

# **Echoes of enslavement:** **A critical assessment of European mobility regimes**

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ABSTRACT: While the institutions of slavery have been nominally abolished, their legacies have been imbricated into the infrastructural arrangements of modern nation-states. Most evident of this heritage is the presence of hierarchical and disparate economic relationships based on exploitation and extraction. Scholars have demonstrated how these relationships are imbued in current migratory patterns and migration management, reflecting the legacies of enslavement as a form of rule, and producing mobility regimes which determine how, from where, and in which directions people move across the world. In looking at the transition from empire, nation-state, and eventually to Europe, we intend to explore the connections between slavery and the subjection of migrating peoples into unjust economic relationships, as well as the reverberating impacts of these relationship. Through a historical exploration of Europe's colonial past and present, triangulated with mappings of slavery and migration infrastructure, we will demonstrate how this double-edge sword of control originating from the era of slavery, has had ongoing impacts in the formation of European mobility regimes.

**Keywords:** *racial capitalism: border regimes: echoes of enslavement; labour exploitation*

“One is misled when one looks at the sails and majesty of tall ships instead of their cargo” -

Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*

## INTRODUCTION

What is to be gained from a study of European slavery that begins with the ship; the power of the empire, the vast reaches of the technology, the exotic delights brought back to European shores? What might be offered, instead, if we began with their cargo? How might our study proceed differently if we turn our attention to the lives in the hold and the underbelly of the beast? It is with this mind, with the gap between the transportation and what was transported, and the aftermaths of all that movement, that our study is launched. We seek to understand how the powers that built all of those tall, majestic ships, capitalized on that unreturned and unrepented for wealth to make a modernity in their image, a global system that has been reformed and renamed but not quite disappeared.

There are a few key notions which are foundational to our argument. The first, and perhaps most important to comprehend, is that chattel slavery was a unique, incomparable horror. The complete dehumanization of slaves within this system does not have a true modern equivalent, and attempts to draw direct comparisons to this practice reflect a fundamental misunderstanding of what took place. Slavery in other forms around the world and over time, such as those used during the Greek, Roman, and Ottoman empires, is worthy of its own discussion, but the slavery we focus on here is that which supported the Western European empires in their global conquest, the slavery that sought to suck the life out of Africa and changed the migration of sharks across the Atlantic Ocean (Sharpe 2014), a slavery which has no current counterpart. Following Rinaldo Walcott, “While it is clear that slavery and other forms of captivity existed prior to transatlantic slavery, the particular ways that transatlantic slavery became a central plank of the European colonial project and of its Enlightenment narrative of the human as not a slave is one of the single most important ideological frames of coloniality” (Walcott 2021:56) There was no life in this system, no names for those moved, and location of future hope was limited to that of the next plantation. Even the abolition of slavery led to a juridical, but not social or purely economic, shift, as slavery has a “moral significance” which “exceeds its status as a particular kind of relation of production” (da Silva 2014:286).

Further, and more relevant to the content of this paper, are the ways in which the slave institution has been imbricated into systems of governance and control active in the current era. We may connect this line of thinking to debates over the colonial and any semblance of the “post” as it refers to coloniality; while the formal, legal end has arrived, the ideologies and impacts linger on (Tuck and Yang 2012). This paper is therefore a response, in some ways, to the general trends of ‘Migration Studies’ theorizing, which has thus far treated slavery in a way that does not address its modern implications (see Saucier and Woods 2014; The Black Mediterranean Collective 2021). Linking together slavery and movement is a way of acknowledging the relationships between “dispossession, slavery, and immigration controls” as “mechanisms of imperial relations and conditions of power” (Barker 2018:33). Migration management, and the b/ordering of the world on which this juridical structure was predicated, is intimately connected to slavery and imperialism in a way that bears further attention to its impact on Africa and the diasporas (for an extensive discussion on this topic, see also the work of the Black Mediterranean Collective 2021).

In this paper we build a theoretical and analytical model used to explore how slavery echoes through European mobility regimes and continues to impact migration control. Our

model can be understood as working alongside the writings of Brazilian scholar Denise Ferreira da Silva and her notion of “circuits of dispossession” (2014). We may go so far as to say that our model is one way of mapping out these circuits. Both our model and da Silva’s circuit “expose how accumulation of capital hangs on a circuit of labor and land dispossession (through enclosure and conquest)” (da Silva 2014:284). As its own entity, an economic circuit of dispossession disrupts a linear framing of history by putting the past in relationship with the now in order to build an interconnected geographic figure, one in which Europe sits at the center. In this sense, Europe is both the beginning (the point of extraction) and the end (holding all that was extracted) of all processes of accumulation. In order to make explicit our conceptualization of the circuit, we take migration and global movement in the post-slave era as a starting point, and work outward into a theoretical model. Our intent is to analytically map the linkages between the displacement and removal of slave-owning empires and colonies with the Western European nations who continue to benefit from this extracted wealth.

In this sense, we seek to explicate the very humanistic elements of slavery and its afterlives which have been attacked, erased, and rewritten. We further posit that without this careful attention to the intricacies of slavery’s implementation and relevance for modern migration management we would be absenting a critical element of the overall narrative. The paper will proceed as such: a brief explanation of the model and the claims it rests upon, the model itself, a deconstruction of each of the key theoretical categories, concluding with a brief illustrative case study. This paper is therefore partially a review of critical literature relevant to migration management and global movement over time, and secondly a critical theoretical exploration.

#### THEORETICAL MODEL: ECHOES OF ENSLAVEMENT

The model is divided into four columns, and three rows. Each of the columns indicates a separate domain of the overall model. These domains relate and influence each other, but each has different implications in determining the relevance of slavery. The rows are divided in temporal approximations. This is not to suggest that they may be neatly blocked off by year, rather that the corresponding rows highlight what we believe to be the most influential partnerships of particular eras, representing a significant shift from the former section of the model. Arrows in between domains and across rows are meant to show the relationalities and reciprocations that take place.

