

## Defending “Western” Values: Reactionary Neoliberalism in the Americas

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### Recommended Citation

Segura-Ballar, Gabriela. "Defending “Western” Values: Reactionary Neoliberalism in the Americas." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 23.1 (): <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.4016>>

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

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**CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture**ISSN 1481-4374 <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>>  
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**Volume 23 Issue 1 (March 2021) Article 7****Gabriela Segura-Ballar,****"Defending 'Western' Values: Reactionary Neoliberalism in the Americas"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol23/iss1/7>>Contents of ***CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 23.1 (2021)**Special Issue ***New Faces of Authoritarianism***. Ed. Massimiliano Tomba<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol23/iss7/>

**Abstract:** Right-wing populism and authoritarianism are on the rise globally after the financial crisis of 2008. This reactionary trend has widely channeled anxieties created by neoliberal insecurities into cultural and nationalistic backlash against the ostensible enemies of "Western" values (e.g., immigrants, racial and sexual minorities, feminists, and leftists). President Jair Bolsonaro's "Brazil above everything, God above everyone" and President Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" are the most conspicuous examples of the resurgence of a populist reactionary right in the Americas. This continental trend promotes ultra-nationalism and more coercive neoliberalization processes combined with a reactionary authoritarianism that celebrates essentialized "Western" values, such as capitalist social relations, the heteronormative family, and Judeo-Christian morality. In this paper, I analyze the meanings of the West in the context of authoritarian neoliberalization processes. I also discuss and illustrate the role of civilizational discourses focused on "Western" values that have contributed to unify discursively and ideologically the transnational Right in the Americas. By focusing on right-wing actors in Brazil and the US, I analyze how the construction and dissemination of civilizational discourses around the celebration and defense of "Western" values is shaped and imbricated by the defense of neoliberal/authoritarian values and agendas.

**Gabriela SEGURA-BALLAR**

## **Defending "Western" Values: Reactionary Neoliberalism in the Americas**

### **Introduction**

Right-wing populism and authoritarianism are on the rise globally after the financial crisis of 2008. This reactionary trend has widely channeled anxieties created by neoliberal insecurities (e.g., income inequality, job precarity, and the fraying of the middle class) into cultural and nationalistic backlash against the ostensible enemies of "Western" values (e.g., immigrants, racial and sexual minorities, feminists, and leftists). President Jair Bolsonaro's "Brazil above everything, God above everyone" and President Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" are the most conspicuous examples of the resurgence of a populist reactionary right in the Americas.<sup>1</sup> This continental trend promotes ultra-nationalism and more coercive neoliberalization processes combined with a reactionary authoritarianism that celebrates essentialized "Western" values, such as capitalist social relations, the heteronormative family, and Judeo-Christian morality.

Donald Trump's presidential campaign and administration has been characterized for instigating xenophobia and islamophobia. Trump focused heavily on "brutal Islamic terrorism" and promised to protect American citizens from "the violence and oppression of a hateful foreign ideology." On August 18, 2016, during a rally in North Carolina, Trump said that "all applicants for immigration will be vetted for ties to radical ideology, and we will screen out anyone who doesn't share our values and love our people" (Johnson and Hauslohner). Subsequently, "travel ban" orders have been part of Trump's promise to protect citizens from "radical Islamic terrorism."

In May 2017, the Brazilian National Congress approved a new migration law designed to replace the 1980 Statute of the Foreigner, which treated immigrants as threats to national security. The progressive immigration law was sabotaged by right-wing politicians and security forces. For instance, Jair Bolsonaro, then representative from the state of Rio de Janeiro, argued that "Brazilians will face the consequences of the in consequence that will be voted" (Tsavkko-Garcia).<sup>2</sup> Before the bill was put before the Federal Senate, dozens of protesters gathered to protest against the law, but most of their anger was directed at Muslims. The demonstration was organized by the right-wing group *Direita São Paulo* (Right-wing Sao Paulo). The group chanted slogans against what they called the "Islamisation" of the country (Tsavkko-Garcia). For them, the new immigration law represented "the first Islamic attack" in Brazil because it was going to open the doors of the nation to terrorists. Between the symbol of the *Liga Cristã Mundial* (LCM, World Christian League)<sup>3</sup>—a Brazilian organization against the Islamization of Brazilian society—and one image of a Crusade soldier, one of the banners read: "for national sovereignty and protection of our borders, we will defend the Christian people of this nation" (Luiz). The representation of the Brazilian people as a Christian nation who are in danger of Islamic terrorism reveals more than anti-migration and Islamophobic sentiments. It shows the representation of Brazil as part of the "West" from a cultural standpoint.

The defense of the nation then goes beyond the threat that is represented in immigrants or Muslims. It is about the defense of traditional values which are defined as "Western" at their core. In this paper, I will analyze what does it mean to defend "Western" values in the context of authoritarian neoliberalization process. I will also discuss and illustrate to role of civilizational discourses around the West that have contributed to unify discursively and ideologically the transnational Right in the Americas. By focusing on right-wing actors (e.g., individuals, groups, and organizations) in Brazil and

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<sup>1</sup> Although I could include other cases in the Americas, I will focus solely on Brazil and the US because, as historian Benjamin A. Cowan argues, Brazil and the US have become power centers of the Right and there is also a long history of cross-border cooperation among activists and organizations in both countries (*Securing Sex*). Furthermore, according to Cowan, Brazil has "formed one of several critical *loci* in the gestation and organization of the New Right as a transnational phenomenon" ("A Hemispheric Moral Majority" 3).

<sup>2</sup> Bolsonaro has referred to immigrants from Senegal, Haiti, Bolivia, and refugees from Syria as the scum of the world that is arriving to Brazil. In an interview in September 2015, he said: "I don't know what the commanders are adhering to, but if they are going to reduce the number [of the Armed Forces] there are fewer people on the streets to face the MST [Landless Workers Movement] outcasts, the Haitians, Senegalese, Bolivians and everything that is scum in the world, and now the Syrians are coming too. The scum of the world is arriving to Brazil as if we don't have too many problems to solve" (Vitor).

<sup>3</sup> See image in [ligacristamundialriodejaneiro.blogspot.com/](http://ligacristamundialriodejaneiro.blogspot.com/). According to its blogpost, the *Liga Cristã Mundial* is a non-profit organization that aims to combat Islamic terrorism and communism and to permanently promote the defense of the Christian faith, that is, the defense of Christians' rights, symbols and cults (*Liga Cristã Mundial*). Ironically, the funder of LCM is Lebanese, and the logo also reads *Liga Cristã Mundial* in Arabic. Former President Temer, who vetoed the immigration law, is also of Lebanese origin (Saleh).

the US, I will analyze how the construction and dissemination of civilizational discourses around the celebration and defense of "Western" values are shaped and imbricated by the defense of neoliberal/authoritarian values and agendas.

### Defining the West

In general terms, the West usually refers to the United States, Western Europe, modernity, and the "Occident." Traditional and celebratory accounts that attempt to define the West and its contributions to humanity usually pose the origins of Western civilization in Jerusalem and Athens: primarily the Jewish and Christian tradition, on the one hand, and the classical Greek tradition on the other. Another founding principle of Western culture is located in ancient Rome. On the question of European identity, French philosopher Rémi Brague argues that one of its distinctive traits is Romanity (211). For Brague, the frontiers of Europe are solely cultural. A culture defines itself in relation to the people it considers as its "others." Therefore, to define Europe, Brague defines Europe's "otherness"; in other words, he distinguishes Europe from what it is not: "Occident" as opposed to "Orient," Christian as opposed to Muslim. However, Brague is not able to recognize that Europe's "otherness" is precisely a creation of Western modernity and imperialism. European and Western identity is therefore constructed upon the creation and the exclusion of its own opposite.<sup>4</sup>

In *Colonising Egypt*, Timothy Mitchell analyzes the place of colonialism in the critique of Western modernity. For Mitchell, the division of the colonial city into the European and the native quarters was expanded to a global scale. In other words, in the process of colonizing and seeking imperial control, a global separation was made "in the form of a cultural and historical 'break' dividing the modern West, as the place of order, reason, and power, from the outside world" (165). The Oriental then could be understood as the negative of the European. This opposite is what makes the West what it is. This exterior is integral and is what makes possible a European identity and power. In Mitchell's words, "The Orient was backward, irrational, and disordered, and therefore in need of European order and authority: the domination of the West over the non-Western world depended on this manner of creating a 'West', a singular Western self-identity" (166).

Mitchell builds on Edward Said's influential work *Orientalism*. Said defines Orientalism as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" (2). Thus, the Orient is not only an integral part of European civilization and culture, it has also helped to define Europe (or the West) (1-2). Therefore, as Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez argues, "the European dominator constructs the other as an object of knowledge ('Orient') and constructs an image of his own locus of enunciation ('Occident') in the very process of exercising his dominance" (265). Said and Mitchell's work demonstrate that there is no Western modernity without colonialism, and there is no colonialism without Western modernity. However, both authors still accept the dominant vision of the eighteenth-century myth of modernity which represents itself as the only modernity.

