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The Forum

“Eurowhite” Conceit, “Dirty White” Ressentment: “Race” in Europe

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This paper offers tools to rethink global critical insights on “race” in the contemporary structural transformation of European identity politics from the perspectives of postcolonial global historical sociologies. “Race” regimes rest on the following background assumptions: (1) The claim that humankind consists of a finite number of disjunct (non-overlapping) “groups,” “populations” or, in the extreme, “races”; (2) The presumption that it is valid to arrange those “groups,” “populations” or “races” in a system of moral super- and subordination; (3) The contention that the resulting moral hierarchy forms a single constant, irrespective of socio-historical contexts, criteria, or purposes of comparison; (4) Insistence that single, ahistorical/decontextualized hierarchy can be mapped on to body shape, skin pigmentation or other epiphenomenal “features” of “groups,” “populations,” or “races,” such that (5) “Whiteness” is always already at the top, “Blackness” is always already at the bottom of that hierarchy. This paper focuses on the workings of “Whiteness” as a moral-geopolitical superiority claim, whose defining element is an ahistorical/decontextualized claim, indeed demand, for unconditional global privilege. “Whiteness” is an unfounded, un-found-able—hence eminently unstable and contested—identity category. It is a relational category whose core is fixed as a constant, inaugurating the “White” subject’s relations (“superiority”) to its constitutive outside. I introduce two conceptual innovations: “eurowhiteness”—result of an internal structuring of the category of “Whiteness” whose purpose is separating an even more exalted, even more superior “cultural” —“racial” distinction within the universe of “Whiteness” and “dirty whiteness”—to capture the epistemic position of quantitative undervalued, positions within the moral quasi-community of “White” claims for global privilege, especially in their east European variants.

KEYWORDS: blackness; dirty whiteness; European identity politics; eurowhiteness; global privilege; “race”.

A few years ago, in Budapest, I attended a presentation on the conditions of European Roma communities, given by a scholar from a Scandinavian university. Later I asked the author why he consistently avoided use of the terms “race”/racism/racist, given that the material he presented could be seen as a textbook illustration of those as I understood them. He replied, “We don’t have “race” in Europe. That is an American concept.”

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To be sure, the first part of his response is almost too easy to contradict²: Viewers of practically any European soccer game will notice the “endless barrage” (Greig 2020) of the “monkey sounds” made by fans to bully players racialized as non-‘White’³ (Bentson 2019; Greig 2020; Harris 2019). This custom is exceedingly difficult to read as anything but a crass expression of a popular culture of biological racism—so much so that a group of “hard core” fans of a leading Italian team have written an open letter to a newly recruited, international superstar, who had expressed apprehension about their chants, admitting to the practice but rejecting the label “racism,” explaining that, in Italy, there is no racism, that they only do the monkey sounds to “mess up” the opposing team (“Inter Fans . . .” 2019). All that rhymes closely with the well-known charges of racism of the institutional structures and the underrepresentation of minorities in international sports (e.g., Bradbury 2013), including European soccer. Dehumanization of players on the field is so widespread that two clubs, both in northern Germany (Haasen 2018; Negley 2020), have chosen to place “antiracism”/“antinazism” in the center of their identity marketing strategy. Not to be left too far behind the soccer clubs, the European Commission has recently raised (European Commission 2019; Gachet n.d.; Mijatovic 2021) what mainstream liberal political practice labels as “the problem of racism,” signifying, at a minimum, a combination of a political unease with, and an inability to repress, the issue.



Image 1. Tableau *Natural Selection of Skin Color* (*Selection naturelle de la couleur de la peau*) Demography Exhibit, Musée de l’Homme, Paris, mid-1990s. Photo (c) József Böröcz.

² We shall return to the second part of the statement later in this study.

³ Throughout this text, I place the term ‘Whiteness’ in single quotation marks to indicate that it is a claim making tool, rather than a descriptive feature of the surface of a person’s skin. I also put the word “race” in distancing double quotations.

I took the photograph presented in Image 1 in the mid-1990s. It is the snapshot of a tableau near the entrance to the then, intendedly, permanent (since then removed) human demography exhibit, titled “Natural Selection of Skin Color”⁴ in the *Musée de l’Homme*, the—“reinvented” (Grognet 2015; Lebovics and Boëtsch 2018)—historical and “biological” (Lebovics and Boëtsch 2018) anthropology museum, clearly a shrine of French colonial science,⁵ in Paris. The image included in the tableau performs at last three acts of symbolic violence. In each, the violence occurs in drastically reducing complexity of reality.

- It squeezes minute empirical variations in human skin pigmentation into eight disjunct categories of decreasing darkness (see the body-less, stylized human heads, at the bottom left of the image, presented as a legend of sorts). In the language of an introductory sociological methods course, the creators of this tableau impose a fixed, ordinal scale on a non-hierarchical, and fluid reality.⁶ Both scales, indeed the very thought of scaling human “populations,” explicitly denies what was considered, by the mid-1990s, the scientifically valid—unitary—portrayal of humankind.
- The map assigns a single “skin color” to mark the empirical range of skin tonalities of people all over Planet Earth. Representing a range of distributions with a single value is a truly unprofessional slip-up—at least if viewed, again, with late-20th-century standards of scholarly representation. At this point, dispassionate observers develop a feeling that the tableau in question may be a relic from an earlier period of west European “colonial science.” Indeed, even a cursory investigation into the past of “racial” categorizations in global space reveals that the tableau of the mid-1990s bears striking resemblance⁷ to European images

⁴ “La selection naturelle de la couleur de la peau.”