Slavery, our focal point, was never purely a legal policy or system of control. It relied heavily on ideologies, state structures, and (mis)uses of space in its implementation. These interlocking connections are part of what has made it so difficult to bring the afterlives of slavery to an end, as we continue to untangle its violent legacies. Slavery, as part of the theoretical precursor to the nation-state, generated sociolegal categories around Black and African diasporic people that continue to render them outside of the “discursive limits of categories that construct the rights-bearing subject before the law” (King 2015:128). The model is a way of expanding the limits of our understanding of particular aspects of slavery by embedding them in larger temporal and structuring forces. The linkages displayed here give insight across the different implementations (how institutions, land, and ideology are used in this white supremacist project), and across time (how different shifts in governance in the decades since colonialism’s legal end have triggered or emerged as a response to larger societal happening).

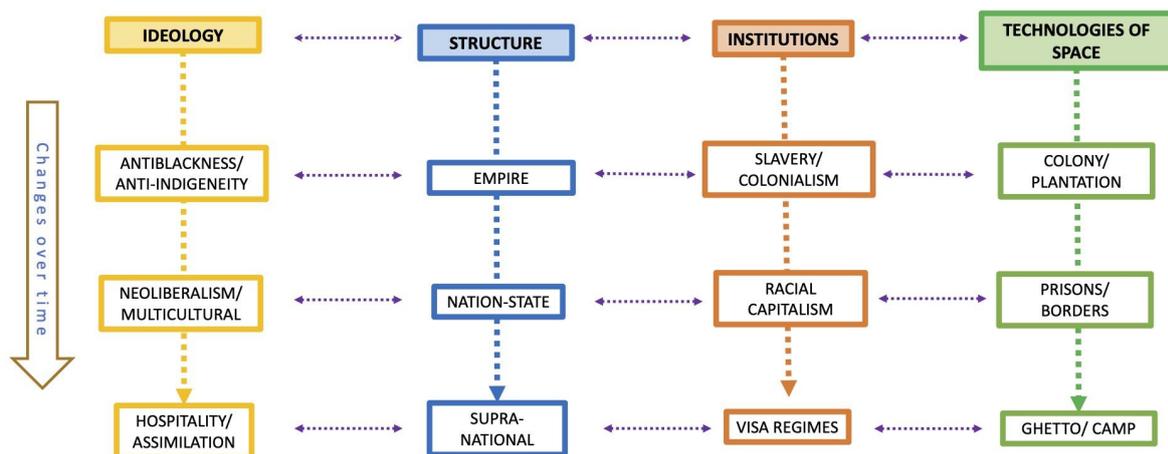


Figure 1: Theoretical model

## SECTION I: IDEOLOGY

Ideology refers to the way governing powers legitimize and justify their choice of institution and the development of their structural form. Ideology, as we name it here, is in relation to concepts such as Patricia Hill Collins’ “controlling images” and “matrix of domination” (2000), Frank Wilderson’s “grammar of suffering” (2003) (which we may understand as riffing off of Hortense Spillers’ “American grammar” 1987), Raymond Williams’ “structure of feeling” (2015), and Iris Marion Young’s “cultural imperialism” (2011), although ideology as we describe it ranges from the explicitly violent, as with Collins, to the more neutral framing of Williams’ work. Ideologies are a way of naming the

sum of the actions across domains and what epistemologies these formations reveal. In the context of our analytical model, an ideology is the underlying way of thinking that connects each other domain on the model, across spatiotemporalities.

Ideologies are not always explicitly named and put forward by the ruling power, but their meaning seeps into every aspect of its operation. As an example, whether or not a governing system would justify its actions by way of being anti-Black, carefully analyzing the impacts of its structures, institutions, and uses of land often reveals animosity for Black people. Relatedly, most Western European imperialist projects also relied on cisheteropatriarchal beliefs, which could be inserted alongside the listed ideologies in a further analytical project, and reveal themselves in the society's treatment of women or maintenance of heteronormative family structures. As these examples highlight, and as a larger point of caution, we would emphasize that a change in ideology (seen on the model with a shift to a new row) is not synonymous with the end or dismantling of the previous dominant form. Instead, these changes are indicative of significant reforms in the approach to rule and relationality, but not radical differences. In the context of slavery and colonialism, the power of the ideological justification behind these forces was such that "the human remains beholden to these pervasive knowledge systems" (McKittrick and Wynter 2015:10). What is important to connect between shifting ideologies is the way their marginal alterations and broad continuities lead to the impossibility of establishing real sociocultural change.

### *Antiblackness and Anti-indigeneity*

The initial ideology at play in the slave-making project, while not articulated as such by the powers at the time was one of anti-blackness and anti-indigeneity. We follow McKittrick in positioning the origins of blackness, as it exists in the archive and history books, as a catalogue of the "object-commodity" and the "possession, proved to be property" (2014:17). Orbiting alongside this formation, Charisse Burden-Stelly offers a neat definition of *antiblackness*, described in her work as: "an instrument of governmentality that confiscates the body and lifeworld of the Black, distorts it for the purposes of accumulation and exploitation, and returns that distortion to the Black as reality" (2017:354). Fred Moten further frames this "antiblackness as the structuring force of the modern world" (Moten 2018:25). The palpable hatred for that which is constructed as Black or Indigenous was fundamental to the way the slave system, and European colonization of the global south and "new world" in the more general sense, operated. The relevance of Blackness and antiblackness in conceptualizing current global movement is due to the fact that the Black

person as a “modern political figure... can only be re/assembled with the tools of knowledge that carved its place of emergence” (da Silva 2005:324). In line with this, Walcott describes a need to take “anti-blackness as central to the colonial project,” a framing which both helps us understand movement in the “tremors of European expansion,” and to reckon with indigenous experiences in their native lands (2020:344). From the originary antiblackness, racialization allowed slavemasters and those who benefited from slavery to collectively create “an elaborate ideology justifying the subhuman conditions imposed upon blacks” (Wacquant 2001:100). In the world that slavery made, these tools of knowledge were extraordinarily violent, and have begat further violence.