Latin American decolonial thinkers have challenged this Eurocentric imaginary by visualizing the first modernity: when Europe was conceived as a center of geopolitical power. For Argentinian-Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel, Europe's centrality within the world-system (as an ethnic and religious point of reference) was the result of the discovery, conquest, colonization, and integration (submission) of Amer-india. Modernity is then the result of these events and not their cause. Modernity's birth was not the Enlightenment but the discovery of the Americas on October 12, 1492 (Dussel 1492). While Mitchell and Said posit Orientalism as part of colonial discourse, Argentinian semiotician Walter Mignolo identifies not Orientalism but rather Occidentalism as the overarching geopolitical imaginary of the modern/colonial world system ("La colonialidad a lo largo" 57). The inclusion of the "America" in the West (Occident) allowed to see the "New World" as the natural (inferior) extension of Europe. As Castro-Gómez argues "the New World became a natural stage for the extension of the white Europeans and their Christian cultures" (276). In other words, as Mignolo points out, Europe's greatest and riches and oldest colonies are not the "Oriental" but the "Occidental": the Indias Occidentales and then the Americas ("La colonialidad a lo largo"). In sum, building on Dussel's idea of two modernities, Mignolo explains,

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<sup>4</sup> Regarding what is exterior to Europe, Brague clarifies that does not mean throw it into the outer darkness of some sort of barbarism. Although Brague does not utilize the civilized/barbaric dichotomy to define Europe explicitly, he is clearly associating European history with Western (universal) civilization. Brague clarifies: "I do not at all identify Europe with the civilized world. To be outside of it is not to be inferior to it" (211). This clarification applies solely to Eastern European countries. It seems that former European colonies could not be considered part of Western culture. For example, although Christianity is one of Western civilization's basic pillars, for Brague the Occident cannot be confounded with Christianity, in other words, Christians who are not Europeans can hardly be considered "Occidentals."

"Orientalism" is the hegemonic cultural imaginary of the modern world system in the second modernity when the image of the "heart of Europe" (England, France, Germany) replaces the "Christian Europe" of the fifteenth to seventeenth century (Italy, Spain, Portugal)...It is true, as Said states, that the Orient became one of the recurring images of Europe's Other after the eighteenth century. The Occident, however, was never Europe's Other but the difference within sameness: Indias Occidentales (as you can see in the very name) and later America (in Buffon, Hegel, etc.) was the extreme West, not its alterity. America, contrary to Asia and Africa, was included as part of Europe's extension and not as its difference. That's why, once more, without Occidentalism, there is no Orientalism. ("La colonialidad a lo largo" qtd. in Castro-Gómez 277)

For Mignolo, the first dominant ideology of the modern/colonial world system (that is, the first geoculture of world-modernity) was the aristocratic imaginary of whiteness and Christian mentality. In other words, the first universalistic discourse in modern times is the discourse of racial purity which allowed the first classification scheme of the global population. The idea of race and racism became the organizing principle that structures all of the multiple hierarchies of the world-system (*Local Histories*). For Puerto Rican sociologist Ramón Grosfoguel, the racial/ethnic hierarchy of the European/non-European divide transversally reconfigures all of the other global power structures, including sexual, gender, spiritual, epistemic, economic, political, linguistic, aesthetic, pedagogical, etc. From an ethnic and epistemic superiority, the West is characterized by being modern, rational, scientific, civilized, while other cultures (the Rest) would be pre-modern, pre-rational, traditional, primitive, in sum, barbarians. Mignolo argues that the distinction between "the civilized and the barbarians" was the space-pillar of Western civilization. The time-pillar in creating the idea of modernity and Western civilization was the distinction between "*les anciens et les modernes*" (*Local Histories*).

Traditional accounts of European civilization locate its origins (the "roots") in ancient Athens and Rome. For example, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), Germany's towering intellectual, contributed to the adoration of Greek intellectual superiority. As historian Nell Irvin Painter points out, "Goethe's prestige made ancient Greek intellectual superiority so dominant that German intellectuals began to claim ancient Greek bodies and culture as their true ancestors" (64). These triumphant accounts of Western civilization are reproduced in much of Western political theory, sciences, and even classic art (e.g. classical ballet)<sup>5</sup> and art history. University of Iowa classics professor, Sarah Bond, published two essays, one in the online arts journal *Hyperallergic* and one in *Forbes*, arguing that it was time we all accepted that ancient sculpture was not pure white—and neither were the people of the ancient world.<sup>6</sup> After the publication of her essays, Bond received a stream of hate messages online (Talbot). A white nationalist group, Identity Evropa, started putting up posters on college campuses, including Iowa's, that presented classical white marble statues as emblems of white nationalism. Identity Evropa is a white supremacist group focused on the preservation of "white American culture" and the promotion of white European identity.<sup>7</sup> Identity Evropa and other white supremacy groups use classical statuary as a symbol of white male superiority (see fig. 1). They imagine these statues to be a direct lineage of white Western culture extending back to ancient Greece. This idea, however, is not restricted to white supremacist groups. For example, current Foreign Minister of Brazil Ernesto Araújo considers that Brazil belongs to the West from a cultural and spiritual standpoint. For Araújo, nationalism is linked to the birth of the West and we owe to the ancient Greeks the "idea of the nation" which united the Greeks against their enemies "to defend freedom, family, their cultural heritage, and their gods" ("*Trump e o Ocidente*" 336). Thus, for Araújo, we can find the origin of the West (and nationalism) in the ancient Greeks who are "our ancestors."

<sup>5</sup> Ballet shoes are assumed to be white or pink. This reflects the dominant idea that ballet shoes have to resemble white dancers' flesh. Ballerinas of color have to dye their point shoes to match their skin color. See news article "Brown Point Shoes Arrive, 200 Years after White Ones" (Marshall). See also video in the BBC (Redmond).

<sup>6</sup> In *Black Athena*, Martin Bernal proposes that a change in the Western perception of Greece took place from the eighteenth century onward and that this change fostered a subsequent denial by Western academia of any significant African and Phoenician influence on ancient Greek civilization.

<sup>7</sup> Identity Evropa was part of the alt right from March 2016 through March 2019. On March 8, 2019, during Identity Evropa's annual conference, the group's leader, Patrick Casey, announced the dissolution of Identity Evropa and the creation of a new group, American Identity Movement (AIM). See Anti-Defamation League and Southern Poverty Law Center, "Identity Evropa/American Identity Movement."

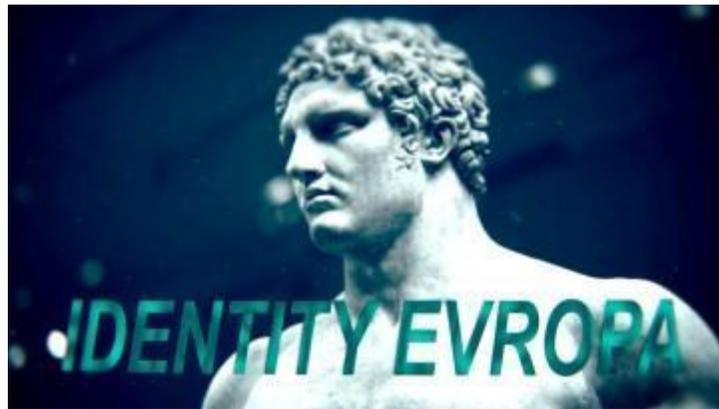


Fig. 1: Identity Evropa from Southern Poverty Law Center. "Identity Evropa/American Identity Movement."

The idealization of white marble buttresses the persistence of the imaginary of whiteness as the epitome of beauty.<sup>8</sup> It also reinforces the false construction of Western civilization as white. Who benefits from this representation? In response to this question, Mark Abbe, the leading American scholar of ancient Greek and Roman polychromy, argues: "If we weren't benefiting, we wouldn't be so invested in it. We benefit from a whole range of assumptions about cultural, ethnic, and racial superiority. We benefit in terms of the core identity of Western civilization, that sense of the West as more rational" (Talbot). Thus, white marble statuary not only symbolize the equation of whiteness with beauty but also show the idea of a superior rationality that distinguished white/Western aesthetic from non-Western art. It is also the equation of color with primitivism (Painter). As Painter argues, for J. J. Winckelmann—the German scholar who is often called the father of art history—and his followers, "color in sculpture came to mean barbarism, for they assumed that the lofty ancient Greeks were too sophisticated to color their art" (61). Thus, the hierarchical scheme of social classification would assume not only the superiority of some men over others but also the superiority of one form of knowledge over another (Castro-Gómez 276). For Grosfoguel, the racial/ethnic hierarchy has an aesthetic dimension: "an aesthetic hierarchy of high art vs. naïve or primitive art where the West is considered superior high art and the non-West is considered as producers of inferior expressions of art institutionalized in Museums, Art Galleries and global art markets."

### **Western liberal civilization: The second modernity**

Rational and epistemic hierarchies are also intrinsic to Western liberalism, as one of the defining features of the second modernity. In *The Modern World-System*, Immanuel Wallerstein analyzes liberalism as the first geoculture of the world-system that arose in the eighteenth century as a result of the globalization of the French Revolution. The eighteenth-century modernity began to develop a vision of itself and its own origins that corresponds to the Eurocentric imaginary of modernity (Dussel 1492). From this perspective, the first modernity is rendered invisible. For this reason, I will consider liberalism as the second geoculture ("world-culture") of the second modernity.

