



HYBRIS nr 63 (2024)

ISSN: 1689-4286



<https://doi.org/10.18778/1689-4286.63.03>

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## **SLAVERY, NEOLIBERALISM, NECROPOLITICS. THE SOLAR AND NOCTURNAL BODIES OF DEMOCRACY**

### **Introduction**

For decades, the international political order has been governed by a set of principles and practices constituting what is known as liberal democracy. Key principles include the idea of human rights, globalization understood as market expansion in the neoliberal model, and the military-economic dominance of the broadly defined West under the leadership of the United States. A series of events that took place in the last decade has shaken the project of liberal democracy, to which a rich literature of both scholarly and commentary nature has been devoted (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Streeck, 2014; Applebaum, 2020; Snyder, 2017; Hopkin, 2020; Przeworski, 2019; Traverso, 2019; Krastev & Holmes, 2019). Among these

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Received: 2024-07-15 | Verified: 2024-12-15 | Accepted: 2024-12-18 Lodz, Poland  
First published online: 2025-01-03

developments are the unexpected victory of Donald Trump in the US presidential election, the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union, the migration crisis in Europe and the USA and the associated rise in xenophobic attitudes and popularity of populist parties, the implementation of military solutions to protect borders, geopolitical impotence in the Russian-Ukrainian and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, as well as the problems of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) related to China's involvement in the international credit system.

In this paper, I aim to understand the difficulties of the liberal democracy project in the context of the colonial past of Western countries, as well as their contemporary economic dominance on the international stage. My analysis employs a methodological framework that combines critical historical analysis and theoretical reflection. Historical analysis is used to trace the ideological and material underpinnings of democracy back to the colonial era, focusing on the economic practices and philosophical justifications that supported slavery and exploitation. Key sources include primary texts from Enlightenment philosophers, as well as economic data on colonial trade and its modern consequences. Integrating theoretical insights with historical data, I attempt to identify patterns of systemic problems in neoliberal regimes, arguing for the dual nature of democracy – as both emancipatory and exploitative. The specific questions this study addresses are: 1) How have historical practices of slavery and colonialism influenced the ideological and economic structure of the project of liberal democracy? 2) In what ways does the global economic system perpetuate inequalities rooted in colonial legacies? 3) How does this colonial past, as well as the neoliberal economic practices of Western countries, shape their political systems?

The article is structured into four parts. In the first, I present Foucault's concept of biopolitics and its extension into Achille Mbembe's necropolitical theory, which provides the theoretical framework for this text. In the second and third

sections, I analyze the ethical and ideological stances of European Enlightenment philosophers on slavery and colonialism, describing how these phenomena influenced the political and economic development of Western countries. In the final part, I focus on international legislation and capital flows, demonstrating how the global economic system favors the wealth of Western countries and the underdevelopment of the Global South. Drawing on Mbembe's concept of the "solar and nocturnal bodies of democracy", I argue for the close relationship between the difficulties of the Western democratic project and its colonial roots and contemporary unequal trade exchange.

### **From bio to necro – the faces of liberal power**

In the Paris lectures of 1976-1979, Michel Foucault conducted a famous study of the history of the Western political model. Its original form can be described by the term sovereign power. It denoted a system in which the monarch is juxtaposed against society, exercising control over it through authority and the force behind it. The motto of this governance model is "to make live and let die" (Foucault, 2003, p. 241). With the development of the proto-capitalist economic model, improved agricultural efficiency, and demographic growth, the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries saw a break from the previous discourses on state and power and a gradual transformation towards a disciplinary management model. Its axis was no longer the ability to inflict death, but treating subjects as a resource to be managed. Thus, the binary nature of law was replaced by regulations, constant weighing and adjustment through an elaborate system of punishments and discipline.

