relations, and the reification of identities: 'the white man is sealed in his whiteness. The black man in his blackness' (Fanon 1986: 11); a conceptualisation of persons and subpersons was created (Mills 1997: 57). Whiteness, in effect, has been masked as a category and deemed non-existent by the colonisers and liberalism, but its effects have shaped the organisation of society and its 'racial contract', white supremacy being its unnamed political system and racism its practice (Mills 1997: 1-3). The effects of racism can be denied by those for whom their race is not an impediment in their everyday life and life-chances, just like 'the fish does not see the water' (Mills 1997: 76).

Similarly to liberalism, whiteness shapes social relations, practices, systems of power and institutions through its apparent 'absence' and normalisation. In Derrida and Moore's terms, metaphysics itself is 'a white mythology which assembles and reflects Western culture: the white man takes his own mythology (that is, Indo-European mythology), his *logos* – that is, the *mythos* of his idiom, for the universal form of that which it is still his inescapable desire to call Reason' (1974: 11). The problem with European and white epistemology is that whenever it talks about itself, it automatically defines the other, as 'whiteness' and 'Europeanness' are based on the negation and rejection of the other's heterogeneity. Whiteness is implicated with colonialism which is a practice of systematic violence, erasure of identity and history, and Nazism is one type of colonialism, which occurred in Europe.

2.4 Nazism as colonialism brought home to Europe

The rise of Nazism not only shocked political theorists and populations, which shows that they took the morality of the social contract (which was supposed to 'protect' everyone), as a norm (Mills 1997: 101). When explaining the causes, affinities or origins of the Holocaust, their primary concern has been with why it occurred *specifically* in Europe (and not with why violence in general happens and how it can be dismantled) fallaciously assuming that modernisation and 'civilisation' are intrinsically bound to 'peace'. Indeed, 'every historical atrocity is distinct, yet all atrocities become part of the same contemporary cultural-historical fabric' (Prager 2010: 96). The emphasis on the unforeseeable nature of Nazism constructs the West's geopolitical space and its people as homogenous, pacifist and

benevolent, without acknowledging the imperialist practices and their ongoing legacies. Seeing Europe as always innocent is consistent, as we have seen, with the long distorted history of the barbaric colonialism upon which the very idea of Europe emerged. Willingly or not, the adherents of this approach reproduce a type of 'postcolonial melancholia' in their writings (Gilroy 2005).

The unprecedented and 'paradigmatic' case of the Holocaust presented as an unquestionable given (Lal 1998: 1189) is politically dangerous due to its potential to create a hierarchy of suffering, memory and violence, depoliticising and ahistoricising the Holocaust and other forms of violence within history and geopolitics (Rothberg 2009: 9). Indeed, it is possible to 'remember the specificities of one history without silencing those of another' (Rothberg 2009: 37) and to bear witness to different pasts, if we conceive of memory as 'multidirectional' (Rothberg 2009: 3). Lal mentions the genocide in Pakistan of 1971 when Bengali intellectuals were massacred and the 'near genocide of Putamayo Indians in South America' (1998: 1189) as acts of brutal, organised violence which have been given much less attention than the Holocaust by Western scholars, arguing that international 'development' is yet another form of 'genocide' (Lal 1998: 1190).

The Holocaust needs to be located historically and politically as part of the colonial process by putting an emphasis on a 'temporality of [colonial] return instead of one of [European civilisation's] regression' (Rothberg 2009: 80). Nazism is not simply an instance of irrationality of the otherwise rational European – it is 'simply colonialism brought home to Europe' (Young 1990: 125). Nazism as the political belief in the superiority of a group of people over others, and the former's desire to dominate and annihilate the latter can be located within European modernity as a symptom of it, not as aberration (Bogues 2013: 211). My aim here is not to compare the degrees of victimisation between the Holocaust and colonialism, but rather to point to nodes of connectivity which have been neglected in liberal scholarship.

Jews, Romani, Slavs, dis/abled and non-heterosexual people were constructed within the dominant ideology of Nazism as objects, in the same manner in which the enslaved were being dehumanised. More precisely, although torture was eliminated formally in Europe by the end of the 18th Century, it was still practiced. In the US of the 1930s, photographs of lynched black bodies were sent as postcards, sold openly in stores, advertised for sale in newspapers and displayed in homes in the US (Wood 2009: 103): 'one woman held her little girl up so she could get a better view of the naked Negro' (Raper, cited by Wood 2009: 100). In colonies, practices such as 'whippings, castrations, dismemberments, roasting over slow fires, being smeared with sugar, buried up to the neck, and then left for the insects to devour, being filled with gunpowder and then blown up, and so on' were

attended by spectators as a form of entertainment where children were present (Mills 1997: 100). The spectators were ‘subsequently fighting over the remains to see who could get the toes or the knucklebones before adjourning to a celebratory dance in the evening’ (1997: 100). Native Americans were ‘skinned and made into bridle reins [...] by US President Andrew Jackson’ (1997: 99).