⁵ Readers might be familiar with the story of Sarah Baartman, a young Khoisan woman removed from her homeland in colonial South Africa only to serve as a disrobed and violently objectified “freak show” exhibit in Britain and France (Maseko 1998). She died, at 26, in 1816. *Musée de l’Homme*, which “owned” her remains, was in the center of related accusations (Qureshi 2004, Scully and Crais 2008) of engaging in acts of disgraceful violence against her by being in possession of, and frequently exhibiting, parts of her preserved body until post-Apartheid South Africa successfully claimed her body for a proper funeral in 2002 (see, e.g., Saartjie Baartman . . . 2002).

⁶ The ordinal scale differs, we may recall, from a nominal scale in that it forces a ranking order on the taxonomy it offers so that “f(x) means any monotonic increasing function” (Stevens, 1946: 678, Table I).

⁷ I don’t have the space here to reconstruct the specific intellectual-political pathways through which patterns the “Racial Doctrine” imagery of humankind—predominant in the period of the 1920s through 1940s in Italy—might have found its way to the “Demography” exhibit at the *Musée de l’Homme*. Nor do I have information about the producers of the mid-1990s exhibit. So my argument stops at stating the striking isomorphy between the two projects.



Image 2. Enlarged Part of the tableau *Natural Selection of Skin Color* (*Selection naturelle de la couleur de la peau*) Demography Exhibit, Musée de l'Homme, Paris, mid-1990s. Photo (c) József Böröcz.

of the world produced under the “racial doctrine” (Taylor 1988) of the Fascist era.⁸

- It confines the “location” of the lightest “skin” color—let us call it *Pinkness*—portrayed, in an astonishing assertion of semiotic power,⁹ as more transparent than

⁸ The map of the world included in the mid-1990s tableau at the *Musée de l'Homme* is virtually identical with “racial” representations of the world developed in the work of Renato Biasutti (1878–1965), a leading “racial”-social geographer in Mussolini’s Italy, amply presented in his magnum opus *Le Razze e Popoli della Terra* (*The Races and Peoples of the Earth*) published in several editions between 1940 and the mid-1960s, in Italian as well as English. (For a source reproducing Biasutti’s skin color maps of the world, see <http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-EjKOn8OwaXo/VFTAaHVP8RI/AAAAAAAAAB20/0E9uViJKxc/s1600/MapCoon-Biasutti.jpg>). As *Le Razze e Popoli* . . . indicates, Biasutti also had a keen interest in the global “distribution” of other biological features, part and parcel to the Fascist imaginary regarding human diversity, including skin color, eye color, cranial form and cephalic indexing. Biasutti’s *Le Razze e Popoli della Terra* was indeed reviewed in great detail, and in glowing terms, by Corrado Gini (1942) (inventor of the Gini coefficient). Biasutti was, clearly, a willing and well supported collaborator with Mussolini’s regime and Emanuel Rota (2013) discusses his work on “racial” variance as “Italian Fascist Africanism,” but he never openly endorsed Fascism. Gini, in contrast, was an avid and proud, explicit Fascist (Gini 1927) and a speech writer for Benito Mussolini (Melegh 2017). Gini’s commitment to the “racial doctrine” and his “White” fear of “population replacement” was so profound that his paper titled “The Italian Demographic Problem and the Fascist Policy on Population,” for instance, posits that the “[t]he demographic balance of all ‘white’-race countries [...] displays an excess of births over deaths” (Gini 1930:692). As Attila Melegh’s brief reconstruction (2017:316) points out, a rekindled interest in geographical space and regionalism on the one hand and insistence on viewing demographic facts as national resources were the twin ideas of between-war Italian Fascist science.

⁹ See, especially the chapter titled “The Politics of Normality,” (32–61) in Zerubavel 2018.

any of the others, making it, perforce, the unmarked¹⁰ point of reference¹¹ for all other “skin colors” on this map—to a well-defined, contiguous geopolitical space.

The realm of Pinkness—characterized, according to the creators of the tableau, by the presence of people with exceptionally low levels of pigmentation in the epidermis (see Image 2 above)—extends from the southern border of France north-northwestward, to include the British Isles, Iceland, and much, but not the northern littoral, of the Scandinavian peninsula (placing the Salmi communities in the Arctic in the darker-than-Pink category), to the northern Urals. Then it makes a sharp turn southwest, cuts through much of north-central Europe, to reach an imaginary line separating the northern and southern regions of Italy, eventually ending the tour on the Mediterranean coastline of France.¹²

In this schema, Pinkness is an utterly exceptional feature of humankind. It only occurs as a separate and unique blot on the planet. The area it occupies includes France, containing the spot inside the museum where the visitor of the *Musée de l’Homme*¹³ stands while, presumably, absorbing the message of the exhibit.

The creators of this image thought it unimportant to explain just what the purpose of this exercise might be—unless the “scientific” inauguration, naturalization and, hence, normalization, of superficial difference in individual levels of epidermic pigmentation, seen as a variable that points at other, presumably “deeper,” moral, socio-cultural meanings. Unable to find a scholarly answer to the question why we should care about all this, especially in the context of a *social science* exhibit, I see it befitting to use this epidermic-reductionist, biocultural image of the world as an illustration to what the creators of the exhibit seem to have considered the underlying “truth” of human existence: a “scientific” rendition of “race difference.”