With further population growth and an increasingly complex economic system, another power paradigm emerged, which Foucault – after Rudolf Kjellén – called biopolitics. Its goal can be summarized as ensuring the well-being and development of the population (understood as a nation). Violence and discipline do not disappear from governing practices but are partially internalized. Theoretically,

there is a free play of individual interests and desires, but at the statistical level, it is regulated by state actions to properly direct it (Foucault, 2008, pp. 63-64). The sovereign motto is reversed: while previously death was the highest manifestation of the power's might, in the case of biopower, death definitively ends its impact. Thomas Lemke (2011, p. 2) states that biopolitics, in its most basic understanding, is simply politics focused on life (Greek: *bíos*).

This system allowed for the consolidation of concepts such as humanitarianism, self-determination of nations, and individual autonomy in relation to the state and law, but it had some contradictions hardwired into it from the beginning. Countries implementing policies of prosperity and freedom simultaneously developed weapons of mass destruction and extreme inequalities, and failed to eliminate racism, poverty, or unemployment. Reducing the individual to what Agamben (1998, p. 4) will call "bare life", that is, the mere fact of biological existence, combined with making biological existence at the population level the focal point of politics, necessitates creation of a dividing line; this line designates life "condemned" to flourish and that which is not worth it (Foucault, 2003, pp. 254-255). For this reason, it is possible to care for the well-being of the general population while ignoring the exclusion of part of the population, criminalization based on class or race, or mass deaths of migrants attempting to cross borders.

Achille Mbembe proceeded from this point, publishing his famous essay "Necropolitics" in 2003, and expanding it several years later in a collection of essays of the same title. The Cameroonian philosopher noted that the contradictions coded in the biopolitical model reveal the horizon of a new power prototype, which constitutes a peculiar combination of sovereign "sword power" with the security politics characteristic of biopower (Mbembe, 2009, p. 31). This means that management through accepting or inflicting death ceases to have a marginal status and becomes central to the political mechanism of contemporary liberal

democracies. Mbembe argues that the common denominator of contemporary management strategies is the idea of division between *us* and *them*, providing a justification for the actions taken by political parties and social organizations, both within homelands and internationally.

The philosopher traces the sources of this problem to the structure of liberal democracy, closely related to its history. In this perspective, phenomena such as human rights violations or the populist turn are not side effects of wrong decisions or "negligence", but natural consequences of the organizational-ideological model that developed through the experiences of the transatlantic slave trade and colonization. According to the dominant narrative today, at some point in its history, the Western world underwent a process of rejecting violence in favor of peaceful solutions sanctioned by law – "the hand-to-hand struggle through which physical violence was expressed in medieval society until the Renaissance has supposedly given way to self-pressuring, self-control, and civility" (Mbembe, 2019, p. 16). Mbembe argues, however, that violence never disappeared from democracy, but was expedited beyond its borders. The conquest of overseas territories and the trade in human commodities and its economic-political consequences constitute, according to him, the repressed interior of the Western world.

Democracy, notes the author of "Necropolitics", has thus adopted two faces: solar, representing the promise of prosperity and well-being, and nocturnal, being its opposite, signifying regression and violence (Mbembe, 2019, p. 22). These two bodies are closely intertwined, as necropolitics means not only forms of governance which expose people to death but, just as importantly, the capitalization of this activity (Gržinić, 2023, p. 110). The existence of the solar body of democracy is thus enabled by practices related to the creation of the nocturnal body.

## **The Flourishing of Democracy – The Flourishing of Slavery**

At the root of the idea of democracy, in its liberal form, lies the idea of individual freedom based on private property and the associated right to accumulate possessed capital. This idea developed along two distinct, yet mutually permeating fields: economic and philosophical. The flourishing movements for personal freedoms in Europe from the 17th century were closely linked to merchants' opposition to the monarchy's monopoly on wealth gained through overseas conquests. As a result of growing protests and the strengthening of the middle class, which was often synonymous with the merchant class, in the years 1690-1701, the Royal African Company's share of the slave trade fell from 90 to 8 percent between 1690 and 1701 (Horne, 2017, p. 9). In this way, the slave trade acquired a "civic" character, becoming largely the domain of independent individuals and enterprises, which led to a drastic increase in the number of slaves (Hodgson, 2017, p. 90). Leading Enlightenment and pre-Enlightenment philosophers were often shareholders or officials of companies profiting from slavery and colonialism, which was reflected in their attitudes and claims.