In "Variants of Liberalism," Stuart Hall defines liberalism as a *political ideology*. As an ideology, it includes the whole range of concepts, ideas, and images that provide the frameworks of interpretation and meaning. This ideology is strongly committed to values of liberty, competition, and individual freedom. Hall summarizes some "core conceptions" of *classic liberalism*: the sovereign and abstract individual who own natural rights, society as the reverse side of this conception of the individual, civil society as the privileged domain of action of the individual, liberty as the freedom of the individual from constraint, and the state had to be strong but limited. In addition, liberalism is identified with the idea of representative government, but not with universal democracy. As Hall explains, one tension of liberalism is between "its universalistic claims on behalf of particular sections of society; between its

<sup>8</sup> In the eighteenth century, Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–68), the German scholar who is often called the father of art history, contended that "the whiter the body is, the more beautiful it is," and that "color contributes to beauty, but it is not beauty." Winckelmann elevated Greek statuary into emblems of beauty creating a new white aesthetic (Painter. See also video uploaded by Vox). For a reconstruction of the German invention of white Hellenism, see Bernal.

commitment to representative government and its doubts about universal democracy" (43). As Wendy Brown argues, although the claims of liberalism are universal, the discourse of abstract citizenship was actually based on the Christian, bourgeois, white, heterosexual norm ("The 'Jewish Question'"). Thus, the failure of liberalism to be universal is "the abstract character of liberal political membership and the ideological naturalized character of liberal universalism" (Brown, "Wounded Attachments" 56).

The universal claims also contradict the colonial and imperial elements that are constitutive of liberalism. Uday Singh Mehta analyzes the extended link between liberalism and the empire by focusing on the role of liberalism in perpetuating and legitimizing imperial power. In particular, Mehta analyzes the responses of British liberal thinkers when faced with the unfamiliarity. In other words, "how a body of ideas that professed a universal reach responded to the encounter with the unfamiliar" (8). As Wendy Brown argues, in liberal discourse, tolerance is employed to manage difference. However, to be considered a subject of tolerance this difference has to be recognized ("The 'Jewish Question'"). In the context of the empire, people in the non-white colonies were considered subjects rather than citizens. They could not be subjects of tolerance because their "exceeding difference" was impossible to be recognized. As Mehta argues, "what is denied is precisely the archaic, the premodern, the religious, the Indian—in a word, the unfamiliar" (20). Thus, by focusing on liberal thought in the context of the empire, Mehta demonstrates that liberalism contributed to reproduce civilizational hierarchies (e.g., superior and inferior, modern and backward, rational and traditional, civilized and primitive) that would justify imperial power. In other words, the urge to dominate and civilize the world is internal to liberalism too.

On the one hand, despite liberalism's principles of universal equality and liberty, civilizational progress promoted by liberalism has meant exclusion and inequality in practice. As Mitchell argues, "modern progress must be understood as a movement towards increasing inequality. Progress involved the steady growth of an elite and its achievements of civilization by long hereditary accumulation" (124). Thus, all individuals are treated as equals by the law regardless of their real differences in power and wealth. The liberal conception of equality is subordinated to the liberal conception of (individual) liberty. On the other hand, universal liberal humanism is actually based on racist logics and civilizational rationalities that denied the universal humanism the liberalism claimed. What better example than the contradiction between the discourse of freedom and the practice of slavery that marked the ascendance of Western nations during this period.<sup>9</sup>

Liberal thought legitimized the empire as being rational, just, and progressive. Thus, Mehta demonstrates that "liberal imperialism is impossible without this epistemological commitment which by the nineteenth century supports both the paternalism and progressivism that is, the main theoretical justifications of the empire" (18). The construction of liberalism as a civilizational enterprise justified morally, politically, and rationally the political exclusion and denial of the universal liberal claims for peoples in non-European and non-white colonies. Colonial exclusions demonstrate that liberal universalism is exclusionary at its core.

Stuart Hall points out that since the end of the nineteenth century liberalism has never been hegemonic. However, from another perspective, it is precisely in the twentieth century when a new liberal narrative became hegemonic. In his "What is Liberalism?", Duncan Bell argues that the idea of liberalism as the constitutive ideology of the West is actually an all-encompassing narrative created in the twentieth century. For Bell, the narrative of liberalism as the most authentic tradition of the West "simultaneously pushed the historical origins of liberalism back in time while vastly expanding its spatial reach" (699). The new historical narrative attempted "to retroject liberalism back into the ancient Greek world, thus making it coterminous with Western civilization" (Bell 702). Thus, the twentieth century is when a new liberal narrative became the bedrock of Western history and Western culture. This was possible with the emergence and proliferation of the idea of "liberal democracy." As Bell argues, conjoining "liberal" to democracy allowed liberalism to become a new liberal-civilizational creed representing not only the most authentic expression of the Western tradition but a constitutive feature of the West itself (704). Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" and the triumph and "universalization of Western liberal democracy as the form of human government" is an example of how ingrained this idea is. In sum, "whereas linking democracy and liberalism had, in the nineteenth century, served to delimit

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<sup>9</sup> The irony is, as political philosopher Susan Buck-Morss argues, that "although abolition of slavery was the only possible logical outcome of the ideal of universal freedom, it did not come about through the revolutionary ideas or even the revolutionary actions of the French; it came about through the actions of the slaves themselves. The epicenter of this struggle was the colony of Saint-Domingue" (833). As Buck-Morss argues, "events in Saint-Domingue were central to contemporary attempts to make sense out of the reality of the French Revolution and its aftermath" (836). In sum, "the Haitian Revolution was the crucible, the trial by fire for the ideals of the French Enlightenment" (837).

its chronological scope, it was now employed to buttress the claim that liberalism was the spiritual inheritance of the West itself" (Bell 702).

The discursive fusion of "liberal democracy" allowed to spread liberalism as the dominant ideology of the West and to construct a potent civilizational narrative (Bell). The identification of "civilization" with the advance of liberty and (Western) culture gave the United States a common development with England and Western Europe. Thus, we could say that "liberal democracy" also contributed to the dominant conception of the twentieth century as the American century: the European American century (Sousa Santos). For Boaventura de Sousa Santos, "Americanization, as a hegemonic form of globalization, is thus the third act of the millennial drama of Western supremacy" (185).<sup>10</sup> The "liberal democracy" ideology contributed to the European American hegemony while helping "to construct a mythopoeic narrative of the West as simultaneously ancient and modern, free and strong" (Bell 705). Thus, conjoining "liberal" to democracy enabled to legitimize the ethico-political superiority of the West. How does the West legitimize itself under illiberal and authoritarian times? Wendy Brown argues that neoliberalism largely eviscerated liberal democratic principles and democratic morality ("Wounded Attachments"). However, as I will argue next, it still borrows from the liberal democratic discourse to legitimize itself.

### **Neoliberalism as a Westernizing/moralizing project**

In *The Road to Serfdom*, F.A. Hayek argues that any collective conception of society that threaten individual freedom is not only the path to totalitarianism but it is also antimoral. As he argues, "freedom to our own conduct in the sphere where material circumstances force a free choice upon us, and responsibility for the arrangement of our own life according to our own conscience, is the air in which alone moral sense grown and in which moral values are daily-created in the free decision of the individual" (216-17). Thus, morals can only exist when the individual is free and can only be exercised by the individual. For Hayek, this individual moral sense is also the bases for civilized life. Therefore, collectivism is not only antimoral because it implies the curtailment of individual liberties, but it is also equivalent to the destruction of the foundations of (individualist) civilization. For Hayek, basic individualism is "one of the salient characteristics of Western civilization as it has grown from the foundations laid by Christianity and the Greeks and Romans" (67-68). However, for Hayek, we are abandoning the individualist tradition that has created Western civilization. Hayek argues that socialism and collectivism are not only a break with the recent past but with the evolution of Western civilization. Therefore, defending the common heritage of European civilization and Western ideals is a matter of moral principles. In this sense, it could be argued that neoliberalism is not only a "Westernizing" project but also a moralizing project.

Under the neoliberal order, liberal democratic principles are redefined by market rationality. Wendy Brown analyzes how liberal democracy has been displaced by neoliberal political rationality. The rhetoric of democracy has become just a way to legitimize antidemocratic imperial and domestic policy. Brown argues that "neoliberalism borrows extensively from the old regime to legitimize itself even as it develops new codes of legitimacy" ("Neoliberalism and the End" 47). I argue that one source of legitimacy is the articulation of civilizational discourses around the defense of moral and "Western" values that are utilized not only to justify racist, discriminatory, and exclusive discourses and actions, but also to legitimize even more authoritarian neoliberalization processes. Thus, the defense of "Western" values not only endorses an authoritarian project, but "Western" values have become redefined by and imbricated with neoliberal values themselves. Thus, the defense of the West functions to legitimize old and new forms of authoritarianism and neoliberalization processes, and, at the same time, it has become a strategy to celebrate essentialized "Western values," such as capitalist social relations, the heteronormative family, and Judeo-Christian morality against "globalists," "cultural elites," "foreign invaders," and "internal enemies."

After the 2008 financial crisis and the Bush administrations, the Obama administration focused on "saving capitalism" while at the same rebuilding the confidence the world had in the United States. Walter Mignolo (2011) call this project *rewesternization* (*The Darker Side*). I would argue that the

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<sup>10</sup> According to Boaventura de Sousa Santos, "The first act, to a large extent a failed act, was the Crusades, which started the second millennium of the Christian era; the second act, beginning halfway through the millennium, was the discoveries and subsequent European expansion. In this millennial conception, the European American century carries little novelty; it is nothing more than one more European century, the last one of the millennium. Europe, after all, has always contained many Europes, some of them dominant, others dominated. The United States of America is the last dominant Europe; like the previous ones, it exerts its uncontested power over the dominated Europes" (185-86).

current rise of authoritarian, illiberal, and reactionary politics in the US, Brazil and elsewhere represent a rewesternizing/neoliberalizing project that represent a fundamental shift in the nature of the incentive structure of the capitalist social order (Feher, *Rated Agency*). This project is based on the deepening of the financialization of national and global economies, the insulation from social and political dissent (Bruff. See also Jessop, Bruff and Tansel, Tansel), and the extension of a neoliberal political rationalities, that is, the submission of every aspect of political and social life to economic calculation, including liberal democracy (Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, "Neoliberalism's Frankenstein," *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*).