I take this skin-color-coded map of the world as an iconic representation of the quasi-scientific practice of the biocultural splitting (Zerubavel 1996) of humankind, created in order to advance a rudimentary biocultural “map” of the human universe. More accurately, what we see are the results of a veritable *splitting spree*, resulting in eight putatively disjunct categories of humanity. The splitting spree to which the

¹⁰ The distinction between marked / unmarked—where, in Jakobson’s words, “only one of the terms of [a] correlation is conceived of as actively modified and positively endowed with a certain mark, while the other is merely conceived of as non-endowed by this mark and thus passively modified”—emerged in a 1930 correspondence between Roman Jakobson and Nikolai Trubetzkoy, included in Trubetzkoy (1975). For further elaborations, see, e.g., Waugh 1982, Brekhus 1998, Vives 2011, Thurman 2019.

¹¹ Linda Waugh offers an example for the unmarked as a point of reference as follows: “right-handed scissors are of course called *scissors*, whereas left-handed scissors are called *left-handed scissors*” (Waugh 1982:314).

¹² For similar maps in the context of Francophone science, see these examples: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/eb/Global-map-of-skin-pigmentation-levelsThis-map-based-on-the-work-of-the-geographer-R.png.jpg>. They all appear to go back to Renato Biasutti (see footnote 7 above), <http://feobus.centerblog.net/1593297-Couleur-de-la-peau>, or <https://images.app.goo.gl/9JY9pLSEquRgG9XE8>, repeated here: <https://www.bluejean.fr/mysteres/couleur-de-peau.php>.

¹³ *The Museum of Man* (emphasis added).



Image 3. “The Various Skin Types.” Source: *Focus Fit und Gesund*, 2021, 1: 32.

unity of humankind was subjected also involved, perforce, a simultaneous *lumping* (Zerubavel 1996) *spre*, stuffing all empirical variation within each of the eight categories of skin tonality into single “colors.” Split-and-lumped to conform to the needs of pseudo-scientific categorization, we now have a hierarchy of putative human difference where the violence that produces it is hidden behind the pseudo-objective reference to “skin color.”

Simple and pseudo-objective as it is, it would be difficult to over-exaggerate the influence of the symbolic violence of splitting-lumping on the minds of mainstream west European scientists, scholars and, more broadly, intellectuals, as they occupy their exalted positions, and execute their pattern-producing power, in the world of ideas. With the mapping of “White” identity on western Europe and insisting on its distinction from all Others in global space,¹⁴ the European subject has prepared him- or herself to navigate, whether in thought or physically, the seas and continents of the world outside western Europe.

The skin-color-coded image of a human world divided into eight “populations” thus carries a profound meaning in global moral geopolitics. The placement of this tableau at the entrance of the “human demography” exhibit at the *Musée de l’Homme*, in Paris / France / western Europe, clearly foregrounds it as an orienting device, a chart suggesting a simple, definite structure—a veritable world model. The creators of the tableau turned a metaphor—an epidermically color-coded categorization of humankind—around, making the implicit message of ostensibly immutable difference explicit and visually graspable. The effect is immediate and visceral.

The presence of such imageries can be established with relative ease in west European public cultures. Take, for instance, a recent piece of conventional dermatological advice offered to the readers¹⁵ of a special edition, titled *Fit and Healthy*,¹⁶ of the popular German magazine *Focus* (Liebich 2021) concerning proper protection of skin from the harmful rays of the Sun. In it (see Image 3), the audience is treated to a taxonomy of skin colors (illustrated, again, with bodyless images of human heads, just as in the tableau in Images 1 and 2 above)—referred to as “The Various Skin Types.”¹⁷ To be noted, here we only have four categories in the ordinal scale of epidermic pigmentation.

To state what might be evident by now, the taxonomy of human skin presented in *Focus Fit and Healthy* matter-of-factly leaves out a majority of humankind, including some who are residents—let alone citizens—in a legal, historical, artistic or emotional sense, part (Goertz 1997; Plumly 2007; Schilling 2015) of the much thematized “Volk” of Germany. Obviously, considerable segments of humankind are ignored here. Arguably, the authors and editors of *Focus Fit and Healthy* offer an even more partial view of humanity so that their symbolic violence of simplification-by-exclusion goes beyond those coded in the “scholarly” typology presented in the tableau in the *Musée de l’Homme*.

¹⁴ On the triple “conflation” of “Whiteness”, Europeanness and Christianity, see, e.g., Bonnett 2008.

¹⁵ At its peak, *Focus* had a paid circulation of over 800 thousand copies, i.e., it reached approximately 1% of the population of Germany at the time. Even after the major overall decline in sales of print magazines, it still reached over 250 thousand customers in 2020 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/417106/focus-magazine-paid-circulation-germany/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Information%20Community,274.456%20thousand%20copies%20in%202020.>

¹⁶ “Fit und Gesund.”

¹⁷ “Die unterschiedlichen Hauttypen”.