Indigeneity, portrayed in European epistemologies as the savage exterminable Other, was that which European modernity positioned itself against. Indigeneity, and thus anti-indigeneity, exist in the same theoretical position as the slave to some extent, as “savage, animal, and female were differentiated in order to cohere civilized, human, and male” (Byrd 2015:120). The deformation of indigenous peoples within European epistemologies was characterized by physical and epistemological violence which framed Indigenous suffering as a result of their own “‘wretchedness’ and ‘inferiority’” (Blackhawk 2006). The brutal disregard and hatred for Indigenous peoples characterizes European colonial movements in a way that echoes across current post-colonies. Described as the “unrecognized corollaries to Europe’s expansion” violence and pain characterized European treatment of Indigenous peoples (Blackhawk 2006:8). In each endeavor, the Indigenous body was dehumanized, separated from its kinship formations with land and space, and treated as property. “Without having to step on these lands or ever meet their inhabitants (the indigenous and the slaves), eighteenth-century European philosophers could deploy them to establish the moral borders of Europe” (da Silva 2014:286). Such was the power of racialization and anti-indigeneity that its shadow follows into each iteration, casting “an apocalyptic shadow on any possibility of our thereby *just*, existence as a species” (emphasis in original) (McKittrick and Wynter 2015:10). In both ideologies of antiblackness and anti-indigeneity, white European homogeneity was established as normative, morally just, and superior, and the blackened indigenous other was ideologically deformed and pushed to the side.

### *Neoliberalism and Multiculturalism*

Neoliberalism as an ideological organizer links the pursuit of capital to the stability and success of the state, framed alongside individual personal interest and working alongside a multicultural project to allow social benefits and movement only in ways that do not disrupt

the flow of capital (Byrd 2015; Connell and Dados 2014; Harvey 2005). The notion of the “free” market was contingent on a perceived sense of equality which could more capably obfuscate discrimination; as civil rights laws granted some sense of equality to the masses, the crucial issue of equity, and reparation for the damage that racialized displacement had caused, was subsumed into questions of economic growth and prosperity (ibid.). Through neoliberalism’s ideological propulsion, the Black and Indigenous Other was reimagined as the inferior laborer and substandard contributor to the national market.

As an ideological frame beyond the juridical sense, the neoliberal impact is visible in industries like plastic surgery and cosmetics, which “prescriptively imply that all humans, globally, be corporeally and aesthetically homogenized according to a single genre-specific (ethno-class) Western European model” (Wynter and McKittrick 2015:19). In more strictly social terms, multiculturalism and other forms of inclusion into the neoliberal nation-state are more often an “invitation to participate more fully in capitalism” (Walcott 2021:65). Rodriguez describes the relationship between the originary point of slavery and the neoliberal multicultural view through the concept of “multiculturalist white supremacy” (2020). This ideology encapsulates the process through which classical forms of white supremacy lose power and more liberal versions rise as a replacement. As Rodriguez notes, “articulations of multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusivity... are formed in the foundational relations of anti-Blackness and racial-colonial power, and generally normalize those relations while narratively disavowing them” (2021:17). As it pertains to perceptions of movements, the aftermath of antiblackness and destruction of Indigenous cultures has meant that the “fundamental out-of-placeness for Black bodies persists, even if ambivalently attenuated by partial inductions into late capitalism... those inductions of the select few do not by any means outweigh the social, cultural, and political expulsions on a mass scale” (Walcott 2021:67). Multiculturalism helps white nation-states (including Europe and the US) uphold the superficial ideals of their founding mythologies while continuing to institutionalize oppression. As an ideological era or phase, neoliberalism and multiculturalism both work to turn the originary violence of the previous ideologies into seemingly neutral global processes.

### *False Hospitality and Assimilation*

In a Europe largely governed by supranational bodies, where multiculturalism is the starting point, an ideological regime of false hospitality has come to the forefront. This is closely linked to policies of assimilation; the Black or blackened Other is welcomed into Europe only if they meet certain terms and conditions. False hospitality towards migrating

peoples within so-called liberal Western states corresponds with “the notion that undocumented immigrants deserve inclusion in the community, but contingent on their submission to the capitalist extraction of their labour and to the state’s (racialised) criminal justice apparatuses” (Paik 2017: 16) (see also Danewid 2017). Another striking example here is the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention. Writing on the convention’s “colonial roots,” Ulrik Krause chronicles how during the negotiation process, delegates of powerful Western actors, demanded a geographical limitation to Europe and “therewith strategically subordinated and ignored the ‘Other’ refugees and regions in pursuit of geopolitical interests” (2021:599). Gutiérrez similarly discusses how discourse on refugees produces hierarchical categories of migrants and refugees, which, as she argues, produces a “nomenclature that is imbued in orientalist and racialized practices of European colonialism and imperialism” (2018:16). This type of false hospitality mirrors what Walcott calls lies of whiteness that must be gone through and dismantled in order to produce a “different kind of world;” in the world as it is the logic of whiteness and service towards whiteness are the only welcome force (2019:395).

Assimilation, as the other end of this ideological formation, sets the expectation of cultural erasure in order to be included into the state. According to Neil Roberts, “assimilationists strive for a color-blind society in which the economic, political, and moral facets of racial difference are irrelevant to human well-being because they view such a society as possible or desirable” (2015:59). Through practices of assimilation, moves towards whiteness are forced upon marginalized people, while also shifting the blame to individuals and actions rather than institutions. The non-white Other is “told that we must embrace our individualism and take responsibility for our exclusion,” and further that “the very identities that white supremacy’s logics have given to us should now be put behind us” (Walcott 2019:400). Just as Europe divided Africa into nations and stigmatized tribal labels only to reprimand individuals for embracing those identities, Europe’s multicultural ideals reach their limit when they counteract the white national hegemon.

## SECTION II: STRUCTURE

The structural domain occupies the left column in the model, and is an example of the impact of ideologies. *Structure* refers to the larger juridical framework that demarcates the implementation of governance and control. Structures such as imperialism, for example, use a variety of doctrines in order to accomplish their operational goals; we name them here as the *institution*, the *ideology*, and the *relationship with land or land as a technological tool*. In very simplistic terms, the forms of governance that we identify as structures, are responsible

for structuring, defining, and delineating the other categories, even as they are influenced by them. To understand structures in the general sense we may borrow from Nkrumah's descriptions of imperialism, which he describes as everything involved in "creating, organizing, and maintaining an empire" (1962:1). Structures require institutions, ideologies, and have particular relationships with land which uphold and maintain their form. They also work in partnership and conversation with the other domains, as an overwhelming shift in acceptable ideologies, such as a rise in the right-wing anti-immigrant sentiment rising in places like Hungary, Poland, and the Netherlands may trigger a change in the structural form like the possible dissolution of the EU. Though speaking of a potential dissolution may be somewhat hyperbolic, the point stands that structures exist in relation to the other pillars.