As a "rewesternization" project, neoliberalism and finance, domestically and globally, are also necessary to maintain white supremacy. Political scientist Michael C. Dawson argues that what motivated the architects of neoliberalism is not only the fears of worker's rights, but also the rights of non-white peoples (the racialized other) and their demands of social justice and the threat they represent to the neoliberal political order. Therefore, neoliberalism is political and economic project, but it is also *racial* project at its center. As Dawson argues, "financial capitalism and its partner in crime, neoliberal political regimes, were created, in part, to protect white supremacy around the world; to repeat the discipline of the old empires with a new, but similar, world order...In fact, financial capitalism aims at maintaining global white supremacy, in order to keep capitalism safe from the savages."

The rewesternizing/neoliberalizing project also represents a new capitalist social order that shapes all societal dimensions. In "Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy," Wendy Brown clarifies that neoliberalism constitutes a *political rationality* that implies a whole new organization of the social. For Brown, neoliberal rationality extends and disseminates market values to all institutions and social action. In other words, "neoliberalism produces rational actors and imposes a market rationale for decision making in all spheres" (40). Economic and market rationality become the basis of state's legitimacy and interpellate individuals as entrepreneurial actors. As Brown argues, "in making the individual fully responsible for her- or himself, neoliberalism equates moral responsibility with rational action; it erases the discrepancy between economic and moral behavior by configuring morality entirely as a matter of rational deliberation about costs, benefits, and consequences" (42).

The new capitalist social order centered on finance has meant that credit matters more than profit. Belgian philosopher Michel Feher analyzes how to be valorized, financial institutions, the state, and households have to prove their own creditworthiness. The ability to appear creditworthy—and to receive credit—is the new mantra that the architects of the neoliberal order were able to successfully implement. "Therefore, economic institutions, governments, households, and individuals must all relentlessly pursue creditworthiness, if they are to have the resources necessary to survive, let alone succeed" (Dawson).

It is now the responsibility of individuals to make themselves attractive assets. To make themselves valuable has become the material, social, and moral imperative (Feher, "The Political Ascendancy"). What is interesting of Feher's analysis in relation the Right), is that authoritarian nationalist leaders have made "sure that their supporters experience their native status, the color of their skin, the gender norms they uphold, and the cultural traditions to which they lay claim as so many valuable *assets*." For example, as Feher explains in an interview, Trump said to those voters who supported him that they might not have a high educational level or a high salary, but they have the value of patriotism and of being attached to old patriarchy. Waiving the American flag, carrying a gun, and being a straight white man are presented as more valuable, and even solvent financially in the face of the future (Feher, "La extrema derecha otorga 'solvencia'").

Wendy Brown refers to *reactionary foundationalism* as a strategy that has a truncated, instrumental link to a foundational narrative. For Brown this strategy "works in the idiom of moral utilitarianism, presenting itself as the indispensable threads, preserving some indisputable good" ("Postmodern Exposures" 36). In the case of the political and intellectual Right, Western civilization could illustrate a strategy of reactionary foundationalism that is based on the moral (individual) subject: the entrepreneur. Under neoliberalism, individuals are constructed as prudent, responsible, rational, and creditworthy subjects. But there are cultural assets that also make the entrepreneurial individual morally valuable. Thus, the Right appeal to the defense of traditional values as a way to valorize valuable cultural assets of the individual. For instance, in the case of the US, Trump's "nativist supporters are grateful that, under the current regime, being or standing by a flag waving and gun-carrying white male is, once again, a truly valuable asset" (Feher, "The Political Ascendancy"). In the next two sections, I will present some examples of actors in the US and Brazil that are united around civilizational discourses to defend the West. This Western/neoliberal project is presented not only as the celebration of "Western culture" but also as the exaltation of traditional values (and assets) that have been redefined by and imbricated with neoliberal values and rationalities as constitutive of Western moral legacy and as foundations of (individualist) civilization.

### The US-led defense of the West

On July 6, 2017, President Donald Trump delivered a public speech in Warsaw, Poland. During the speech, Trump argued that the future of Western freedom is at stake and urged the audience to defend Western civilization. According to Trump, "today we're in the West, and we have to say there are dire threats to our security and to our way of life." For Trump, without strong families, values, and faith, the West will not survive ("Remarks by President Trump to the People of Poland"). Trump also claimed: "We must work together to confront forces, whether they come from inside or out, from the South or the East, that threaten over time to undermine these values and to erase the bonds of culture, faith and tradition that make us who we are" ("Remarks by President Trump to the People of Poland"). Political scientist and journalist Peter Beinart analyzed Trump's speech at Warsaw in 2017. For Beinart, "the West" is not a geographical term. It is not an ideological or economic term either. Instead, the West is a racial and religious term. Thus, "to be considered Western, a country must be largely Christian (preferably Protestant or Catholic) and largely white" (Beinart). Trump's civilizational rhetoric and quest to lead the defense of the West also reflects a vision of America (or rather, North America) as the summit of Western civilization and as the leader of the Judeo-Christian West. Trump's speech in Warsaw inevitably evoked Samuel P. Huntington's "clash of civilizations" ("The Clash of Civilizations," *The Clash of Civilizations*). For Huntington, "the survival of the West depends on Americans reaffirming their Western identity and Westerners accepting their civilization as unique not universal and uniting to renew and preserve it against challenges from non-Western societies" (*The Clash of Civilizations* 20-21). Under this view, the "survival" of the West is at stake, so the West must protect itself from outsiders. Trump claimed in his speech that "the fundamental question of our time is whether the West has the will to survive. Do we have the confidence in our values to defend them at any cost? Do we have enough respect for our citizens to protect our borders? Do we have the desire and the courage to preserve our civilization in the face of those who would subvert and destroy it?" ("Remarks by President Trump to the People of Poland").

When Trump warned Poles about forces "from the south or the east, that threaten... to erase the bonds of culture, faith, and tradition," he was talking not about Christianity but about Christendom: a particular religious civilization under siege by non-white, non-Christian "invaders."<sup>11</sup> This religious civilization is built upon so called Judeo-Christian values which constitute the underpinnings of Western civilization.<sup>12</sup> The Christian right has embraced a renewed notion of "Judeo-Christian" principles as the

<sup>11</sup> Dussel locates the origins of Christendom in the beginning of the fourth century in the Roman Empire. This is when Christianity fetishistically replaced the philosophical and religious foundations of the Hellenistic-Roman empire. Christianity became the new hegemonic *culture*. In other words, it became *Christendom*. With the *invasion* of America, Europe not only became the seat of culture but also of Christendom. For Dussel, European Christianity (central and Eurocentric Christianity) constituted *imperial Christendom*. If the soldiers who crucified the Crucified were from an oppressive empire that killed the Just One, the were now Spanish soldiers of Christendom in the *colonies* a now the metropolitan, central, oppressive soldiers (as analogically Israel was in the Roman Empire), and they killed the indigenous peoples in the name of a metropolitan, distant, Roman Christianity (Dussel, *Filosofías del sur* 324, 328).

<sup>12</sup> In the 1969 essay "The Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition," theologian Arthur A. Cohen argued that it is historically inaccurate to think of Judaism and Christianity as a shared tradition and that the notion of Judeo-Christian is actually quintessentially an American construct. In this venue, scholar Gene Zubovich argues that the concept of Judeo-Christianity has taken on several meanings (on the history of Judeo-Christian America, see Gaston, "Interpreting Judeo-Christianity," *Imagining Judeo-Christian America*; and Haynes). It was first promoted in the late 1930s, when President Franklin Roosevelt popularized it in response to the efforts of liberal Christians and Jews who began to characterize the Western religious tradition as "Judeo-Christian" to combat the rising tide of anti-Semitism. As scholar Shalom Goldman argues, "with the swing to the Right of the 1950s, American conservatives began to deploy 'Judeo-Christian' in the fight against 'Godless Communism.'" Thus, during the Cold War, the idea "Judeo-Christian tradition" was used as a proxy for "Western values" in opposition to atheist Communism. The cultural significance of the phrase continued to grow. According to historian Andrew Preston, Ronald "Reagan reconfigured the Judeo-Christian civil religion from what it had been since the 1930sa way to foster inclusiveness—into a rhetorical device to attack liberalism and secularism" (582). In 1983 annual convention of the National Parent-Teacher Association, Reagan stated: "I know this may be laughed and sneered at in some sophisticated circles, but ours is a Judeo-Christian heritage, and ours is a loving and living God, the fountain of all truth and knowledge" (qtd. in Preston 582). Thus, as scholar Mark Silk argues, the religious right "appropriated the term in the 1980s as a label for the values they were pushing in the new American culture war." During the 1990s, the term was commonly used in the so-called culture wars over abortion and same-sex marriage and remains popular among evangelical conservatives today (Holzel). "In the post-9/11 world of the Bush presidency," as Goldman argues, "American Islamophobia flourished and 'Judeo-Christian' has become a term of exclusion, rather than inclusion."

fundamental values that form the basis of "Western" culture.<sup>13</sup> In September 2017, Trump gave a speech in the Values Voter Summit (VVS)<sup>14</sup> in which he stated: "We are stopping cold the attacks on Judeo-Christian values...We're saying 'merry Christmas' again" ("VVS2017, Video Archive").<sup>15</sup> From this conception, defending "Judeo-Christian values" (or purported "Western" values) is about protecting Christmas, and about protecting Christians—at the exclusion of others (Warren).<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the "survival" of the West and Judeo-Christian civilization is endangered by non-white, non-Christian "invaders" as well as by other internal enemies who threaten the core values of Western nations (e.g. racial and sexual minorities, feminists, and leftists). I argue that the current notion of the "Judeo-Christian/traditional values" include neoliberal values (e.g., individual responsibility, free market, and limited government) and have been redefined by neoliberal logics and rationalities.