John Locke began his famous "Two Treatises of Government" with a radical condemnation of slavery, but at the same time – in co-writing the extremely repressive Constitutions of Carolina – he considered it obvious that white people had full sovereignty over their black slaves (Locke, 1993, p. 230). The slavery which European thinkers were opposed to was understood as the unlimited power of the monarch over his subjects, threatening their property. It was thus concerned with the condition of the citizens of the Western world, referring to their possessions, not humanity as such (Buck-Morss, 2009, pp. 27-28). Locke further believed that the conquest of overseas territories was justified by the fact that the indigenous inhabitants did not cultivate the land, and thus it was being wasted, which gave Europeans the right, in accordance with God's will, to take it over (Locke, 1993, pp. 21-28). This argument was previously expressed by Grotius, considered the "father"

of international law, who believed that "if there be any waste or barren land within our dominions, that also is to be given to strangers, at their request, or may be lawfully possessed by them, because whatever remains uncultivated, is not to be esteemed a property" (Grotius, 2005, p. 448). "Terra nullius" was also an important part of Hobbes' thought, although scholars' opinions on his views on colonialism remain divided (Liu, 2023; Springborg, 2015).

The idea of natural law, or pre-existing natural conditions that would justify the conquest of other peoples, also appears in the philosophy of French thinkers. Montesquieu, while devoting much attention to ridiculing and criticizing the practice of slavery, at the same time believed that it was understandable in areas with a warm climate - "heat enervates the body and weakens the courage so much that men come to perform an arduous duty only from fear of chastisements", therefore "slavery there runs less counter to reason" (Montesquieu, 1989, p. 251). Voltaire highly valued the benefits associated with the development of free trade, but overlooked its cost in the form of the rise of living, human commodities. Even as he recognized the suffering of slaves, he considered it a necessary evil, as it signified global development (Giovannetti-Singh, 2022, pp. 24-36).

Similarly, for Hegel, the creation of new financial markets was synonymous with the progress of all humanity, which was ultimately to benefit even the enslaved - he considered the status of a white man's slave to be ontologically superior to the natural state of existence of an African inhabitant, which equated to cruelty and lack of ability to feel the need for freedom (Bernasconi, 1998, pp. 50-56). John Stuart Mill, although he criticized slavery with all firmness, recognized that "Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians" (Mill, 2003, p. 95). A contemporary of Mill's, Alexis de Tocqueville (2001, pp. 71-72), recommended brutalizing the treatment of the Algerian civilian population and its total subordination to the goals of the colonizers. Between 1700 and 1850, roughly

marking the epoch of the Enlightenment, when treatises proclaiming freedom as an inalienable human characteristic were written en masse on the continent, the number of slaves in the Americas increased almost twentyfold (Losurdo, 2011, p. 35).

The combination of the belief in the superiority of Western culture and its predestination for domination with the theory of the inferiority of "alien cultures" created what Mbembe will call necropolitical management in the form of an intertwining of violence with bureaucracy and a shift of focus from a moral evil-good opposition to a moral-economic profitable-unprofitable opposition. In the colonial area, as Hannah Arendt wrote, the colonizer assumed the function of an "administrator", characterized by "his own innate capacity to rule and dominate", implemented through "official massacres" (Arendt, 1979, p. 216). The continental path to democracy not only did not eliminate racial divisions but actually perpetuated them (Mbembe, 2019, p. 6), as they were functional for it. Building the industrial power of Europe, and later the United States, was made possible by the exploitation of labor and natural resources in overseas territories – it was there that black bodies became "simultaneously an exchange value and a use value" (Mbembe, 2021), fueling with their work the productive capacity of countries entering the path of democratization, but equally importantly, creating the Western middle class by providing access to cheap consumer goods (Burnard & Riello, 2020, pp. 240-243). The democratic system is thus indebted to the practices of slavery and colonialism on both an ideological and purely material level.