It is within a colonial culture and violent system of oppression that Nazi ideas emerged and appealed to so many; the Racial Contract was for the first time applied against Europeans (Mills 1997: 103). The surprise of the apparent unprecedented dimension of Nazism reflects the forgotten fact that ‘before they [the Europeans] were its victims, they were its accomplices’ (Césaire 1955/1972: 36), as Nazism is an form of colonial thinking which had been legitimised, tolerated, accepted for centuries, when applied to non-Europeans; Nazism was ‘cultivated’ in Europe (Césaire 1955/1972: 36).

3. Moving forward: the need for decolonial praxis

The Holocaust underlines the continuity between colonialism, liberalism, neo-colonialism and neoliberalism, and the latter two continue the legacy of colonial othering and path established through colonialism (Springer forthcoming: 2). I suggest that there is a need to replace the ‘liberalism versus “totalitarianism”’ paradigm with ‘anti-colonialism versus liberal domination’ for the creation of new imaginaries, social relations and knowledge which transcend colonial liberal impositions within the current system of ‘European/Euro-North-American capitalist/patriarchal modern/colonial world-system’ (Grosfoguel 2012: 96). Looking back in history, we can see that

during the last 520 years [...] we went from “convert to Christianity or I’ll kill you” in the 16th century, to “civilize or I’ll kill you” in the 18th and 19th centuries, to “develop or I’ll kill you” in the 20th century, and more recently, the “democratize or I’ll kill you” at the beginning of the 21st century (Grosfoguel 2012: 97).

Democracy ought to be de-linked from the Western liberal model and directed towards a ‘transmodern, pluriversal, decolonized world of multiple and diverse ethico-political projects’ (Grosfoguel 2012: 97-8) in which social relations are equal, pluri-versal rather than uni-versal, horizontal, non-colonised, autonomous, allowing for inter-epistemic dialogue. We cannot speak of liberty until colonisation is dismantled. De-linking from the colonial matrix of power means rejecting the idea that the liberal, Western ideals are the (only and true) ideals which, if followed, would lead to the liberation of the colonised. Instead, liberation happens through a de-linking of categories of thought which have been developed to work for their domination (Mignolo 2007b).

Although colonialism as an 'explicit political order was destroyed', coloniality is 'still the most general form of domination in the world today' (Quijano 2007: 170) because 'Eurocentered coloniality of power has proved to be longer lasting than Eurocentered colonialism' (Quijano 2007: 171). Thus, the world is still organised around old criteria within the colonial matrix of power, and the affirmation of the other's alterity is still obstructed (Dussel 2000: 473). Any form of socio-political hierarchy can be conducive to domination, as 'no one colonises innocently' (Césaire 1955/1972: 39). Given that coloniality survived colonialism (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 243), the political struggle of liberation necessarily entails a struggle of decolonising knowledge, being, existence, institutions, states and social relations. Decolonisation here should be understood as a form of political praxis for the achievement of pluriversal transmodernity, that is, transcending the 'Eurocentric version of modernity' with the aim to complete the 'unfinished project of decolonization' (Grosfoguel 2012: 96-7). The contemporary liberal violence of eugenicist 'population management' and 'family planning' (Brignell 2010; Kluchin 2009), 'intellectual property' and patents, indigenous' land grabbing (Cassia 2015), state b/orders and securitisation (Vaughan-Williams 2009), police killings (IRR 2015), ableism (BBC 2015), racism and Islamophobia (Musharbash 2014), the victimisation of women in the Global South (Foster 2015), austerity, privatisation, trade agreements (Williams 2014) and so on, impede, but cannot stop decolonisation.

By analysing the origins of Europe and the colonial dimension of liberalism, I drew attention to the connection between the history of colonialism, the role of the Holocaust within this history, and the current neocolonialism. Unlike Arendt's object of focus, the aim of the paper has been to underline continuities, rather than discontinuities between the period of colonial modernity followed by liberalism, going through the Holocaust, and continuing to neoliberalism. I explored the way in which the history and story of Europe its 'others' are being told, to show that Nazi ideas are linked to normalised beliefs of violent racialised hierarchy. Indeed, social relations and societies are still organised around white, liberal colonial hegemony, and it is these forms of power which need to be made visible in scholarly critique, and dismantled. In practice, the term 'totalitarianism' does not allow for immanent analysis of social relations and violence, and rather than creating links of solidarity cross-boundaries, it establishes a hierarchy of victimisation. The recognition of the colonised others as agents of socio-political change needs to be the focus of critical scholarship concerned with social transformation. Constant struggle is needed in the age of decolonisation. Finally, it is crucial to bear in mind Hill-Collins' warning that 'contemporary forms of oppression do

not routinely force people to submit. Instead, they manufacture consent for domination so that we lose our ability to question and thus collude in our own subordination' (2004: 50).

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