### *Empire and Colonial power*

The initial structure responsible for the implementation and development of slavery is the Empire, and in particular those empires which are endemic to Western Europe. An Empire, as we see it, as well as Imperialism more generally, is defined as a way of operating where subjected peoples and nations are bound to the empire "by political ties with the primary object of promoting her own economic advantages" relying on the exploitation of natural and human resources (Nkrumah 1962:2). This structuring and structural force of an empire includes the ways in which "systems and stories produce the lived and racialized categories of the rational and irrational, the selected and the dysselected, the haves and the have-nots as asymmetrical naturalized racial-sexual human groupings that are specific to time, place, and personhood" even as they "are increasingly subordinated to a figure that thrives on accumulation." (McKittrick and Wynter 2015:10). Byrd temporalizes the U.S. empire in relation to the European colonialist agenda of the era, which "sought to appropriate indigenous lands, knowledges, presences, and identities" for their own use (2010:xiii). Crucial to the existence of an empire, in this framing, is the impulse of expansionism and a form of oppression.

Colonialism as we understand it here, is the main instrument of imperialism, and the empire more generally. Colonies are typically either formed as settler/ settlements, wherein "the racial environment" of those in power mirrors the empire, or as exploitation colonies which are operated by "monopolist combines, cartels, trusts, administrators, soldiers and missionaries" (Nkrumah 1962:3). In both formations there is a geographic separation from the originary imperial power, and land changes into an extractable resource. In the settler colony, the settler brings "the native into existence," while also owing the very fact of his

own existence, “that is to say, his property, to the colonial system” (Fanon 1963:35). In this process, the colonized individual is transformed into “thing,” just as the slavemaster transformed Africans into slaves, and African diasporic people into things. Colonial and imperial competition on the continent motivated European empires to leave their own homelands and strike out to create colonies, but it was through slavery and the wealth generated by the chattel slave system that they solidified their own state shapes. Colonialism was justified and naturalized by European powers to the extent that any resistance against it was seen as barbarity and blight despite the presence of these very qualities, to a much more extreme extent in the colonial forces (Fanon 1965:24).

### *Nation-state*

With the political momentum and rise of a global anticolonial independence movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, the world was strategically mapped and divided into the idea of the nation-state (Fanon 1965). In other words, when the parasitic violence of the empire was no longer tolerated or considered economically beneficial for those in power (Zinn 2005), nation-states and statist approaches were used to contain the share of capital growth and wealth accumulation among rising elite classes with growing ties to certain landed areas (Fanon 1963; Walia 2020). The nation-state form was also a way of exporting social problems and hierarchies from the colony into the capitalist countries (Nkrumah 1965:xiii). This became most evident after World War II, when the territories of global empires were nationalized, consequently categorizing people in separate “nations” which were “ruled through the apparatus of nation-state sovereignty, international bodies, and global capital” (Sharma 2020:16).

Both as a cause and a consequence of the proliferation of the idea of Western nation-states as the ultimate form of rule, European powers drew arbitrary borders which divided communities into formations which would better serve their political and economic interests (Byrd 2011; El-Enany 2020; Walia 2020). In this regard, empires, did not dissolve so much as move and shift into not-quite-new formations, resulting in a continuation of the original hierarchical structure (see also Balibar 2009; De Genova 2016; El-Enany 2020; Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2019; Isjakjee et al. 2020; Kalir 2019). In this sense, it may be useful to think of countries like France or Spain as post-empires in order to fully capture their linkages with their imperial pasts. The nation-state, as the only acceptable structure “predicates that indigenous people remain still colonized liminally within and beside the established geopolitical and biopolitical borders and institutions” (Byrd 2010:xix). For non-settler post-

empires, the nation-state form facilitated continued suppression of its former colonial subjects through border regimes and their enforcement. As Nandita Sharma depicts in her writing on Home Rule:

“imperial states were primarily concerned with preventing people’s escape from imperial territory. Simultaneously, imperial states also moved people into imperial-state spaces across numerous continents and archipelagos, largely to labor or fight for its glory. [...] the nationalization of state sovereignty was announced—and institutionalized— by controls limiting both the entry and rights of those who came to be classified as Migrants. Thus, far from a general characteristic of state sovereignty, supposedly in place since the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, immigration controls became a hallmark of state sovereignty only with the advent of the nation form of state power” (2020:18).

Restricted forms of sovereignty that prioritize and legitimize the governing powers of the nation-state have served to reimagine and reinstate the empire without diminishing its power.

### *Supranational bodies (EU)*

Though the nation-state structuring force was an efficient means of conveying the same powers idealized by the empire, the move to networks, partnerships, and consortiums of nation-states like that of the European Union has proved to be an even more efficient way of b/ordering. The initial iteration of this supranational form in the context of Europe (and on the way to becoming EUrope) was the foundation of the European Economic Community EEC (1957). Through trial and error, and a political climate that changed vastly with the end of the USSR, these nations reorganized and created the European Union (1993) (Balibar 2009; Fykes 2019; Walia 2013). These imagined communities (Anderson 1991), as discussed at length in settler colonial studies, are a legacy of imperialism that in disparate yet intersecting ways moved and shifted into not-quite-new formations (Byrd 2011). As a post-slavery structural form the EU enacts shared networks of control and power that stretch far beyond its geographic limits.

The history of the colonization of the Canary Islands is one example of the resulting impact of this structural network. First colonized by the Spanish Empire in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, the islands were initially constructed as a plantation economy, facilitated through extermination of Indigenous peoples and the importation of African diasporic peoples. In their current form, the Canary Islands remain a form of Spanish property put to work in service of EUrope’s border regime. As the outermost region of the European Union, the islands are a major gateway for African migrants into Europe. African people

“from the western regions of Africa—born of a legacy of slavery, civil wars fueled by Western geopolitical interests, and the colonial Scramble for

Africa with its contemporary expression of landgrabs—flee to the Canary Islands in the tens of thousands every year” (Walia 2014:31).