In the US, we can find many examples of right-wing actors who are proud of Western culture and of being "Western chauvinists."<sup>17</sup> Right-wing movements and actors in the US who defend Western values are usually associated with the celebration of the European legacy and white identity, even when they claim that "race isn't a factor" (Bazile). For instance, "Identity Evropa members insist they're not racist, but 'identitarians' who are interested in preserving Western culture" (Southern Poverty Law Center, "Identity Evropa/American Identity Movement"). However, why do minorities and people of non-white European origin also identify with ideas and figures associated with white supremacy? To answer this question, we have to look at the values that are promoted. For example, Prager-U, a right-wing website, will present *Americanos*, "featuring the stories of Latinos across the country who embody the American dream." According to the website, the common thread of the stories will be "a love for America and the shared values of faith, family, personal responsibility, and a strong work ethic." In the same vein, Latinos for Trump are calling Latinos to "Gear up to defend the American Dream with the Latinos For Trump Flag" ("Latinos Are You Ready").

Latinos for Trump is a "Pro-God, Pro-Life, Pro-Family, Pro-Economy" organization. The organization supports Trump's welcoming of Christianity in the White House and they consider that Trump shares their values in strong families and faith. For them, "a traditional family is biblical-based and we respect and obey that order from God." Latinos for Trump also support Trump's agenda and stance on immigration because "these reforms will advance the safety and prosperity of all Americans while helping new citizens assimilate and flourish" (Latinos for Trump). Marco Gutierrez, right-wing political activist, co-founded Latinos for Trump to promote Trump's candidacy in 2016. In an interview on MSNBC in September 2016, Gutierrez said: "My culture is a very dominant culture, and it's imposing and it's causing problems. If you don't do something about it, you're going to have taco trucks on every corner"

<sup>13</sup> The recent renewal of the doctrine of the return to the "Judeo-Christian" foundations is associated with the Christian right and its rejection to liberalism, secularism, and Muslims. As Goldman argues, "today, it's commonplace for the Christian Right to invoke the idea of 'Judeo-Christian values,' and for America to once again become 'one nation under God.'" These groups, and numerous others, have moved from describing the values they fight for as "Christian" to "Judeo-Christian." For example, as he points out, although religious conservatives have been issuing online voting guides for "concerned Christians" for a while now, but since the 2011 general election there has been something new: a national "*Judeo-Christian Voter Guide*."

<sup>14</sup> The Values Voter Summit is an annual political conference bringing together some of the most extreme groups on the right, including multiple designated hate groups (SPLC, "Values Voter Summit: Whose Values?"). This event is hosted by the Family Research Council (FRC). For its vilification of LGBTQ communities, it has been named as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center ("Frequently Asked Questions about Hate Groups"). On the FRC, see also SPLC, "Family Research Council." According to the VVS's website, the "Values Voter Summit was created in 2006 to provide a forum to help inform and mobilize citizens across America to preserve the bedrock values of traditional marriage, religious liberty, sanctity of life and limited government that make our nation strong."

<sup>15</sup> See also "Remarks by President Trump at the 2017 Values Voter Summit."

<sup>16</sup> For the Christian right, the Godless and multicultural left wants to make Christmas a private, not a national, holiday. From this perspective, what is behind this is the attempt to remove Judeo-Christian values and God from American public life which it is framed as an attack to religious freedom. During the National Day of Prayer Event on May 4, 2017, Donald Trump signed the "Executive Order Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty" to end the attacks on religious liberty and to protect the "fundamental right to religious liberty as Americans' first freedom." In the speech announcing the Executive order, he state: "Under my administration, free speech does not end at the steps of a cathedral or a synagogue, or any other house of worship. We are giving our churches their voices back. We are giving them back in the highest form. With this executive order, we also make clear that the federal government will never, ever penalize any person for their protected religious beliefs" ("Remarks by President Trump at the National Day of Prayer Event").

<sup>17</sup> The US group Proud Boys define themselves as "Western chauvinists who refuse to apologize for creating the modern world" (Bazile). For conservative commentator and author, Ben Shapiro, Judeo-Christian values is what "made the West great." See Shapiro's video "Why Has the West Been So Successful?" See also Shapiro's *The Right Side of History: How Reason and Moral Purpose Made the West Great*.

("Donald Trump Supporter Warns of 'Taco Trucks on Every Corner'"). This inflammatory rhetoric is usually associated with the rise of white nativism in response to Hispanic immigration.<sup>18</sup> For example, the anti-immigrant manifesto of the shooter of El Paso, Texas in 2019, is based on the idea of the "Hispanic invasion of Texas." In the shooter's words, "I am simply defending my country from cultural and ethnic replacement brought on by an invasion" (Crusius). It is not surprising that Marco Gutierrez is defending American culture and values. However, what is surprising is that Gutierrez, who was born in Mexico, is using the same white supremacist rhetoric to represent its own culture as a civilizational threat.<sup>19</sup>

Latinos for Trump is not the only organization conformed by minority groups that share Trump's tough stance on immigration. Although the organization American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS) does not support Trump openly, it shares his anti-immigrant positions. When referring to the reparations black Americans should receive, they specify that these are "solely to those people who have lineage that ties them both to slavery in the United States, and the subsequent era of Jim Crow." Thus, "reparations for American chattel slavery would exclude black immigrant populations that voluntarily migrated to America, which—since 1980—have undergone an unprecedentedly sharp expansion" (American Descendants of Slavery). In sum, according to ADOS, foreign-born blacks and their offspring, especially those from the Caribbean, are not eligible for reparations.<sup>20</sup>

Turning Point USA (TPUSA) is a nationwide conservative student organization founded in 2012 by Charlie Kirk.<sup>21</sup> The organization's mission is to identify, educate, train, and organize students on high school and college campuses to promote the principles of freedom, free markets, and limited government. Ben Okereke is the President of TPUSA Georgia State. He was one of the black conservatives who spoke during the Young Black Leadership Summit at the White House in Washington on October 4, 2019. President Trump introduced him as a Cameroonian-American who migrated *legally* to the US when he was 14 years old. Then he called him to the podium where Okereke thanked Trump for everything he "has done for the African American community so far." Then, Okereke said "we want you to build a wall, sir. Frankly, because we don't oppose immigration, but we oppose... illegal immigration" ("Remarks by President Trump at Young Black Leadership Summit 2019"). Just as it would be a mistake to presume that the Latino or Hispanic population<sup>22</sup> universally condemn Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric, not all black conservatives vote Republican (Philpot)<sup>23</sup> or identify with Trump or with the black leaders represented at the Young Black Leadership Summit. However, it is important to analyze

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<sup>18</sup> This rhetoric is common in white nationalist, neo-Confederate and neo-Nazi hate groups. For example, The American Freedom Party advocates for the deportation of non-white people and the creation of a white ethno-state (Southern Poverty Law Center, "American/Freedom Party").

<sup>19</sup> Just before the interview, Gutierrez posted a video on YouTube telling other Trump supporters that "Hispanics are taking over" and called on the fellow supporters to "defend your country." "I'm going to speak as if I was still Mexican," said Gutierrez, who was born in Mexico. "If you guys as Americans don't do something about this, us Hispanics, we're taking over. I have six kids, guys. Let's be honest. Let's be frank here. In the next three generations, if my kids have six kids, you are talking about 280 million people with the illegal immigrants and all the people who are here, Hispanic based" ("Marco Gutierrez = pre- taco trucks on every corner." See also Latimer and Gamboa).

<sup>20</sup> Co-founder of ADOS, Yvette Carnell, was a member of the board of the anti-immigrant organization Progressives for Immigration Reform (PFIR). According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), this group has links to John Tanton, the racist founder of the modern anti-immigration movement for whom to maintain American culture "a European-American majority" is required (Zaitchik; Beirich). In a newsletter released in September 2019, the PFIR states that ADOS is a "movement that understands the impact unbridled immigration has had on our country's most vulnerable workers" (Lynn). On ADOS, see Stockman.

<sup>21</sup> Charlie Kirk is the Founder and President of Turning Point USA. According to his website, "He is empowering and activating a new wave of free thinkers who are breaking the mold, standing firm, and redefining the future of American conservatism". On campuses and young conservatism, see Binder and Wood.

<sup>22</sup> The state with the largest percentage of Hispanics and Latinos is New Mexico. On September 16, 2019, Trump held a rally in Rio Rancho, New Mexico. According to a New York Times article, "While the campaign has officially labeled its outreach effort 'Latinos for Trump,' all of those interviewed eschewed the label and instead identified as Hispanic, which emphasizes ties to Spain and the Spanish language instead of Latin America and is a term that is often more readily embraced among conservatives." Ironically, "When asked about the mass shooting last month in El Paso, when a white nationalist killed 22 people in the most deadly attack targeting Latinos in modern American history, most simply shrugged. Several said they had never heard of the shooter's manifesto, which said the attack was 'a response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas'" (Medina).