### **Colonial Foundations of European Economic Success**

Adam Smith (1978, p. 181) argued that the abolition of slavery in a republican system is almost impossible, demonstrating the link between owning slaves and democratization. The access of the merchant class, and later the general public, to the benefits of overseas conquests allowed the strengthening of Western



power while weakening the significance of the monarchy. Zak Cope (2019, p. 22) summarizes that between the 16th and 19th centuries, six major sources of European wealth can be identified, all closely related to overseas conquests: the export of precious metals from South America, the Dutch spice trade, the slave trade, slave labor in the West Indies, the opium trade, and income from colonial lands.

From the beginning of The Age of Discovery until 1776, 85% of the people who crossed the Atlantic were forcibly transported Africans (Dodson, 2002, p. 13), who served as cheap labor. The increase in slave shipment is closely correlated with the development of European cities (Derenoncourt, 2008, pp. 8-9). The use of slaves enabled the production of cotton, crucial for the onset of the British Industrial Revolution, which soon spread across the continent (Beckert, 2014). Besides cotton, goods such as sugar, coffee, and tobacco facilitated rapid economic growth and effective competition with China and India. An important role was also played by the transport of raw materials serving as payment assets. It is estimated that between 1530 and 1780, over half of Western Europe's economic growth came from the supply of precious metals from the Americas (Chen et al., 2024, pp. 14-15). These allowed Europe not only to make investments but also to import Chinese goods (Pomeranz, 2000, p. 273). In the 1830s, the British press reported that 3/4 of British coffee, 15/16 of cotton, 22/23 of sugar, and 34/35 of tobacco came from slave labor (Drescher, 1986, p. 170). A few decades later, the foreign assets (mostly related to colonies) of English and French owners amounted to even 25% of their wealth (Piketty, 2020, p. 279).

These facts led anthropologist David Graeber to reject both the liberal and Marxist interpretations of history, in which the transition to capitalism is tantamount to the displacement of previous production models by wage labor. Indeed, the development of capitalism leads to a rapid growth in the scale of slavery, which in the Middle Ages was almost eliminated in European countries. It is not

wage labor, Graeber argues (2006, pp. 78-81), but slavery that constituted the true characteristic of nascent, industrial capitalism. The commodification of slave bodies meant unlimited access to the work they provided, which was the basis for capital accumulation - "what one buys when one buys a slave is the sheer capacity to work" (Graeber, 2009, p. 79). It is the slavery that founds the future development of wage labor by enabling wage increases for workers from profits from overseas plantations and factories, thus increasing purchasing power and further investments. Economist Joan Robinson (1970, pp. 65-66) concludes that the Western working class benefited from colonialism on three levels:

"First of all, raw materials and foodstuffs were relatively cheap compared to manufactures which maintained the purchasing power of their wages. (...) Secondly, the great fortunes made in industry, commerce, and finance spilled over to the rest of the community in taxes and benefactions, while continuing investment kept the demand for labor rising with the population (...). Finally, lording it around the world as members of the master nations, they could feed their self-esteem upon notions of racial superiority".

Beyond purely material aspects, the colonial experience directly contributed to the development of modern accounting, insurance systems, labor organization, criminal law, and methods of managing large enterprises (Batou, 2011; Harley, 2015). Mbembe (2019, pp. 19-20) notes that the benefits of slavery and colonies also shaped European culture, such as the development of museums (by bringing artifacts from the colonies), art (through access to new raw materials and dyes), public institutions, and dietary habits. An example is tea beverages. Tea, initially considered a luxury good, quickly spread first in Great Britain and the Netherlands, then in other countries, allowing the population to consume fluids other than contaminated water, disease-prone milk, or alcohol (Kemasang, 2009). As a drink with antibacterial and stimulant properties, tea positively influenced work

efficiency, thus supporting intensive industrialization. Similarly sugar, after the development of trade routes, became a product accessible to the lower and middle classes. This meant a change in dietary habits for the better by providing the body with more calories. It became possible to produce food items such as preserves, which facilitated survival during the winter season. According to anthropologist Sidney Wilfred Mintz (1985, pp. 143, 148), sugar also contributed to the engagement of women and children in work, as it shortened the time needed to prepare meals, allowing them to be stored for a longer period.