The exploitation of African nations through colonization and the slave trade resulted in long legacies of European wealth. Pooling together these remaining riches in service of white supremacy,<sup>1</sup> the EU has organized itself in a governing form that allows it to maintain control over its Member States’ former colonies in the broadest sense. In the case of the Canary Islands, their function as a gateway into Europe plays a key role in the way Europe manages migration and how it enforces control over people on the move (see Mountz 2020).

### SECTION III: INSTITUTIONS

While the structural power of the empire and its predecessors made many of the decisions regarding slavery’s origination and implementation, these decisions were enacted primarily through networks of institutions. We define institutions here as the social, economic, political (intersectional) means through which the structure is stabilized. Institutions are the building blocks of structures, also understandable as the tools through which the structure is organized and put into operation. Choosing to separate institutions as such in the model is a way of demonstrating how reflective they are of the structural forms they emerged from and the significant ideologies of the era. Institutions generate the juridical, social, and economic frameworks required for actualizing the structure’s aims. In the model we prioritize the largest or most influential institution, but these are practically upheld and supported by other interrelated, smaller ways of organizing. For example, the establishment and management of colonies was necessarily aided by an armed militia and a colonial education system (Fanon 1968). When slave catchers were no longer legally permitted the police force grew in power, and each of these institutions is linked to and supported by the operations of slavery and racial capitalism respectively (Rodriguez 2006; Davis 2010). The nation-state both relies and is built on racial capitalism in order to operate, but this is ideologically upheld using a baseline belief in (neo)liberalism and mutli-culturalism (Sharma 2020; Walia 2020).

#### *Slavery*

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<sup>1</sup> White supremacy is seen here as the culmination of hundreds of years of violence against African diasporic peoples and the global South at large, as evidenced through the disparaging treatment of im/migrants to Europe, countries like France’s continued exploitation of their former colonial holdings, and disproportionate rates of racialized violence from state/ police forces

Slavery is the institution from which our discussion originates, and also the foundation from which much of the modern world was made. When speaking of slavery in this paper we look more specifically at chattel slavery, as it originated from European masters, extracted bodies and labor from Africa, and was imposed on the “new world” of the Americas. The difference between this form of slavery and other modes of servitude was what Neil Roberts calls the “property dimension;” while European peasants were certainly exploited, it does not compare to the “ultimate bondage” of slavery (2015:66). Slavery in this sense, renders the slave “a piece of property—a marketable commodity, in the language of the law” (Douglass 1846). This definition is especially poignant as it comes from Frederick Douglass, a formerly enslaved person who escaped to freedom in the settler colonial USA. The dehumanization required by chattel slavery relied on the idea “that Negroes are not physiologically, or ‘biologically’ human,” but rather legally and philosophically similar to animals and property (Chandler 2014:24). This justification “allowed for the forceful enslavement of another human group under the belief that individual freedom to own property granted the enslaver the right to place into bondage any entity—human, animal, or inanimate—considered personal private property” (Roberts 2015:65). Slavery was thus a sociopolitical institution that moved beyond a system of labor and into a social formation that “spawned a suffusive racial culture,” resulting in a slave and post-slave world that featured “a color-coded institution of ethnoracial division” (Wacquant 2001:100). This perspective, wherein slavery is predicated upon racialization, demonstrates the connections between slavery and the ideologies used to uphold it.

Much of our argument up to this point has worked loosely with a term that merits a more extensive description: the afterlives of slavery. Coming from the work of Saidiya Hartman, this term captures the intricacies in slavery’s varying reincarnations. Hartman describes that “if slavery persists as an issue... it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago” (2007: 17). This arithmetic added up into the institutional form that took African diasporic people en masse from their homelands, transforming them into commodities. Relatedly, Nahum Chandler describes the problematization of Black lives as beginning with slavery and following with “double and reciprocal articulation” that carries slavery and its aftermath forward (2014:12). Beginning with slavery as such and extending it forward and outward is to acknowledge our positionality within these long and multitudinal afterlives. Slavery is difficult to conceptually and practically separate from colonialism

because those who primarily enacted and benefited from the systems, particularly in regards to chattel slavery and the Atlantic, are the same; the post-empires and current nation-states of Western Europe. Chandler points to chattel slavery and the transatlantic slavetrade as facilitating “modern colonialism on a worldwide basis,” subsequently creating “the worldhood of Europe” (2014:124). This worldmaking project was built upon slavery and has as of yet refused to apologize or repair this originary damage.

### *Racial Capitalism*

From the slave system and its colonial counterpart, the growth of racial capitalism took root. Racialized capitalism is a way of maintaining the white supremacist/ anti-black system of social relations, as well as upholding the economic hierarchies of a minority conglomerate rule which primarily serve to benefit the global north. Racial capitalism as a term describes the ways in which the “development, organization, and expansion” as well as the “social ideology” of capitalist society “pursued essentially racial directions” (Robinson 1983:2). Useful to contextualizing racial capitalism is its place in da Silva’s “circuit of dispossession,” through which we can see the ways in which accumulation of capital is exposed as being “guided by the presumption that self-determination distinguishes the proper (modern/ European/ white/ male) legal, economic, and moral subject” (da Silva 2014:288). This existence of a full moral subjecthood, where rights and access are fully given, is one which has been confined primarily to white European men (admittedly with nuances here regarding religion and ethnicity). Racial capitalism as both economic in nature and moving far beyond this realm can also be defined as “a racially hierarchical political economy constituting war and militarism, imperialist accumulation, expropriation by domination, and labor superexploitation” (Burden-Stelly 2020:web). Burden-Stelly further adds that the “racial” aspect primarily “refers to Blackness, defined as African descendants’ relationship to the capitalist mode of production—their structural location— and the condition, status, and material realities emanating therefrom” (2020:web). In a racialized capital system, “capital is thus projected as the indispensable, empirical, and metaphysical source of all human life” (McKittrick and Wynter 2015:10). The linkages between life and livingness and the pursuit of property are essential to conceptualizing this institution.