To be precise, *Focus Fit and Healthy* designates four “skin types”: “very light,” “light,” “light brown,” and “brown.”¹⁸ An important clue (Ginzburg 1989) lies in *which* parts of the empirical range of human skin tonalities are omitted. Needless to say, it is those parts farthest from the Pink extreme. The focus (pardon the pun) is, thus, on “*lighter*”-*skin-as-“skin”-genus*—an explicitly scandalous claim that is, hence, implicitly, normalized.¹⁹

All this converges on a world model wherein the west European “White”-identified subject (1) creates a hierarchy of all people, (2) places itself on the top of that hierarchy, and (3) propagates the model as objective truth in which (4) all that, including, most important, its self-placement at the top of the global human hierarchy, is fully transparent. Consequently, (5) that “Whiteness” can be read, at will, as a synecdochic reference to “humanness” *genus* serving as a master plan for all Others.²⁰ From a geopolitical perspective, cognitive regimes based on “race” categorization emerged as moral / ideological / emotional instruments that guide and govern west European actors’ practices regarding Other humans, in- and outside western Europe, as tools for making and maintaining “difference” (Griffin and Braidotti 2002). As moral tools, they have eased feelings of dissonance between “European” claims of west European “Goodness” (Böröcz 2006; Burton 2007; Dzenovska 2013) on the one hand, and the genocidal practice inherent to colonial capital accumulation on the other. They worked to allay west European anxieties at the time of the completion of global colonial expansion, inculcating—or, as with Fanon, “epidermalizing,” (Sardar 2008:xiii, Irizarry and Raible 2014)—a deeply biocultural pattern of an inferiority complex into a vast majority of humankind, a psychological state the colonizer used deliberately to promote the cause of colonial oppression, plunder and genocide (Fanon 2008 (1952)). “Racial” ideologies centered on “Whiteness” have inaugurated concentric gradations of putatively decreasing humanity, roughly proportionate to distance from western Europe—say, from the Trocadéro, the square at the entrance of the *Musée de l’Homme*. As an emotional device, “race” cognition has provided ways for west European subjects to experience feelings of relative relaxation and happiness, even in the colonial context, even in situations where they witnessed abject suffering by Others—even as that agony was directly caused by their very own acts committed from their subject positions as agents of colonialism. “Race” cognition has been a key tool in centuries of colonial oppression, normalizing a preposterous self-exception by, and in favor of the colonizer operating in a world marred by a devastating pattern of inferiorization projected on the world by the “White”-identified subject—only to obfuscate issue of the perpetrators’ colonial accountability through what Fanon (2008 (1952)) called

¹⁸ “Sehr hell,” “hell,” “hell braun” and “braun.”

¹⁹ Of course the skin care advice in *Focus Fit and Healthy* is not the only instance in which the lighter-skin-as-skin-“genus” model appears in west European public culture. That violent, synecdochic representation of human epidermal variation, skewed in the “lighter” direction as it is, rhymes well, for instance, with the French debates over the national soccer team being “too black,” first thematized by the extreme right, eventually burning through almost the entirety of the political spectrum, including a politician in the Socialist Party (Beaumont 2007; Thompson 2015), only to subside, for now, after two decades of bitter rows (Robins-Early and Clavel 2018).

²⁰ Gurminder Bhabra (2017) calls this feature, as it crops up in the social sciences, “methodological whiteness.”

“the racial redistribution of guilt.”²¹ Therein lie the moral implications of the cognitive practice of the colonial difference (Chatterjee 1993; Mignolo 2002) i.e., the process in which “White”-identified Pink west European subjects impersonated the abstract moral object of “Europe” and defined it “in sharp distinction to the colonized world” (Berger 2017:17, quoting Kaelble 2013), creating a “systematic racial division of labor” (Quijano 2000:535).

“Race” regimes rest, then, on the following interlocking background assumptions:

1. The claim that humankind consists of a finite number of disjunct (non-overlapping), internally homogenous “groups,” “populations” or, in the extreme, “races.”
2. The presumption that it is “scientifically” valid to arrange, analyze, and fix those “groups,” “populations” or “races” in a system of moral super- and subordination.
3. The contention that the resulting moral hierarchies converge on a single constant, irrespective of socio-historical contexts, criteria, or purposes of comparison.
4. Insistence that that ahistorical/decontextualized hierarchy can be mapped on to epidermic pigmentation, body shape, or other epiphenomenal “features” of “groups,” “populations,” or “races,” such that
5. “Whiteness”—a *moral* category pseudo-empirically tied to mis-operationalized, and anchored, in the first (and most often the only) instance as, low epidermic pigment levels, as in Pinkness above—is always already at the top, while its putative “opposite,” “Blackness” is always already at the bottom of that hierarchy.

Each of those assumptions is of course an obvious fallacy, an imprudent misconception, and a brutal lie. In my view, a combination of those five assumptions is what *racism* is.

It has often been pointed out that the biocultural superiority claim of “Whiteness” also comes with demands for, and comparatively extremely easy access, to privileges of all kinds. I suggest that we might gain considerable theoretical advantage from reversing the logic of that argument. Instead of viewing “Whiteness” as an already existing superiority claim to which certain secondary privileges are “also” attached, I suggest we regard it as a social process in which the claim for privilege is constitutive and primary. “Whiteness,” in this conceptualization, would be an epidermalized moral-geopolitical superiority claim whose defining, core element is an ahistorical/decontextualized *moral-geopolitical demand for unconditional, collective global privilege*. Quijano’s (2000) colonial “racial” division of labor hence converts, with the demise of many formal organizational structures of the colonial system, into a global “racial” division of privilege. “Whiteness” has been a key cognitive mechanism that helped that conversion take place. “Whiteness” helps understand the magnitude of the global privileges showered upon the west European occupants of the erstwhile colonizer “White” subject category as it contextualizes the persistence, indeed expanded reproduction, of “racial” cognition, generations after the demise of colonialism.