One of the raw materials that had a crucial impact on the lives of citizens in democratic countries was rubber, essential for the development of both the automotive and electric power industries. This particular resource is associated with one of the greatest genocides in human history, which took place in the Belgian Congo and resulted in several million victims (Nowak, 2011, pp. 277-281). The country's organizational structure was fully subordinated to exploitation regardless of the consequences (Buelens et al., 2009, pp. 158-159). As the genocide spread, the shares of European companies involved in the exploitation of the Belgian Congo rose dramatically, even by several thousand percent (Morel, 1902, pp. 335-337). The Congolese tragedy specifically illustrates the duality of European policy – the prelude to turning the country into a private enterprise was the establishment of the International Association for the Exploration and Civilization of Central Africa, a humanitarian organization initiated by King Leopold, which was supposed to bring "enlightenment" to the natives. The colonial world enabled the emergence of a distinctive doublethink, encoded in the very foundations of liberal democracy, which was forged in opposition to "the stranger, the Muslim, the veiled woman, the refugee, the Jew, or the Negro" (Mbembe, 2019, p. 30).

## Contemporary Economic Domination

With the ongoing liberalization of trade since the 1970s, deindustrialization of Western countries occurred, and production shifted mainly to Asian countries. Thus, the world of finance, including stock transactions, investment funds, hedging, and the derivatives market, became an important area of corporate activity (Gowan, 1999, p. 56). These forms of endeavor benefit not only the upper class, which makes direct capital investments, but the entire society due to the involvement of pension and savings funds in the stock market as part of asset diversification. Hence, the dominance of international corporations in the global money circulation affects all societies of liberal democracies. Just as Enlightenment philosophers who preached the idea of supranational equality had trouble to extend it to non-white slaves, as it would hurt their material assets, today's democratic societies, despite proclaiming human rights ideals, are unwilling to change the international balance of power, since it ensures relative prosperity in their own countries.

During the colonial period, metropolises were able to impose their policies on subordinate countries directly, while today this is done through the use of their bargaining power. Developing countries must compete for investment capital by reducing investment costs, mainly in the form of labor costs. However, attracting foreign investments does not necessarily mean development, as most of them are aimed at taking over existing enterprises rather than creating additional production and jobs (Chang, 2011, p.84). Development is all the more difficult because in the event of financial crises, investors withdraw their resources from developing countries, while this is precisely when investment is most needed (Rajan, 2011, Chapter Three). Creating national potent businesses is a hard-to-implement alternative; It demands protectionist policies (which have been the source of economic success for Western countries), while such policies – in the name of “free trade” – are strictly prohibited for developing countries. Economist Ha-joon Chang (2023, p. 73) notes that “the WTO puts fewer restrictions on trade protection

and subsidies for agricultural producers than for manufacturing firms. It is not difficult to guess why – relatively speaking, rich countries have weaker agriculture and poor countries have weaker manufacturing".

The result is that the food market is dominated by a dozen corporations that control the global trade of grain and livestock, but also food processing technologies, access to pesticides, and seeds. Due to the extreme imbalance of power between countries, the rates for food production are very low, while the costs of seeds and pesticides are high, as are the final product prices (sometimes exceeding 1000 times the cost of production) (Cope, 2019, p. 40). Thus, the profit of Western countries is generated without real participation in production, primarily through the ability to impose high margins on products made in subordinated areas. Jason Hickel (2017, Chapter One: The Development Delusion) summarizes that "there is a yawning gap between the 'real value' of the labour and goods that poor countries sell and the prices they are actually paid for them." Moreover, the pressure of international financial institutions on increasing exports by developing countries favors basing the economy on the export of raw materials, such as cocoa, coffee and copper, which are susceptible to price fluctuations and not conducive to technological development (Chang, 2011, p. 118).