### *Visa Regimes*

While borders are a landed technological way of dividing and oppressing peoples (Sharma 2020; Walia 2020), visa regimes are the institutional outcome of this land-based

formation. We understand visa regimes, and in particular European visa regimes, as a system that regulates temporary or permanent membership in a political community (Salter 2006). Research has shown that the European visa regime operates through a so-called ‘positive and negative’ list, which separates citizens from countries that require a visa to enter EU territory and those who do not require a visa (van Houtum 2010:962). The positive list contains 60 countries of the world, while in stark contrast, 135 out of 195 countries require a visa for entrance into the European space. The division between the positive/negative list shows how some nationalities are considered more welcome (positive list) than others (negative list). Although not much information can be found about how these lists are created, van Houtum notes that “a significantly high number of Muslim and developing states are listed” as negative formations (2010:964). The list discriminates against people of certain nationalities with certain cultures and economic situations, constituting a regime reminiscent of global apartheid. The European Union and the Schengen agreement are the most visible actualization of racial capitalist institutions that continue to extract surplus labour from outside of its territory, relying on short term work visas and undocumented workers (The Black Mediterranean Collective 2021)

#### SECTION IV: TECHNOLOGIES OF LAND USE:

Understanding the technological element of land use offers critical insight to the way land has been used over time, revealing the impact of ideologies, the emergence of particular institutions, and addressing structural shifts. Land and its changing uses and meanings are key to understanding slavery as, among its other evils, a project of mass displacement. We use *technologies of land use* to describe how space is managed to facilitate control in the other domains. The linkages between space and oppression emerging from the slave system are described by Ruth Wilson Gilmore as “fatal couplings of power and difference,” who use “death-dealing displacement’ in order to maintain hierarchical relations (2002:16). Looking at land is a way of looking at the “logic of the *passages themselves*,” highlighting that the very fact of forced movement set standards about land relations (Rodriguez 2006:224). By reimagining land as property, and considering displacement from land as a further reflection of this concept, European imperial forces triggered a forced migration on a scale previously unseen.

Indigenous Africans were taken from their homes and moved across the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean, bringing with them complex histories, cultural practices, and ways of knowing which are still evident in African diasporic communities today. The

destruction of Indigenous lands across the Americas in order to develop the plantations where chattel slavery came to life should also not be neglected, and the current presence of reservations in the Americas and Africa are the afterlife of this violence. In this sense dispossession from land is both a “mode of imperialism” and “the mode by which imperialism is operationalized” (Barker 2018:31). The deformation and reformation of land, as with the creation of reserves and plantations “evidences an uneven colonial – racial economy that, while differently articulated across time and place, legalized black servitude while simultaneously sanctioning black placelessness and constraint” (McKittrick 2011:948). Land use, in the long afterlives of colonialism and slavery, creates spaces that are “deemed devoid of full human life” and include prisons, camps, and plantations alike (Weheliye 2014:12). In each major structural and ideological shift, and with different institutional organizations, land has evolved from kin and partner to exploitable resource, both a site of containment and a fortress needing protection. Bringing land to the forefront is a way of acknowledging the changing meanings of movement, and the connections between slavery as a spatial project and the management of movement across Europe today as rooted in the same oppressions that engendered slavery.

### *Plantations and Colonies*

Turning indigenous land into an economic resource was one of the primary projects of the colonial empire. In the creation of both colonies and plantations, land was transformed into a tool for the furthering of state suppression. Weheliye names the colonial outpost and slave plantation as two relational points in the formation of modern politics, serving to “physiologically subdue and exploit” (2014:37). Colonization “marked a fundamental and radical shift within the historical trajectory of European epistemology, engendering in its wake the notion of the human and mobilizing the concepts of property, money, and life as possessions that would come to stand as the boundaries between civilization, savagery, and the nonhuman” (Byrd 2015:122). Settler colonial discourses relied on a “logic of containment,” one which enacts a division between “who is expendable (Indigenous populations) and who is given priority (settlers)” (Goeman 2017:101; see also Goodyear-Ka’opua 2013). In this spatial reckoning, where containment and land become forms of violence, “Indigenous bodies are made absent or disinterred to lands now renamed and domesticated” (Goeman 2017:101). Linking the colony with the plantation is in line with the work of Mbembe, who argues that within our current formation both of these sites became a zone outside of the realm of legality (2003:23). This echoed further in Paul Gilroy’s writing

on the plantation as a colonial formation “where normal juridical rules and procedures had been deliberately set aside” (2000:81).

Edouard Glissant, describing the plantation in more specific terms, called it “one of the bellies of the world,” which despite being physically closed as a place remains the site from which the world was derived (1990:75). In this sense, the plantation acted as a microcosmic embodiment of the way space was used in colonial and slave empires, or as Weheliye points out “a miniature version of the world of Man,” where the Black slave is the always-Other (2014:111). Both of these formations sit in conversation with Orlando Patterson’s framing of chattel slavery as a “relation of domination and not a category of legal thought,” in that they see the existence and operation of the plantation as relying on the violence of antiblackness described at length above (1982:334). In the plantation, the forced movement of the African diasporic person rendered them “outside of spatiality” (Chandler 2014:138). Wacquant describes slavery as an institution from which a lineage of “defining, confining, and controlling” African diasporic people was originated, each iteration characterized by the plantation (and its related institutions) as the core of the economy (2001:98). Plantations were seen as the preferred method of control because they empowered European migration as a contrast to the captivity of Africans, further exacerbating unequal relations. Plantation economies created an “enforced placelessness that demanded the enslaved work and thus be chained to the land” therefore normalizing dispossession alongside land exploitation (McKittrick 2011:949). As two separate but interrelated ways of controlling land, the plantation and the colony both altered the nature of the human in relation to land. Within the world of slavery at large, plantation futures and the colonial present continue to enforce oppression.