²¹ Fanon indexes “how colonization divided racialized subjects against each other and used them in colonial repression and occupation” (Al-Saji 2019:480).

“Whiteness” is an unfounded, un-earned, and un-deserve-able—hence eminently unstable and forever contested—identity category, not only because constructing hierarchies of superiority/inferiority among human populations is the charlatan pseudoscience that is, but also, crucially, because the attractiveness of the superiority claim ensconced in “Whiteness” is deeply ensconced in the largely unequal global distribution of social, economic, political, moral, esthetic, psychological, etc. privileges, at least in the form of the racialized capitalist world economy of the *longue durée*.

“Whiteness” can be defined, then, working with Ziauddin Sardar’s reading (2008:xiii) of Fanon, as the *obverse epidermalization* (see also Stephens 2016) of the an inferiority complex manufactured in the colonial relationship and projected on the colonized by the colonizer, deriving a sense of un-proven, un-prove-able superiority in a world after the collapse of the colonial system, *performed as a tool for global privilege making*. “Whiteness” is ritual recitation of a contrived and insincere, hence insecure and unsustainable, compensatory mechanism, a veritable superiority complex on part of the west European subject who still “lacks”—to make a playful reference to Kant’s famous definition of the Enlightenment here—“the determination and courage” to see him/herself for what s/he is, without inferiorizing the Other. In Enrique Dussel’s formulation, modernity—a product of the European Enlightenment—is:

in fact, a European phenomenon, but one constituted in a dialectical relation with a non-European alterity that is its ultimate content. Modernity appears when Europe affirms itself as the “center” of a World History that it inaugurates; the “periphery” that surrounds this center is consequently part of its self-definition (1993:65).

The “White”-identified subject produces his/her self-image by racializing as non-“White,” i.e., inferiorizing the non-west-European as Other—always already in the context of his/her pursuit of the global privileges. What Habermas (1992) called “the unfinished project of the Enlightenment” cannot, even in this, elementary sense, possibly be depicted as a process completed, let alone left behind. When it comes to the un-earned privilege claims of “Whiteness,” it has hardly even been begun.²²

“Whiteness” is a *relational* concept whose core is fixed as a constant, inaugurating the “White” subject’s relations (a putative “superiority”) to its constitutive outside. “Whiteness” is, I emphasize, a moral-geopolitical category. At its core, it has nothing to do with skin tonality. The frequent justificatory reference to the empirical fact of Pinkness—i.e., to repeat, the fact of individual epidermic tonality of the globally privileged collective subject is, ostensibly, on the lighter-hued end of the empirical spectrum of human skin coloration, the condition of low pigmentation—as alleged “evidence” supporting the privilege claims lodged in “Whiteness” is an impertinent ruse, a ham fisted yet effective excuse that allows users of the “Whiteness” scheme to establish a quasi-objective, pseudo-scientific foothold on which its practitioners mis-justify the core of the idea, their unsubstantiated, indefensible claim of global privilege.

The identity schema of “White” entitlement to a wide range of global privileges “based” on pseudo-objective, epidermic “criteria” is undoubtedly present in west European public and academic cultures. What sets apart west European social prac-

²² See, e.g., Maldonado-Torres 2004; Hesse 2007; Grosfoguel 2011.

tices of “Whiteness” from Other instances of racialization is that it is available for borrowing, almost like books in an open-shelf public library in western Europe—especially for “White”-identified Pink west European subjects who possess a membership card in the form of a west Schengen passport.

It is in the context of “White” privilege claims and the “racially” coded identity imaginaries, including that of “Whiteness,” that are used to substantiate them, that the intellectual and official discourses of the reverse-synecdochic representation of the European Union as “Europe” has been embedded.²³ The creation of the supra-state public authority called the European Union assumed, invoked, re-articulated, and preserved the subject position of “Whiteness” in three moral-geopolitical relations.

First, it established what has become the effective physical, moral, and social closure of the political/physical space occupied by west European societies, staving off people racialized as non-“White” (White 2019:387), rendering them epidermically ineligible to the privileges that accrue on the inside of the territory of European integration. The physical exclusion of non-“White,” non-west-European subjects (White 2019:387) takes place through supra-state legal means—via the European Union’s shared visa regulations²⁴—and through a murky reference to the requirement of the never meaningfully defined “European identity” as a legal precondition for any non-EU-member state²⁵ to be allowed to file a membership request in the European Union. All that is taking place in a context in which, as we have seen, the semantic fields of west “Europeanness,” Pink skin tonality and “Whiteness” overlap to a considerable degree, particularly if we define “Whiteness”, as I have proposed above, as a set of global privilege claims. In that sense, the institutional arrangement of the European Union, especially its shared border policing and foreigner/migration “management” systems, function as quasi-state organizations created with the purpose of preventing access to the territory of western Europe—defined, hence, as a “White” space—by members of Other societies, racialized as non-“White.” Some exceptions and special arrangements—having to do with the member states’ legacies as colonizing powers, spot demand by west Schengen capital for labor, and a trickle of refugee flows—add variations to this scheme, but the underlying idea is this.

²³ That process was long in the making, as suggested by the fact that the EU’s original six founding member states included most major west European colonial powers. The United Kingdom was left out of the group of the EU’s founders because the status of its recent / still existing colonial holdings could not be reconciled with the EU’s principle of supra-state sovereignty. (It is reasonable to assume that some of the historical legacies of that condition have something to do with Brexit as well.)

