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### Capitalism's contingent entanglement with racism

Taken from a historical perspective, capitalism has unsurprisingly garnered a reputation for its racist inclinations in its various modes of accumulation of wealth throughout history. It can be continuously verified that historical modes of capitalist production have relied to a significant extent, more or less, on the expropriation and dispossession of property, assets, and capacities held by marginalized populations, and the conscripting of this confiscated capital into the value-expanding process of capital accumulation. Nancy Fraser demonstrates this historical observation and its correlation to the deep-seated racist past of capitalism in her article “Is Capitalism Necessarily Racist?”, where she connects the observation of capitalism's persistent entanglement with racial oppression throughout history to the idea that racism is fundamentally imbricated in the essential functioning of capitalism. Additionally, she posits that the expropriation of wealth regards this fundamental and inextricable tie to racial oppression. She also offers a counterpoint, arguing for capitalism's associative relationship to racism on the basis of contingency, stating that, unlike a matter of necessity, racism is not a fundamental requisite for the functioning of capitalism, and that the expropriation of wealth finding ties with racial oppression is a matter of historical contingency, not necessity. Fraser herself, despite maintaining a fairly nuanced and bilateral perspective on the question, endorses the contingency model of capitalism's association with racism, ultimately arguing for capitalism's ideological

non-necessity - but historical association - with racism. In this paper, I will argue in favor of this position, proving that capitalism as an ideology does not implement racism as a requirement, functioning on the standalone basis of exploitation of wage labor and the expropriation of capital on an indiscriminate basis. Capitalism, in this argument, thus finds a structural association with racism based only on the historical contingency that allowed both capitalism and racism to coexist and form an aggregate model based on the oppression of subordinate racial groups. Additionally, I will argue that, despite capitalism finding non-necessity in racial oppression to function, the gradual disentanglement from its contingent association with racism remains imperfect, resulting in contemporary forms of oppression, namely that of political expropriation and the mode of domination entailed by it.

From an ideological standpoint, capitalism finds non-necessity in racism to operate, instead having associated with racism throughout history on a contingently structural basis, with more recent modes of capitalism disassociating with the interimbrecating forces of exploitation and expropriation as enablers of racial oppression less and less. To distinguish necessity from contingency in terms of how capitalism associates with racism in both historical and current perspectives, it must be mentioned what the term necessity implicates, namely that the necessity of racism for the operation of capitalism implicates that capitalism as an ideology cannot function otherwise, and that, given other historical reproductions of society, capitalism will absolutely not come to exist or function without the driving force of racism, even if other historical factors are variable. The issue with necessity occurs when describing the nexus of exploitation and expropriation, with Fraser's contra contingency argument stating that expropriation finds a structural and intrinsic association to racism throughout history with the dispossession of capital maintained by subordinated people groups and its re-appropriating into

the circuits of capital expansion, a mode of racialized capital accumulation fundamentally necessary of racism. Although Fraser does have substance and validity in her argument of racism playing an integral component in capital accumulation, it must be reiterated that racism's involvement in capital accumulation is historically variable. This inherently causes racism to be invalidated as a primordial driving force of capitalism, as variability in entanglement can only imply that racism as a systematic contributing factor to capital accumulation is auxiliary and dispensable, at best, despite it being structurally associated with the economic system over history. This idea can be best exemplified by Fraser's account of capitalism's history as a sequence of regimes of racialized accumulation, which demonstrates what Fraser describes is a blurring of the lines within the nexus of expropriation and exploitation, away from the racialized color lines of earlier renditions of capitalism and towards more indiscriminate forms of exploitation and expropriation in "financialized capitalism". Fraser notes that capital accumulation will consistently require both exploitation and expropriation, validating the very definition of capitalism as a system reliant on this nexus, but disassociating it with its racial undertones, asserting "precisely how the system constructs its human subjects and assigns them to those two processes" (Fraser 37) as varying historically. Earlier forms of capitalism she mentions having had "installed a clear-cut division" (Fraser 37) with "Free, rights-bearing citizen-workers, subject 'only' to exploitation" (Fraser 37) being "sharply marked off from politically defenseless racialized subject peoples, made available for expropriation" (Fraser 37), referring to the intimate, deep-seated structural association racism had with earlier forms of capitalism. In fact, more recent historical forms of capitalism, such as laissez-faire capitalism in the nineteenth century, contained more sharpened contrasts between the freedom of the exploited and the dependency of the expropriated, showing an increasingly racialized division between the