### *Prisons and Borders*

The establishment of states led in turn to the enforcement of borders and prisons as a further way of containing movement and wealth, through control over mineral and human resources. Following Rodriguez, we believe that “the epoch of white-supremacist chattel slavery and its transatlantic articulation—the Middle Passage—engender and enliven the social and political logic of the current carceral formation” (2006:224). As an institutionalized form of enclosure, transforming land into bordered and restricted areas of movements creates “kinships of immobilization,” within which certain people are further subjected to exploitation (Rodriguez 2006:223). The connections between borders and prisons are theoretically similar, as both transform land and space into compartmentalized zones of

exclusion, and serve to reproduce each other, as border enforcement criminalizes and imprisons those who defy these spatial formations. As Robinson describes, “there has never been a moment in modern European history (if before) that migratory and/or immigrant labor was not a significant aspect of European economies,” as seen in the creation of “human reserves” for “domestic service, handicrafts, industrial labor, the ship- and dock-workers of merchant capitalism, and the field labourers of agrarian capitalism,” individualized who are restricted in movement because of their bordered positionalities (1983:23)

In the colonial era, Europe exported much of its most violent land removal practices, but the movement into the nation-state form also saw its own (comparatively) limited lands used to further exploitation. Looking specifically to the policing of migrants and refugees moving from Africa to Europe, especially those who take the Mediterranean route, P. Khalil Saucier and Tryon P. Woods suggest that “any discussion of policing today that does not ground itself in the historical context of slavery and colonialism is imagining a world that is not, rather than dealing with the world as it is” (Saucier and Woods 2014:60). The policing they describe is both localized and focused on moving peoples, and the world “as it is” is one in which “violence against the black body is gratuitous, not contingent, instrumental or incidental: it is punishment for *being*” (Saucier and Woods 2014:61). This long legacy of slavery is part of what Martha Kuwee Kumsa calls “an incredible reversal” and “ironic twist” wherein “the forces that dragged Africans into the West are now stringently policing the borders to ward them off” (2008:96). Reckoning with the way land is articulated and put to use to form borders and spaces of imprisonment is a connection between the dispossessive politics of colonization and slavery.

### *Ghetto and Camp*

EUropean border enforcement has become increasingly restricted, even as Europe refuses to offer restitution or reparations for its colonial and slave trade endeavours, and clings tightly to the neoliberal trend. The subsequent migration conditions, and the treatment of moving people within EUrope’s borders has not aligned with Europe’s ongoing desire for imported labor. The resulting formation is therefore one with differential impacts on marginalized (and racialized) groups. The urban Other is pushed into ghettos, the undocumented immigrant Other is trapped in camps, and the economically subjugated Other is constrained to precarious and highly mobile work. Workers are both displaced from their homelands and prevented from building meaningful relations with the European nations where they work, resulting in a liminality that the state exploits in order to maintain

hegemonic control. Wacquant describes this relationship as a “deadly symbiosis,” wherein ghettos and prisons melt into each other in ways that perpetuate “socioeconomic marginality” (2001:95). Similarly, Hartman calls the ghetto the “third matrix of black death and dispossession, after the slave ship and the plantation” (2016:169).

More broadly, though visa regimes are the mechanisms through which borders are legally upheld, there is a very concrete spatial element in the way borders are physically built and operated around. These visa regimes regulate who is legally allowed to enter and remain within European territory. Those who cross the border and enter the territory ‘irregularly’ are contained in camps and prisons (Mountz 2020). The camp, evidence of the politics of confinement and containment, appeared in nineteenth-century documents “as distinct, substitutable, adjacent, and interdependent forms of containment: barbed wire, walls, checkpoints, internment camps within the colony, refugee camps that produce new (and expanded) borders for the colony, military camps outfitted with potential settlers” (Stoler 2014: 37). Camps, as described by Stoler, together with “agricultural colonies, penal colonies, resettlement camps, detention centers, island military bases, and settler communities (temporary and permanent) were nodes in an imperial network” (ibid.). These imperial nodes continue to influence contemporary mobility regimes through which so-called liberal states and supranational bodies like the EU enforce sovereignty over their borders (Mountz 2020; Walia 2014). In each form of land control and management the empire and its iterations distort and deform land from kin to resource to source of exploitation.

## CASE STUDY

In order to make the theoretical model concrete we will operationalize it with a brief case study of Portuguese migrant labor and the agricultural sector. It is helpful to enter this case study with Wright in mind, pointing out that “empirical categories of analysis are *underdetermined* by the theoretical frameworks within which they are generated or interpreted” (1997:37). In this sense we would reiterate that though there may be distinctions made between the theoretical nomenclature or phases (focusing on ghettos rather than other forms of enclosure, for example), the overall framework offers a set of guidelines to understanding the specifics we discuss here. Portugal and the Portuguese post-empire provide insight into the links between the way slavery was upheld and operated and the current mobility regime at play today due to its position as one of the earliest and most powerful participants in the transatlantic slave trade. Though there are myriad reasons to focus on any European post-empire, Portugal stands out, according to Rodney, because “they boasted the

most and did the least" to the extent that after 500 years of occupation, originating in the slave era, "the Portuguese had not managed to train a single African doctor in Mozambique, and the life expectancy in Eastern Angola was less than 30 years" (1973:322). The Portuguese empire was responsible for, by conservative estimates, the importation, exportation, and death of at least 5.8 million African peoples. This active engagement in institutional violence against African people "rewarded the Portuguese with the premier place in the African slave trade for its first two centuries" (Hartman 2007:45). Turning from Portugal past to European Portugal present, industrialized agriculture in the EU is indicative of the long transit of rule from empire and colony into nation-state, a shift which has continued to maintain and create forms of oppression (Fikes 2009; Mahmud 2013; Walia 2013; 2020). In the larger field of migration scholarship, migrant labor, and the agricultural industry more precisely, are part of critical labor studies and economics alongside bureaucratic concerns (see Neilson and Mezzadra 2014; Rogaly 2021).

During the 1960s Portugal witnessed labour shortages of unskilled workers in sectors like the naval industry, construction, and public works (Malheiros 2013). In order to solve the issues, Portugal brought people from (former) colonies to "work as 'substitute' labour in the construction industry and other sectors that were suffering labour shortages" (Malheiros 1999:169). Between 1973 and 1975 independence movements in the Portuguese African colonies and the Portuguese revolution further led to large-scale African migrations to Portugal<sup>2</sup> (Pires 2019). Since the late 1990s Portugal began to experience rising prosperity, an aging population, and another series of labour shortages which triggered a demand for foreign labour in the Portuguese economy<sup>3</sup> (Cork 2001; Fikes 2009; Peixoto 2009). In 1996 Portugal became one of Europe's Schengen states, meaning that Portuguese workers no longer needed work visas to seek employment in northwestern Europe. As argued by Fikes, Portugal then witnessed another sudden demographic shift when it worked to adapt to EEC political, commercial, and technological standards<sup>4</sup> (2009:24). Although Portuguese nationals were moving out of the country, taking advantage of Portugal's position as part of the EU and the Schengen agreement, exploitative labor systems utilized restricted movement in order to uphold economic gains for the elites.