²⁴ Max Andruski argues, as a result of EU regulations (I add: regulations that are firmly rooted in colonial practices of “Whiteness” by erstwhile colonial powers, today’s member states of the European Union) “certain [non-European born] bodies with European ancestry and phenotype” (2010: 358) practice frequent “motility” out and in South Africa so that “the complex regulation of transnational (and internal) migration on the part of states as well as supra-state networks works as part of an ensemble out of which race emerges” (2010: 361). As a result, “pre-histories of colonial movement [. . .] thus hang spectrally—and materially—over the present” (2010: 358).

²⁵ The European Union’s official-legal terminology refers to non-EU-member states as “third countries”—a reference in which the numeral “third” is perfectly meaningless unless viewed against the background of the idea of the “third world,” a residual category widely used in the context of the tripartite cognitive splitting-lumping of humankind during the cold war.

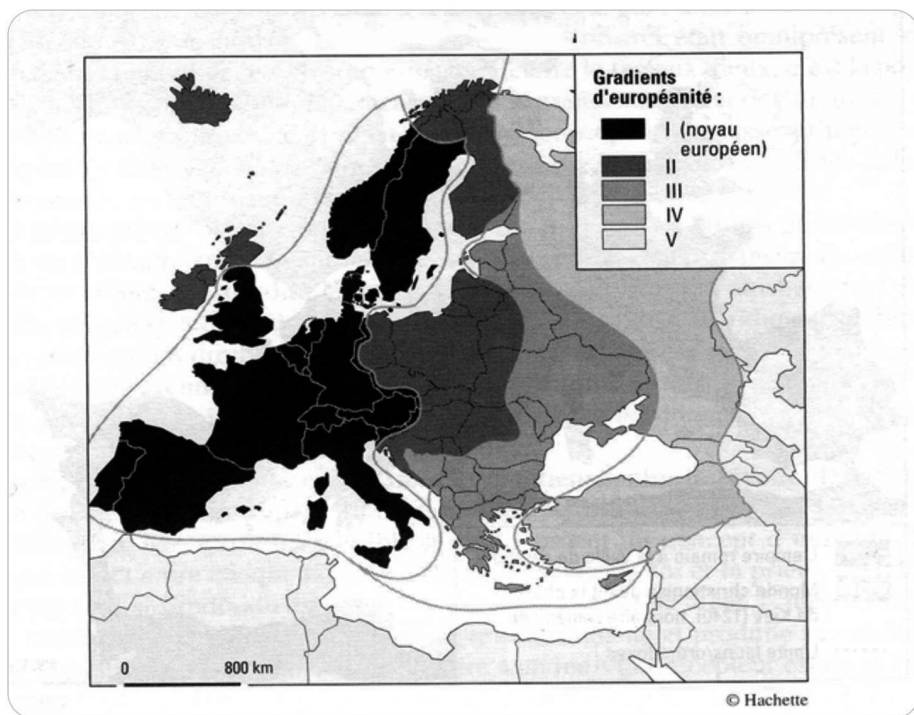


Image 4. The European Core (*Le noyau européen*). French geography textbook, Hachette, 1977. Source: <https://twitter.com/AlexDrace/status/1174239857012592640>. An updated, 2011 version of the same textbook reproduces the image with a slight variation https://twitter.com/I_Katchanovski/status/1174885249689554944.

Second, it created a field of everyday, popular conversation concerning the particulars—ostensibly, some loftier, superior features—of “proper” west European “Whiteness” as contrasted to other claims to “Whiteness,” e.g., the “White”-settler varieties that had defined the erstwhile-colonized context.

Third, it thematized a host of tensions, uncertainties, incongruities, paradoxes and impossibilities as the moral-geopolitical distinction of western “Whiteness” was eagerly, and with some unease, mapped on the political cartography of Europe, foregrounding, with much intensity, the supposedly unalterable “eastern” borders of west European “Whiteness.”

Arguably those moral-geopolitical borders—as illustrated by the map of comparative “Europeanness” adopted from a French geography textbook (see Image 4)—had been drawn much before the mid-1950 when the predecessor to today’s European Union was established. There is convincing evidence²⁶ that something very similar to

²⁶ See, e.g., Larry Wolf’s brilliant book (1994) on the subject of the Enlightenment’s relations to the eastern reaches of Europe, as well as Attila Melegh’s important work (2006) on the contemporary west-east “slope” that governs much of the hegemonic patterns of cognitive functioning in, and regarding, “European” space.