In addition to trade dependencies, the global hierarchy of states is maintained through the institution of debt. In the second half of the 20th century, developing countries, often only recently independent, financed their development (as well as increasingly expensive oil) through loans from international financial bodies and Western governments, usually borrowed in dollars (Gereffi, 1984). When U.S. interest rates rose dramatically in the late 1970s, it marked the beginning of the debt crisis that continues to this day. New loans, instead of being spent on development, are used to repay other obligations. To stabilize the political situation, developing countries had to use the help of the World Bank and the IMF. However,

it was contingent on implementing adjustment plans that transformed local economies into a free-market model, most beneficial for Western businesses.

According to a study by Global Financial Integrity and the Centre for Applied Research (2016, IV), in recent decades, developing countries have received capital inflows (in the form of investments and financial support) from developed countries worth less than the amounts exploited from them. For example, in 2012, developing countries received funds worth \$2 trillion, while funds over twice as large – worth \$5 trillion – flowed out (Hickel, 2017, Chapter One: The Development Delusion). Moreover, the structure of the global financial system favors the misappropriation of a significant portion of financial aid by local elites. This is the result of the neoliberal revolution of the late 1970s and early 1980s, as a result of which, again in the name of the free market, international control over financial flows was minimized. This considerably facilitates the transfer of funds to tax havens (Andersen et al., 2022). Peripheral countries also receive regular transfers from the Global North in the form of humanitarian aid. However, for every dollar of aid (including debt relief), poor countries lose 14 dollars due to trade barriers imposed by wealthy countries – at the same time, they are required to remove barriers to capital flows within their own countries (Cope, 2019, p. 19).

The policies of neoliberalism discussed here have also brought about transformations in liberal democratic countries that have resulted in the flexibilization of labor markets, the weakening of trade unions, and the establishment of a cross-party consensus in which planning policies are replaced by the idea of a self-regulating market (Chiapello & Boltanski, 2018; Piketty, 2017; Slobodian, 2018; Streeck, 2014; Varoufakis, 2011; Vogl, 2014). This has created winners and losers of the transformation from welfare state to workfare state, developing a sense of frustration and helplessness, leading to the rise in popularity of anti-system groups, mainly of a conservative nature (Bartel, 2022; Mair, 2023;

Sajó et al., 2023; Streeck, 2017). In states governed by the paradigm of financial profit, everything, including human life, becomes a profit and loss account. The potentiality of embracing the Other (whether in the form of migrants or, for example, more equitable trade relations) can only be considered in terms of its financial consequences.

At the same time, as demonstrated above, the politics of hostility and division are not exclusively the domain of populist environments, but the backbone and fabric of modern Western democracies. Neoliberal austerity policies foster the transfer of this repressed interior to the political mainstream which results in the electoral successes of radical groups (Gabriel et al., 2023). Hostility and division thus become both a grassroots social affect and a technology of power. The populist turn advocates for a return to the idea of a strong state while voicing opposition to migration, and expressing ideas with a nationalistic tinge. Such groups appear not only on the right (Alternative für Deutschland, Fratelli d'Italia, Se Acabó La Fiesta, Rassemblement National, Partij voor de Vrijheid) but also on the left (Movimento 5 Stelle, Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht, Sozialdemokratiet).

## **Conclusions**

European universalism used slogans of human dignity and equality, but they were often confined within the European horizon, justifying or excusing the enslavement of overseas territories. Mbembe demonstrates that the ontological foundation on which the liberal democracy project was built contains a component of separation and domination over the Other. The phenomenon that is referred to today as the crisis of liberal democracy is a form of necropolitical turn – it results from the rejection of the pursuit of universalism and equality and its displacement by the universal projection of division (Ragatieri & Da Silva Santos, 2022): "This is the 'world of undesirables': of Muslims encumbering the city; of Negroes and other

strangers that one owes it to oneself to deport; of (supposed) terrorists that one tortures by oneself or by proxy" (Mbembe, 2019, pp. 38-39).