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<https://www.pordata.pt/Portugal/Popula%C3%A7%C3%A3o+estrangeira+com+estatuto+legal+de+residente+total+e+por+algumas+nacionalidades-2>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.pordata.pt/en/DB/Portugal/Search+Environment/Table>

<sup>4</sup> [https://repositorio.ul.pt/bitstream/10451/38905/1/Moreno\\_Esteves\\_Fonseca\\_2016\\_acesso%20aberto.pdf](https://repositorio.ul.pt/bitstream/10451/38905/1/Moreno_Esteves_Fonseca_2016_acesso%20aberto.pdf)

An illustrative example of a sector that benefits from the rising prosperity of the Schengen economy has been agriculture, and specifically the export of fruit and vegetables to the rest of Europe and beyond (see also Rogal 2021; Sampaio and Carvalho 2017).<sup>5</sup> This sector has expanded since the 1980s and attracted many foreign investors that built big agricultural farms in the Southern Alentejo region in Portugal (Moren et al. 2016). In a study on migration stakeholders in Portugal and Spain, Morén-Alegre et. al. quote one of their interview respondents, a land-owning farmer, who shared:

“Portuguese people don't want to work on farms. So we have to import labour. And that is getting very difficult because of regulation. On the one hand you have unemployment but people don't want to come and work in the fields or in the greenhouses” (2018:262).

As a result, as mentioned in a study from OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development), Portugal, like its southern European neighbors Spain, Italy and France, relies increasingly on undocumented migrant labor in order to meet the increased demand for labor power on these big agricultural farms.

In addition to Portugal's own demands, migrants are attracted to Portugal by the promise of a better life. Although many people travel to Portugal on their own, recent studies have demonstrated the involvement of so-called “work agencies” in facilitating their movement (Peixoto 2009). These “agencies” demand thousands of Euros for their ‘services’ and people often spend years paying back these exorbitant fees<sup>6</sup>. Often people work under inhumane conditions and often for less than the state-guaranteed minimum wage of €600 a month with no labour or social rights. Depending on the season, people are picking olives, strawberries, and oranges or made to harvest melons and grapes. The issue with seasonal work is that farms are only in need of temporary labour, which means that after the work is done, people have to find a new place of employment, reinforcing levels of precarity.

NGOs and even governmental agencies have documented labour exploitation where people are charged expensive prices for accommodation, food, and travel costs (e.g., SolImigrante, Solim CPR, AKTO).<sup>7</sup> In an interview with AlJazeera one such group, SolImigrante, stated that people are living in repurposed shipping containers with rents of up

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.portugalresident.com/slavery-in-the-alentejo/>  
<https://www.marxist.com/modern-slavery-in-portugal-capitalist-barbarism.htm>  
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-portugal-rights-exploitation-idUSKCN1Q227X>  
[https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms\\_093650.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_093650.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-portugal-rights-exploitation-idUSKCN1Q227X>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theportugalnews.com/news/2021-03-31/portugal-failing-to-combat-forced-labour/59110>  
<https://www.dw.com/en/cheap-asian-workers-flock-to-portugals-farms/a-57811307>

to 100 euros a month.<sup>8</sup> This creates so-called labor camps of migrant workers in places like Alentejo and Odimira where the agricultural sector is big. Within these camps, migrant workers from formerly colonized countries<sup>9</sup> live under restricted conditions, with limits placed on their movement both across borders and within the Portuguese nation-state.

An important aspect of post-empire migration in this case study is that it does not directly link Portugal to its former colonial holdings. Rather, we would emphasize that Portugal as a white supremacist state which now benefits from its collaboration with other European post-empires relies on ongoing oppression and exploitation to maintain its own stability and re-enact systems of racialized oppression which originated in colonialism and slavery. Although Portugal shares an image of a country with looser border controls than most of the northern European countries, this needs to be analyzed in tandem with the model we presented before, and the nation-state's refusal to fully recognize or repair its past harm. While their labor is in some ways regulated under international standards, migrant workers' connections to both their homelands and any relationality with Portugal are severed and deformed by their economic value. They are socially rejected from mainstream society, and their bonds with their homelands are also constrained by their limited movement and restricted access to communication technology. While slavery is no longer permitted and the Portuguese empire has since fallen, through the importation of exploited workers who are racialized and forced into violent relationships with land, the economic basis and plantation logics of the slave system are reimaged.

## CONCLUSION: ALTERITIES AND OTHERWISES

By way of closing, though space does not permit a full meditation, we would like to turn to the alterities, otherwises, and radical elsewhere that remain, despite this broad and ongoing violence. We maintain that another world is out there, even if it is one "they have not told you about" as Afrofuturist artist and thinker Sun Ra would say (1978). The model we presented here is first and foremost a theoretical exploration that we will explore empirically in a later stage of our research. In further work, we intend to add a critical element to the existing model; the case for abolition, decolonization, liberation, and a radical disruption to these ongoing trends. This pursuit is challenging, both theoretically and practically, as it

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/11/23/south-asian-workers-portugal>

<sup>9</sup> In this paper we write about Portugal, however, it must be noted that when we talk about people from the former colonized countries, we understand this as the countries that have been, or continue to be colonized by former European empires.

requires grappling with, for example, the just claims of movements like #LandBack alongside the arguments made for open borders. To take a small step towards this eventuality, we turn to the words of Sylvia Wynter, and take her guidance as a path forward:

We must now collectively undertake a rewriting of knowledge as we know it. This is a rewriting in which, inter alia, I want the West to recognize the dimensions of what it has brought into the world... Because the West did change the world, totally. And I want to suggest that it is that change that has now made our own proposed far-reaching changes now as imperative as they are inevitable. (McKittrick and Wynter 2015:18)

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