the “rule of European difference,” defined elsewhere²⁷ (Böröcz 2006) had already been present at the dawn of capitalist modernity. Such splitting and lumping of the territory of the European continent characterized the approach of the philosophes of the west European Enlightenment as they discovered, possessed, and gave (often openly condescending, if not hostile) meanings to, the peoples and societies of the lands east of today’s Germany, Austria,²⁸ and northern Italy. The legacies of 19th century European Orientalism—cognitive structures that further emphasized and reinforced the putative moral differences between the “west” and “the rest” of Europe—are undeniable (Boatcă 2006) in the histories of the societies that have found themselves on the outside of the so-defined lands of west European “Whiteness.” The establishment of the European Union and the unexpected collapse of the political-geographical separation between the eastern more-than-half of the continent and the territories where west European “Whiteness” flourished raised the volume of the conversation concerning the “center of gravity” of proper “Whiteness” and the outside borders—or, in the words of Joschka Fischer, the then Foreign Minister of Germany, the “finality” (Fischer 2000)—of west European integration to unprecedented levels. The stakes, almost everyone feels, are enormous²⁹ and the attendant anxieties and risks were distributed very unevenly. For, drawing the boundaries of the European Union—a geopolitical organization devoted to maintaining the global flows that ensure the exceptional privileges accruing inside it—has dramatic implications for the abilities of societies to partake in, or be barred from access to, those global privileges. The question of the imaginary boundary separating the land of west European “Whiteness” from its eastern neighbors goes to the heart of the “modern” identity constructions of the societies east of the Germany-Austria-Italy line—measuring themselves, ever so desperately, against the *étalon* of a set of idealized images of French society/culture (Böröcz 2006; Melegh 2006)—at least since the mid-19th-early-20th centuries. The very existence of such struggles over “properly” European—read, here: properly “White”—practices

²⁷ The rule of European difference involved the launching of three interlinked cognitive operations:

[. . .] Insistence that, within Europe, goodness is distributed unevenly.

[. . .] The claim that the uneven distribution of goodness maps on the west-east, north-south, and/or northwest-southeast axes, or the west-centric core-periphery structure, of the continent of Europe, so that locations in the eastern, southern, south-western, and/or simply peripheral parts are marred by the insufficiency, absence, or opposite of goodness; and, finally,

[. . .] the key conclusion of the entire exercise in terms of geopolitical identities: the suggestion that goodness, an essentially “European” quality, is found in its highest empirical density in western (northern, north-western, or west-central) Europe.

²⁸ Even the name of Austria, in the original German—Österreich (literally: “Eastern Empire/Realm / Land in the East”)—thematizes its status as an “eastern” borderland.

²⁹ Roberto Dainotto (2007: 2) describes the feeling of being European and outside the borders of “eurowhiteness” from an Italian subject position, along a north-south divide, instead of the west-east boundary described above. (Italy had not been included in the Schengen system until the mid-1990s):

The anxiety we felt at that initial exclusion is hard to describe. As Giuseppe Turani used to write on the pages of the daily *La Repubblica*, we badly wanted “to become like all others . . . to become a European country, not so Mediterranean, not so pizza-and-mandolin, not so defective” [. . .] And how could we possibly overcome our parochial—let alone “defective”—identities if we were denied the “promised disappearance of physical borders” that alone granted “an enhanced meaning of Europe” as a cultural identity [. . .]?

lends support to Manuela Boatcă's (2013) suggestion of "replacing the notion of a single Europe producing multiple modernities by the one of multiple Europes with different and unequal roles in shaping the hegemonic definition of modernity and in ensuring its propagation." Little surprise that the epidermalization of inferiority is also palpably present (Lazarević Radak 2015) beyond the "eastern" borders of "Eurowhiteness."

Both relational references have created identity discourses that carve out a special, putatively trans-historical, place for the west European subject, self-racialized as "White", in a field of moral geopolitics. In conclusion, I propose a way to make explicit the two key identity practices that have implicitly emerged in regulating these fields of identity. The first one—I will call it "*eurowhiteness*"—encapsulates the idea of a self-racialization that is imagined as a pristine, un-tainted "White" subjecthood. It distinguishes itself from identity locations racialized as non-"White," as well as distancing itself from presumably less immaculate, either diasporic or "eastern" varieties of "Whiteness." Its counterpoint—I will call it "*dirty whiteness*"³⁰—embodies a demand for acceptance as properly "White" despite *the absence* of any apparent willingness on part of occupants of the "eurowhite" subject position to accept it as such.

The "dirty white" subject position—conceived as a reaction to what it experiences as a conceited "eurowhite" condescension, or even insult, imposed on the societies of a vast land on the eastern parts of Europe—could have produced, at least hypothetically, a reaction that would challenge the racialization of humanity on principled grounds. Several political ideologies quite well known in the "dirty white" societies—from socialist internationalism through an all-encompassing view of humanity based on a political identification with the legacies of the Non-Aligned Movement through various green, liberal or even, to a limited extent, the "liberation theology" component in Roman Catholicism—could have served as a basis for such a reaction. The end of the period of state socialism and the opening of the European Union for the movement of all "factors of production," including labor, resulting in a steep increase in the proportion of east European subjects who had gained experience in working in western Schengen-Land, to a considerable extent working alongside co-workers who had a long experience in being racialized as non-"White," could have been expected to raise a popular consciousness of anti-racism among east European subjects racialized as "dirty white." Had the "eurowhite" condescension to the eastern parts of Europe happened suddenly, as part of a historical event—say, in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of state socialism in 1989–1991—perhaps it would have been possible for such a reaction to emerge.

However, that was not the case. The "eurowhite" putdown of eastern Europe has had its own *longue durée* history. So have east European reactions to it.