<sup>23</sup> On studies about black Republicans, see Wright and Fields.

what kind of identification some young black conservatives feel with President Trump, someone whose campaign and presidency have also energized the white supremacist movement.<sup>24</sup>

For some young black conservatives, Trump shares their conservative values like guns rights. Born in 1986, rapper Maj Toure founded Black Guns Matter in 2015, a pro-gun organization that aims to educate urban populations about their Second Amendment rights. For Toure, violence can be stopped by arming urban communities. On February 28, 2019, he was interviewed by Willes Lee, a member of the National Rifle Association of America (NRA) Board of Directors, at CPAC. For Toure, the problem in urban black communities is the "slave mentality."<sup>25</sup> He wants to overcome that by empowering people and teaching them that "we have to be responsible for our own liberties, defense, and our own freedoms" ("Toure and the 2A: An Interview with Maj Toure"). According to Toure, "advocating for guns is advocating for freedom" ("Black Guns Matter Maj Toure Discusses His Efforts to Promote Legal Firearm Ownership"). For him, gun control is not only "hamstringing good citizens to being able to defend themselves," it is also racist (Casiano).<sup>26</sup> Born in 1990, Antonia Okafor is a gun rights activist whose parents migrated to the US from Nigeria. She is founder and CEO of EmPOWERed "a movement of women on college campuses all over the country who feel empowered when they use their gun for self-defense. EmPOWERed's slogan is "gun rights are women rights." When explaining why she decided to advocate for gun rights, she says: "I decided that the very definition of empowerment required me to take responsibility for my own life. I wasn't going to be anyone's victim. Which meant I had to protect myself. So, I bought a gun. I started to advocate for gun rights..." For this reason, she says: "I voted Republican, the party that views me as an empowered individual, able to shape my own destiny, not as a member of a victim group" ("Black, Millennial, Female").

The rejection of a "victimization mentality" is very powerful not only among second amendment rights activists but also among prominent young black conservatives. Born in 1989, black conservative activist Candace Owens<sup>27</sup> is known for criticizing the Black Lives Matter movement for playing the "oppression card."<sup>28</sup> "Victimhood," for Owens, "has become a cancer to our society" (see video in Shannon). When referring to her own experience, she says: "I could have played the black card and absolve myself of all responsibility for my own stupid decisions." She refused to play the "black card." For her, the problem is that "... if you are born black and you don't accept your natural status as a victim, then the validity of your blackness is immediately called into question." For her, being "American" is the only card she has ever been interested in playing ("Playing the Black Card"). In October 2018, Owens launched the Blexit<sup>29</sup> movement, a campaign to encourage African Americans to abandon the Democratic Party which she refers to as a "plantation" in which African Americans have been "mentally enslaved" ("Candace Owens Is the New Face").<sup>30</sup> Blexit, in contrast, promotes the values of family, culture,

<sup>24</sup> See Southern Poverty Law Center ("Hate Groups Reach Record High"). On Trump's racist, xenophobic, and hate speech, see Graham et al. White nationalist Brenton Tarrant, accused of killing 50 people at two mosques in New Zealand, wrote and posted a manifesto on social media shortly before beginning the mass shooting. For him, Trump represents a "symbol of renewed white identity" (Tarrant). After the New Zealand attacks, however, Trump denied white nationalism as a rising threat (Levin). The White House also dismissed the mention of Trump (Reuters in Washington).

<sup>25</sup> In a Fox Nation episode of *The Liberty File*, hosted by Judge Andrew Napolitano, Maj Toure argued that "free men women own guns—slaves do not, and if your government is doing more and more things to make it harder for you as New Yorkers to defend yourself from bad guys, they are saying we want you to be a slave state" ("Black Guns Matter Founder Maj Toure").

<sup>26</sup> In the Black Guns Matter website, there are pictures of Maj Toure modeling clothing with slogans such as "All gun control is racist," "Black guns matter," "Make the hood great again," "Make racists afraid again," and "Freedom over everything."

<sup>27</sup> Infowars and Fox News contributor and host of the weekly Candace Owens Show at the right-wing website PragerU.

<sup>28</sup> On April 20, 2018, Turning Point USA held a discussion at the University of California, Los Angeles featuring Candace Owens. When Black Lives Matter activists interrupted the discussion. Owens said to them: "I can guarantee what you're seeing happening is victim mentality versus victor mentality... Victim mentality is not cool. I don't know why people like being oppressed. It's the weirdest thing I ever heard: 'I love oppression. We're oppressed'... You're overly privileged Americans" (Harriot). On April 20, 2018, Owen posted a video of the incident on Tweeter that was retweeted more than 16,000 times. On the post, Owens referred to the protesters as "a bunch of whiny toddlers, pretending to be oppressed for attention."

<sup>29</sup> The term Blexit—a portmanteau of "black" and "exit"—mimics Brexit, the word used to describe the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union. On the "major black exit" from the democratic party, see video of Owens in Fox News Insider ("Candace Owens: There Will Be"). See also the interview published in *The Washington Post* ("Candace Owens Is the New Face").

<sup>30</sup> Owens develops these ideas in her 2020 book *Blackout: How Black America Can Make its Second Escape from the Democrat Plantation*. According to the book's overview, "Owens addresses the many ways that liberal policies

belief, freedom, progress, and strength (Blexit). Owens also denies the existence of systemic racism,<sup>31</sup> white privilege, and white supremacy (Cummings).<sup>32</sup> Ironically, Owens was named in a manifesto by the white nationalist who killed 50 people at two mosques in New Zealand in March 2019. The shooter credits Owens with helping him to "push me further and further into the belief of violence over meekness" (Tarrant).<sup>33</sup>

Candace Owens was Communications Director of TPUSA from late 2017 until May 2019. Both Owens and Charlie Kirk, Executive Director of TPUSA, are known for being Trump supporters. Born in 1990, Kirk recently published *The MAGA Doctrine: The Only Ideas That Will Win the Future*. The book's overview describes it as "a powerful reminder of the true narrative of freedom and greatness that swept Donald Trump to the presidency" ("The MAGA Doctrine: The Only Ideas That Will Win the Future by Charlie Kirk"). Kirk features the "Cultural War" tour at college campuses in which he invites conservative figures such as Donald Trump Jr. In a video promoting the tour in 2019, Kirk stated, "you are on the precipice of the most important cultural war in our country's history and for the first time in our country's history we have more threats within our country than outside our country ("Join the Fight to Win America's Culture War!"). In addition, for Kirk, nationalism—placed in the broader context of loyalty to Western Civilization—is the only response to the menace of globalists. Candace Owens is also known for being an outspoken Trump's admirer (Rossman).<sup>34</sup> In a tweet posted on April 16, 2018, Owens claimed that Trump "isn't just the leader of the free world, but the savior of it as well. May God bless America—the last stand for western civilization." I argue that the kind of identification that the leaders and members of some organizations that are also composed by minority groups is based on ideas of heritage and identity based not on European descent but on Western values that have also been redefined by neoliberalism. The identification with these values could in part explain why a segment of minorities groups in the US identify with Trump despite their long history of oppression and discrimination. In sum, I argue that "Westernness" goes beyond white identity. It is about embracing and enacting Western/Judeo Christian (and neoliberal) values: individual freedom, strong families, private property, and God.

### **Brazil and the defense of "Western" values**

Historically, the ideology of whiteness has informed state modernization (westernization) projects in Latin America. A servile admiration of Europe and then the US has characterized Latin American governing elites since colonial times. In Brazil, the whitening nation-building project has been also an

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and ideals are actually harmful to African Americans and hinder their ability to rise above poverty, live independent and successful lives, and be an active part of the American Dream." In sum, *Blackout* lays bare the myth that all black people should vote Democrat—and shows why turning to the right will leave them happier, more successful, and more self-sufficient" ("Blackout: How Black America Can Make").

<sup>31</sup> In "Candace Owens: Black men getting shot by police isn't about racism" published by Stanford Advocate in July 2016, Owens said police shootings of black men in the US are not about racism but about ignorance. Regarding the inexistence of racism, Owens argued in an interview that "there's nothing that I cannot do as a black woman sitting in this chair or in this society, in this country that you can do as a white man. It's all about our choices." See video of interview to Candace Owens in the American Thought Leaders show ("Candace Owens: The Victim Mentality").

<sup>32</sup> In 2017, Owens posted a video titled "I Don't Care About Charlottesville, the KKK, or White Supremacy" which has more than 600 thousand views. In April 2019, Candace Owens gave a testimony before the House Committee on the Judiciary at the hearing titled "Hate Crimes and the Rise of White Nationalism." For her, the hearing was not about white nationalism, racism, or hate crimes, it was "about fear-mongering, power, and control." For Owens, the hearing should have focused on real issues and real concerns in Black America. In September 2019, at the congressional hearing "Confronting Violent White Supremacy" before the House Oversight Committee, Candace claimed that "white supremacy and white nationalism would not crack the list of the top 100 issues facing African American communities today." She argued that the real issues are hostility towards masculinity, black-on-black crime, abortion rates, and illegal immigration. Regarding masculinity, she claimed that "right now, we have a social environment that is hostile toward men and does not inspire masculinity or being a man and what it means to be a father figure in a household." Owens told lawmakers that instead of focusing on white supremacy they should instead focus on "God and religion and shrinking government" ("House Oversight Joint Subcommittee Hearing on Confronting White Supremacy." See also Touchberry; Behrmann).