Thus, from a historical perspective, democracy has a solar and nocturnal body – it provides equality and prosperity, but this happens at the cost of subordination and oppression. According to Mbembe (2019, pp. 16-17), the violence and exploitation of colonies were the reverse of the development of democracy and civil liberties in Europe. Enlightenment ideas encouraged the liberalization of the legal regime in European countries, and at the same time produced a belief in the civilizational superiority of the white race, which provided justification for plunder – and simultaneously was a condition for industrial development, conducive to the weakening of the monarchy and the consolidation of the political importance of the middle class. The development of culture and pluralism of public debate in one place was closely related to the vision of the historical necessity of enslaving other places.

Facing the colonial heritage is made difficult by the fact that Western societies in general benefit from poor countries remaining in the underdevelopment stage. The development of capitalism and democracy has been closely intertwined with the necessity of growth and profit. Despite the collapse of the colonial order, the system of international dependency of developing countries has been maintained and functions to this day through wealth transfer mechanisms such as weakening control of capital flows and the development of tax havens, generating added value through low-paid work in developing countries, trade misinvoicing, and unequal exchange. The legacy of slavery and colonialism, combined with the contemporary system of economic inequalities, constitute a component that prevents the democratic project from closure, setting it in a state of constant suspension. In other words, the historically dual structure of the democratic order makes this system permanently vulnerable to the return of authoritarianism, and to the transfer to its interior of violence and exceptionalism characteristic of administering overseas colonies.



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## **NIEWOLNICTWO, NEOLIBERALIZM, NEKROPOLITYKA. DZIENNE I NOCNE CIAŁA DEMOKRACJI**

### **Abstrakt**

Artykuł podejmuje próbę zbadania współczesnego kryzysu demokracji liberalnej, osadzając go w kontekście spuścizny kolonialnej oraz trwającej dominacji ekonomicznej krajów Zachodu. Tekst śledzi powstanie idei praw człowieka i wolnego handlu, łącząc je z praktykami niewolnictwa i wyzysku podbijanych terytoriów. Autor analizuje poglądy oświeceniowych filozofów na temat niewolnictwa i kolonializmu i przedstawia ekonomiczny wpływ tych zjawisk na rozwój krajów europejskich. Tekst przechodzi następnie do analizy obecnych międzynarodowych stosunków gospodarczych, aby pokazać, że brak równowagi sił między krajami bogatymi a rozwijającymi się prowadzi do wyzysku tych drugich. Argumentuje też, że zarówno kolonialne korzenie, jak i współczesne nierówne stosunki handlowe leżą u podstaw obecnego wzrostu populizmu i ksenofobii w krajach liberalno-demokratycznych. Głównym motywem przewodnim pracy jest zaproponowana przez Mbembe koncepcja solarnej i nocnej ciała demokracji: ciągłe przeplatanie się wewnętrznego rozkwitu gospodarczego i kulturowego ze wzrostem nierówności, populizmu i niedemokratycznych praktyk.

**Słowa kluczowe:** niewolnictwo, kolonializm, nekropolityka, neoliberalizm, demokracja

### **Abstract**

The article explores the contemporary crisis of liberal democracy, framing it within the colonial heritage and ongoing economic dominance of Western countries.

It traces the rise of the idea of human rights and free trade, linking it with the practices of slavery and exploitation of conquered territories. The author examines Enlightenment philosophers' views on slavery and colonialism and outlines the economic consequences of these historical phenomena to analyze how they contributed to the democratization and economic development of European countries. The text proceeds to examine current international economic relations to show how the imbalance of power between rich and developing countries leads to exploitation of the latter. The article argues that both colonial roots and contemporary unequal trade relations underpin the current rise of populism and xenophobia in Western countries faced. The main guiding theme of the work is Mbembe's proposed idea of the solar and nocturnal body of democracy: the constant intertwining of internal economic and cultural flourishing with the rise of inequality, populism and undemocratic practices.

**Keywords:** slavery, colonialism, necropolitics, neoliberalism, democracy