As a result, by and large the opposite happened. Instead of encouraging a search for possibilities of global anti-racist solidarity, the intellectual elites, the extended informal networks that had monopolized access to political power, and the populations at large resorted to re-warming their intellectual and political traditions from

³⁰ I have borrowed the term from the terminology of paint used in professional house painting. The color that refers to the color that belongs in the white spectrum but it is not the brightest—called, in US English "off-white"—is marketed, in Hungary, as "piszkosfehér," or, "dirty white," a near perfect metaphor for the phenomenon I wish to grasp and comprehend.

as early as the 19th century. East European “dirty white” subjects proceeded to assert their demands for being accepted as “eurowhite” (with the attendant privileges of course) at an ever-increasing volume. Their demands were met with silence in the “eurowhite” context. Open acknowledgment of the strategy of demanding inclusion in “eurowhite” subjecthood on account of a series of dermatological and geographical accidents—a combination of the presence of Pinkness and their physical location just outside the realm of “eurowhiteness”—is a taboo as that would be tantamount to admitting to the “embarrassment” of being racialized as less-than-“eurowhite.” Similarly, the ever more loudly repeated demands for acceptance are so protected on the “inside” that its critiques, let alone alternative conceptualizations are, for all intents and purposes, forbidden.³¹ Tied up in this game, they keep producing cultural practices that the “eurowhite” subject position interprets as ever dirtier “dirty white.”

As a result of the repeated demands and the staunch silence they receive, the discursive soundscape of erstwhile state socialist, soon-would-be-EU-member societies soon began sounding like an illustration to Max Scheler’s (2015) century-old idea he called “ressentiment”:

Ressentiment is a self-poisoning of the mind [...] a lasting mental attitude, caused by the systematic repression of certain emotions and affects which, as such, are normal components of human nature. [...] The emotions and affects primarily concerned are revenge, hatred, malice, envy, the impulse to detract, and spite. [...]

[R]essentiment is [...] chiefly confined to those who serve and are dominated at the moment, who fruitlessly resent the sting of authority. [...] If an ill-treated servant can vent his spleen in the antechamber, he will remain free from the inner venom of resentment, but it will engulf him if he must hide his feelings and keep his negative and hostile emotions to himself (Scheler 2015:4-6).

As far as I can see, it is not true that “there is no “race” in Europe.” Nor is “‘race’ an American concept.” The problem is that it is essentially almost impossible to talk about it openly in contemporary Europe. The almost-five-centuries long period of genocidal practices in the colonial context, culminating in the simultaneous emergence of Fascism and Nazism, followed by a several-generations-long cleansing of the mind of the west European subject about *explicit* racial aggression make it very difficult for west European subjects to address “race” openly, even in a scholarly-analytical fashion. It is too *embarrassing* to admit the continued existence of “race”—especially for a collective mindset that is, otherwise, fully committed to a self-image as possessor of the greatest cultural / civilizational achievements of humankind. Arguably, the very existence “eurowhiteness” is a key reason why it is so difficult to talk openly about “race” in Europe today.

The inability to confront explicit “race” references is clearly demonstrated, for instance, in situations where west European “eurowhite” subjects experience surprise and a mild sense of distaste at being asked a direct question about their own “race”—e.g., in official questionnaires on arrival in the United States. That repulsion

³¹ Things have gotten so absurd that not only does the Hungarian soccer team refuse to take the knee, along with their Irish counterparts, in support of Black Lives Matter, not only does the Hungarian part of the audience jeer and boo the Irish players who do so, but even the Prime Minister of Hungary dismisses the antiracist symbol as “alien to Hungarian national culture.”

is usually followed by the same west European subjects—who, as we should recall, supposedly have no “race”—seamlessly to categorize themselves as “White,” instead of refusing to answer the question or choosing another category, lodging a complaint, etc. A similar reaction is clearly detected in the reactions of “eurowhite” commentators to news of racist police brutality, the “race”-discriminatory penal system, or the forms of resistance to systemic racism such as the Black Lives Matter movement or the acts defacing symbols of colonial-racist violence in the United States. The “eurowhite” subject sighs and marks his/her distance from those expressions of “race” as being too crass. Instead of “taking the knee” together with the young people protesting systemic violence, members of “eurowhite” intelligentsia suddenly discover the hidden “aesthetic value” of the statues of colonial “White” statesmen, even if the person they commemorate had been genocidal murderers and their presence in public space is an affront.

The “eurowhite” discursive strategy is, by and large, all about trying to forget “race” into oblivion. In that sense, it resembles the attitude of the small town in Germany, depicted in *Nasty Girl*, a film by Michael Verhoeven (1990), based on real events after World War II, whose citizens united in a conspiracy of silence against a girl who discovers and wishes to discuss their shared nazi past. That European silence about “race” is practiced from a position of global power, and its main consequence is forestalling any possibility of openly questioning “Whiteness” as a system of global privileges.

My sense, hence, is not that “there is no race” in Europe. Nor can we read “race”—a practice brought to the Americas, as well as just about everywhere in the world, by European colonizers—as an “American concept.” If we relegate “race” to the US context, we expressly deny the west European origins and the centrality of western Europe in the history of five centuries of colonialism; those five centuries which have produced the splendor and grandeur displayed in just about any west European city, filled their grandiose museums, the value transfer that has served as the material infrastructure for the persistence of “eurowhite” privilege claims to this day.

If we view the silence about “race” and the practice of “eurowhiteness” as excuses for global privilege claims, as I have proposed above, we might be able to notice that they are difference making devices developed as part of the colonization of the rest of the world by west European subjects who racialized themselves and everyone else to suit the cognitive needs of an extremely complex global colonial world. “Whiteness” is, hence, a conceptual instrument that refused to vanish after the collapse of the colonial system. Instead, it became a partly explicit, *partly implicit*, partly formal, partly informal, marker of difference all over the world, very much including Europe, in the service of providing cognitive scaffolding for regulating the moral geopolitics of access to privileges.

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