<sup>33</sup> The 74-page manifesto is titled "The Great Replacement," a reference to the "Great Replacement" and "white genocide" conspiracy theories.

<sup>34</sup> Owens has met with President Trump in the Oval Office. On June 4, 2018, Candace Owens posted on Twitter a picture of her next to Donald Trump, saying: "This is the greatest President of our lifetime." During the Black Leadership Summit in October 2019, Trump invited Owens to the podium, and Owens claimed: "We need to make sure we fight for this man—the one man who is standing up for Black America" ("Remarks by President Trump at Young Black Leadership Summit 2019"). In May 2018, Donald Trump tweeted that Owens is "part of a group of very smart 'thinkers.'"

aspiration of modernity and progress. Despite the elite and official discourse based on the glorification of hybridity and the celebration of racial harmony, whiteness ideology has persisted and is reproduced in everyday existence (Pinho). As in the US, we can find examples of actors in Brazil who also identify with ideas, values, and figures who defend traditional values that are based on hierarchical, racist, and patriarchal structures. These (Western) values not only show the persistence of white supremacy and authoritarian cultural traditions but also the imbrication of neoliberal rationalities.

Right-wing actors in Brazil have articulated alliances with other movements and organizations that defend principles of social organization based on ultra-nationalism and the defense of "Western" culture. For example, in 2017, Steve Bannon, former White House Chief Strategist, founded The Movement, an international organization to support right-wing populism in order to reject the influence of globalism and defend the "Judeo-Christian values" of Western civilization. The organization is even planning to start the "Academy for the Judeo-Christian West" in an Italian monastery in order to transform it into a "gladiator school for culture warriors" (Harlan). Although The Movement mainly promotes this agenda in Western Europe, in February 2019, it was announced that Eduardo Bolsonaro—Federal deputy for the state of São Paulo<sup>35</sup> and the son of President Jair Bolsonaro—will be its representative in South America. For Eduardo Bolsonaro, the alliance between the Brazilian government and The Movement, "will restore dignity, freedom and economic opportunity to our great nation and her neighbors. We will walk through our program of uniting the forces of nationalism" (The Movement).

As the Brazilian case illustrates, reclaiming a Western identity and a belonging to the Judeo-Christian West goes beyond the United States or Western Europe. In his "Trump E O Ocidente" (Trump and the West), published in the Brazilian Journal of Foreign Policy in 2017,<sup>36</sup> current Foreign Minister of Brazil, Ernesto Araújo, analyzes Trump's speech at Warsaw to make the argument that Brazil's essence is Western. For him, Brazil "has deep, sacred roots linked to the deepest mysteries of the Western soul as manifested in the Portuguese nation" ("Trump and the West"). For Araújo, the nation came to embody the vitality of the Western spirit and Brazil is an example of Western nationalism. Under this logic, nationalism has to be understood in the context of the legacy of and loyalty to Western Civilization. For Araújo, the human soul is nationalistic, and the history of the West has only meaning and only embodies a destiny in the context of national feeling. Thus, "Brazil would not have to feel uncomfortable if it were to try to reclaim the soul of the West based on national sentiment." Brazil as part of the "spiritual West" was also developed by Araújo in the American Thought Leaders show.<sup>37</sup> Araújo argued in the show that "the main pillar of our culture and society is the Western tradition." For him, Brazil is a country that needs to assert itself in the world for freedom, for democracy, and for Western values. When referring to why Brazil should be a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), he argued, "NATO maybe, or not NATO, but the Western alliance needs a north-south axis because they have a west-east axis—United States, Europe. But why not with Brazil in the south" ("Exclusive: On Brazil Joining NATO"). In his article "Trump and the West," Araújo also argues that Donald Trump represents a vision of the West based on the recuperation of a symbolic past, and the history and culture of Western nations. Araújo sees Trump as the savior of the West:<sup>38</sup> "Donald Trump is Western Civilization's Hail Mary pass."<sup>39</sup> The admiration for Trump in Brazil is not limited to political figures. For example, Brazilian black hip-hop musicians who define themselves as conservatives are proud of wearing the Trumpian mantra on

<sup>35</sup> Receiving almost 2 million votes, Eduardo Bolsonaro is the congressman who received the most votes in the history of Brazil (Skodowski).

<sup>36</sup> This article was later translated to English and published by the Center for Security Policy (Araújo, "Trump and the West"). According to the Center, "Brazil is emerging as a strong ally of national sovereignty and Western civilization." In addition, "Brazil's new foreign minister gives profound philosophical base to Trumpian populism" (Waller). The Center for Security Policy is an organization led by Frank Gaffney, a former Reagan Pentagon official and aide to Senator Scoop Jackson. Its mission is "to secure freedom for American citizens of today and tomorrow."

<sup>37</sup> American Thought Leaders is a program of the right-wing news website The Epoch Times. On the occasion of Jair Bolsonaro's visit to the White House on March 19, 2019, Ernesto Araújo was interviewed by host Jan Jekielek. The 40-minute interview was titled "On Brazil Joining NATO and Defending the Soul of the West" (Araújo, "Exclusive: On Brazil Joining NATO").

<sup>38</sup> For Araújo, Donald Trump represents a cry of nationalism and faith to defend the Western soul. Spiritual defense is necessary to avoid the disappearance of Western identity. For Araújo, Trump knows what is at stake: the spiritual survival of the West. Thus, only Trump can still save the West and restore its soul. In his words, "Trump does not want to westernize other civilizations; all he wants is for Western civilization to be left in peace to restore and rediscover its vitality" ("Trump and the West").

<sup>39</sup> Even though he is Brazilian, and soccer is the most popular sport in Brazil, Araújo chose an American football metaphor to show his admiration for Trump.

their MAGA cap. For rapper Ricardo Alves "being progressive is mainstream... We're anti-establishment" (Phillips).

The reference to American culture is not restricted to football. In October 2019, the first Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) took place, in the city of São Paulo, Brazil.<sup>40</sup> Eduardo Bolsonaro, Federal deputy for the state of São Paulo and the son of President Jair Bolsonaro, repeated a gesture that the US president made in his speech at the 2019 CPAC. In the Brazilian CPAC, Eduardo Bolsonaro hugged the Brazilian flag and asked: "Guess who I'm honoring?" (L. Guimarães). Eduardo Bolsonaro was also invited as a speaker to CPAC 2020 which had the theme "America vs Socialism" (Mencimer). Matt Schlapp, Chairman of the American Conservative Union, tweeted the Brazil and the US can work together to stop socialism (see fig. 2).<sup>41</sup> President Jair Bolsonaro has also expressed his admiration for Trump as is exemplified in his speech at the White House on March 19, 2019. Regarding the defense of "Western" values, Bolsonaro said: "May I say that Brazil and the United States stand side-by-side in their efforts to ensure liberties and respect the traditional family lifestyles and respect to God, our creator, against the gender ideology and the politically correct attitudes and against fake news" ("Remarks by President Trump and President Bolsonaro").

Just as his son, Jair Bolsonaro is also admired by American right-wing figures. David Duke, American



Fig. 2: Tweet of Matt Schlapp from *Twitter*, 20 Jan. 2019.

neo-nazi and former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) endorsed Bolsonaro in 2018. Duke supports the preservation of what he considers to be Western culture and traditionalist Christian family values (Neiwert). Duke, who also endorsed Donald Trump during the 2016 election in the United States and has congratulated him for not condemning the KKK and white supremacist violence, mentioned Bolsonaro during one of his radio programs in October, 2018: "He sounds like us... he looks like any white guy in America—for that matter Portugal or Spain or Germany or France or the UK."<sup>42</sup> During the program, Duke declared that "nationalist movements which are basically pro-European are definitely sweeping the world," and he called Bolsonaro's rise part of that trend (Darlington). On Twitter, Bolsonaro refused Duke's endorsement by evoking the myth of racial democracy:<sup>43</sup> "I refuse any kind of support

<sup>40</sup> It was attended by leading US conservatives like the Matt Schlapp, chairman of American Conservative Union (ACU) and his wife Mercedes Schlapp, Utah senator Mike Lee, Fox News commentator Walid Phares.

<sup>41</sup> On the occasion of Jair Bolsonaro's visit to the White House on March 19, 2019, Eduardo Bolsonaro was interviewed by Jan Jekielek and Stephen Gregory from the right-wing news website The Epoch Times. The 69-minute interview was titled "Purging Brazil of Socialism, an Ongoing Battle" (Bolsonaro, "Exclusive: Purging Brazil of Socialism").

<sup>42</sup> Duke also said, Bolsonaro is "talking about the demographic disaster that's in Brazil and the massive crime that exists in that. For example, the black boroughs and so forth of Rio de Janeiro" (Darlington).

<sup>43</sup> The myth of racial democracy has been described as an ideology of nondiscrimination and the prejudice of not having prejudice. This denial of racial discrimination is generally understood as the defining element of the myth (Bailey, *Legacies of Race*; "Democracy, Racial"). See also Winant; A. Guimarães Alberto). As sociologists David FitzGerald and David Cook-Martin argue, "Just as political liberalism historically proclaimed equality for all, but understood 'all' to be white propertied males, racial democracy espoused harmonious relations among all Brazilians while in practice protecting the privilege of the light-skinned" (260). According to sociologist Stanley R. Bailey, the

coming from supremacist groups. I suggest that, for consistency, they support my adversary the candidate of the left party, who loves to segregate the society! This is an offense with Brazilian, the most beautiful and mixed-race people in the world."

On November 21, 2019, Jair Bolsonaro launched the new political party *Aliança pelo Brasil* (Alliance for Brazil) in Brasilia. The party was launched with strong appeal to religious discourse, the defense of carrying of arms<sup>44</sup> and free market, and the repudiation of socialism and "gender ideology." In its website, it says that the party will be a trench in the defense of Judeo-Christian values, national sovereignty, democracy and entrepreneurship as the driving force of our economy. In its statute, it is stated that the party will look to safeguard the gradual and natural evolution of society for the permanent protection of life since conception, family, individual freedoms, self-defense, private property, free enterprise, and the cultural and religious values of Brazilians ("Estatuto"). The party was presented as a conservative party committed to freedom and public, social, moral, and legal order as well to the historical, moral and cultural traditions of the Brazilian nation. The party pledges to fight for the restoration of Brazil's traditional values and culture. This involves the recognition of all that we have inherited from other nations, such as Lusitanian and Hispanic traditions, Roman Law, Greek philosophy, and Judeo-Christian morality ("Programa da Aliança Pelo Brasil"). Thus, the party's education proposals will aim to propagate and disseminate the Brazilian and Western cultural heritage. The political plan that will guide the Alliance's action also defends God's place in the history and soul of the Brazilian people who are a religious people educated on the basis of Christianity. The party will then commit to freedom of religious expression especially in the public sphere. Additionally, in order to guarantee moral order, the party will commit to preserve Christian values, memory, and Brazilian culture. The document states that the relationship between this nation and Christ is intrinsic, fundamental, and inseparable. For this reason, the party takes as its founding values the Gospel and Western Civilization. The latter is the heiress of the virtuous encounter between the cities of Jerusalem, Athens and Rome. The party is aware that for the Brazilian people, God is the guarantor of true human development since the dignity of the human person stems from the fact that all fellow Brazilian citizens are children of God, endowed by Him of inalienable rights ("Programa da Aliança Pelo Brasil").

The defense of Judeo-Christian values and Western culture also permeate other political and cultural levels. Brazilian organizations such as *Direita São Paulo* (Right-Wing São Paulo), *Voltemos à Direita* (Let's Turn to the Right), and *Movimento Brasil Livre* (MBL, Free Brazil Movement) promote economic freedom, free-market values, and conservative ideas. The MBL was founded in 2014 after the 2013 protests in Brazil.<sup>45</sup> In 2019, its leaders published a book about the origin of the organization. They describe this process as the creation of a political movement to articulate the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff with the help of social networks and political forces.<sup>46</sup> Some MBL's leaders have become active politicians and have gained political power. In 2016, twenty-four-year-old Fernando Holiday, the National Coordinator of the MBL, ran for and won a seat as city councilor of the city of São Paulo. Black and gay, he insists that the government should not implement affirmative action programs because, as he sees it, they encourage—rather than combat—separation, segregation, hatred, and prejudice (Gragnani). Twenty-four-year-old Kim Patroca Kataguirí, activist of Japanese descent, is one of the founders of the MBL.<sup>47</sup> In the 2018 general election, Kataguirí was elected to the federal Chamber of Deputies for the state of São Paulo. For Kataguirí, the MBL promotes not only privatizations and reduction of the state but also Western civilization values such as Greek philosophy, Roman law, and Judeo-Christian religion (Balloussier).

Organizations such as the *Associação Nacional dos Conservadores* (National Association of Conservatives) and the *Movimento Conservador* (Conservative Movement) also defend the existence of

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United States was the central counterpoint for the myth's development. As Bailey argues, "This myth was a source of national pride during much of the 20th century, as Brazilians compared their reality to that of a segregated and racially violent United States" ("Group Dominance" 729).

<sup>44</sup> In this regard, the party commits itself to fighting tirelessly until all Brazilians can have fully guaranteed their inalienable right to possess and bear arms, for their defense and their own, as well as for their property and freedom ("Programa da Aliança Pelo Brasil"). Bolsonaro announced the party's number as 38, equal to revolver caliber. During the launching event, Bolsonaro's supporters posed with the symbol of the party made of bullet shells (Arbex et al.).

<sup>45</sup> These refer to the massive and unprecedented wave of street protests that would prove to be a major turning point in Brazilian history. The decision that triggered the protests of 2013 was the increase in bus fares in Brazilian cities but grew to include other issues such as the high corruption in the government (Winter).

<sup>46</sup> The book is titled *Como um grupo de desajustados derrubou a presidente - MBL: A origem*. (How a group of misfits toppled the president - MBL: The origin) (Kataguirí and Santos).

<sup>47</sup> Receiving 465,310 votes, being the fourth most voted amongst all candidates (Skodowski).

a perennial and superior moral order of Christian character. They also defend the values of patriotism, traditional family, private property, and Judeo-Christian morality, as well as the importance of teaching the legacy of Western Civilization. The identification with Western identity and the defense of Judeo-Christian culture could in part explain why different actors in Brazil support and share the "tradition," "faith," "culture," and "identity" of the West.

### Conclusion

Reactionary and authoritarian movements are on the rise globally. This is part of a larger right-wing trend that is characterized by the radicalization of neoliberal subjectivities and its convergence with the emergence of fascist subjectivities. Under this form of reactionary neoliberalism, combined with nationalist racism, we are witnessing the redefinition of what it means to be human, or, as Hannah Arendt powerfully argued, what it means to be expelled from humanity. Historically, massacres and genocides have been preceded by dehumanizing discursive constructions. In this respect, it becomes urgent to understand and expose the discourses, meanings, and the actions and motivations of movements that claim the right to hate others.

The current surge of the reactionary right in the Americas seeks to intensify even more authoritarian agendas combined with civilizational missions. First, this civilizational rhetoric and crusade to defend and restore so-called "Western" values have allowed and facilitated discursive and ideological alliances among right-wing actors throughout the Americas. This shows the relevance of studying the seeming contradictions of the emerging phenomenon of transnational populist nationalism. Second, I argue that current notions of traditional, Judeo-Christian, or purported "Western" values not only include neoliberal values (e.g. individual responsibility, free market, and limited government), but the moral principles defended have been shaped and redefined by neoliberal logics and rationalities. For example, Jair Bolsonaro and his sons have galvanized gun culture in Brazil. His trademark campaign sign was a hand folded into the shape of a gun (Casado and Londoño). Thus, the right to possess and bear guns has been redefined as an "inalienable right" of (responsible) individuals for their defense and their own, as well as for their property and freedom ("Programa da Aliança Pelo Brasil"). This trend mirrors the political and cultural debate over guns in the United States. We cannot dismiss the long history of servile emulation of Brazilian and Latin American elites to Europe and the US and their aspirations of modernity (westernization) and progress. However, I argue that the right of the moral and decent citizen to possess and bear guns has become popular because it is also about the reaffirmation of the right of the (neoliberal) citizen to self-defense. Thus, although we cannot ignore that the reactionary embrace and celebration of "Western" values in Brazil is also related to internal colonialist dynamics, it is important to pay attention to the neoliberal logics and subjectivities at play. In this sense, my third point is that the fact that minorities and people of non-white origin also identify with ideas and figures associated with white supremacy could be explained by the pervasiveness of colonial subjectivities. However, the defense and performance of neoliberal values could also add "moral" value to prudent, responsible, and rational subjects that goes beyond their racial identities. Nevertheless, neoliberal subjectivities are also related to colonial dynamics of racial superiority. As I discussed in the third section, neoliberalism is also a racial project to maintain white supremacy (Dawson, Slobodian). This same argument could explain internal colonialist dynamics within nation-states. The "traditional" values that are defended in Brazil and the US seeks to defend traditional privileges based on hierarchical, racist, and patriarchal structures tied to the long legacies of slavery, white supremacy, and authoritarian cultural traditions. The reactionary right then has appealed to the defense of "traditional" values as a way to valorize valuable cultural assets of the (neoliberal) individual.

I have discussed how the reactionary right has constructed and reactivated the defense and return to "Western" values. In the context of a global pandemic in which the reactionary right has also reframed public health measures as a cultural war issue, it is important to rethink, appropriate, and resignify the idea of "Western" values and "Western" civilization by envisioning new forms of convivence and new forms of humanism beyond the white masculine middle-class ideal. First, this task demands the decolonization of European history and the visibilization of forgotten alternative projects of modernity and their insurgent universalities (Tomba). Second, we have to look at knowledge production and epistemologies of the "Western" Global South. Just as Latin American liberation theology was an attempt to recuperate the original commitment of Christianity to life and justice (or, as Enrique Dussel would argue, an attempt to place right-side up *inverted* Christianity), we also need to look at the contributions of ancestral thought of indigenous communities in the Americas in order to create new meanings and ideas of the "West." In the midst of repeated and ever-increasing global crises, it is urgent to think in new political and civilizational projects that have the community at its center and that respects life in all its manifestations. Contemporary indigenous perspectives and traditions and their participatory

democratic practices and ways of collective life are crucial for envisioning new worlds. In the "Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona," the *Ejército Zapatista de la Liberación Nacional* states, "We want to tell the world that we want to make you large, so large that all those worlds will fit, those worlds which are resisting because they want to destroy the neoliberals and because they simply cannot stop fighting for humanity." From indigenous knowledges and epistemologies, we can recuperate the modern project of universal freedom and imagine how to construct a "Western" world in which all worlds fit.

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