two categorically different people groups, more so than the earlier, mercantile form of capitalism in the sixteenth century. In this mode, Fraser notes modern racism as having “found a durable anchor in the deep structure of capitalist society” (Fraser 32). Although this association may regard a seemingly inextricable link between the two ideologies and what can be considered as a symbiotic strengthening of capitalism's accumulation of wealth from racism's inherent functioning, that itself does not imply fundamental necessity, only a historical variance, and a meandering one at that. Fraser notes, “by contrast, the financialized capitalism of the twenty-first century dispenses with that sharp division”, not separating people based on racial lines, but subjecting “propertyless people of every hue to both exes simultaneously” (37), referring to the indiscriminate subjection of any and every individual into the nexus of exploitation and expropriation irregardless of racial group, a nicety of capitalism as an individual ideology, not one of racial necessity. In modern financialized capitalism, Fraser argues that expropriation, formerly relegated to the subordinated racial groups divided on the basis of color, “is becoming universalized, afflicting not only its traditional subjects but also those who were previously shielded by their status as citizen-workers and free individuals” (Fraser 35). This metastasis of expropriation cannot be justified on account of racism, as its indiscriminate nature regards any possible people group as an opportunity for expropriation, a detail justifiable only by the essential workings of capitalism. Racism as an imbricating force is unnecessary in this respect, suggesting a gradual disentanglement of capitalism from racism, with “the expropriated-and-exploited citizen-worker” (Fraser 36) becoming the norm, no longer having clear-cut divisions involving peripheral populations and racial minorities, instead encompassing the population in its entirety, a form of expropriation taking on more current, modern financialized forms, such as those “veiled by a cloak of commerce” (Fraser 26), as in financial

misdeeds like predatory loans and debt foreclosures. Of course, racism in this mode of capitalism remains present, disproportionately affecting people of color. This, however, only implicates the prevalently documented contingent historical association racism has had with capitalism, not its necessity and ubiquity.

Expropriation as a form of subjection is bimodal. The historical variance in entanglement between capitalism and racism does specify, at least in one regard, how racism may only be classified as a contingent yet structural component of historical modes of capital accumulation. Despite this historical variance pointing to the idea of non-necessity, there is argumentative substance to be given to expropriation as a form of political domination, a mode of subjection that, unlike its economic counterpart, can enable racism's features to materialize in current political affairs, hence why the disentanglement between capitalism and racism remains, in a certain respect, imperfect. Expropriation in the political sense regards modes of domination, a status hierarchy that relegates subordinated groups to the status of being "inherently violable" (Fraser 29) and "deprived of political protection" (Fraser 29), causing them to lack the means to "set limits and invoke protections" (Fraser 30) against the more powerful, free citizens. This inherently then becomes a matter of "political exposure" (Fraser 30), with political agencies being the ultimate decision-makers in whether a certain group is allowed or denied this political protection in capitalist society, hence allowing political subjectivation to occur in the non-protected subordinate groups. Adopting this more macro-perspective of expropriation, one involving both modes of accumulation and political domination, does indicate how the subjugation of unfree, violable people groups in the capitalist periphery, as mentioned by Fraser, can constitute a structurally dependent relationship between racism and capitalism. However, such historical patterns of expropriation, either in the form of political fabrications of dependent,

violable subjects or of racialized modes of accumulation, fails to consider the ideological, theoretical basis upon which expropriation as a mode of subjection operates. Going back to Fraser's account of capitalist development as a sequence of racial regimes, a conceptual pattern can be seen, namely that the way in which capital accumulation is structured, and with it, the methods in which political exposure is distributed across people groups, indicates that later forms of capitalism is dispelling racial oppression in its political-economic structure. Subjected populations in the periphery and the free, exploited citizen-worker of the metropole have been combined in more recent forms of capitalism, doing away with the clear-cut racialized divisions that had made up the modes of racialized capitalist accumulation in earlier forms of capitalism. Despite this, racism in its various forms of oppression still coexists with the economic system, with Fraser making several caveats about the viciously predatory world of financialized capitalism engendering racial antagonisms, specifically those of right-wing authoritarian populism. Fraser does, however, prognosticate what a non-racial capitalism could entail under current societal conditions, interpreting it as either a regime in which people of color are proportionately represented in positions of power and influence, or as an extension of the "expropriated-cum-exploited victims" (Fraser 39), owing to the possibility of, as has been reiterated, the indiscriminate basis by which expropriation operates. Fraser notes that, at best, this form of non-racial financialized capitalism would lead to "equal-opportunity domination amidst rising racial animosity" (Fraser 39), the domination being a problem inherent only to capitalism. Given these conditions, racism cannot easily be extinguished by a transition to "equal-opportunity domination", considering the nexus of exploitation and expropriation will continue to operate on an indiscriminate basis and dominate every class and racial group, afflicting racial minority groups more so due to their historical positioning in the lower ranks of

society. Therefore, capitalism's persistent entanglement with racism, although not owing to their necessary association with one another, continues to - as has been historically substantiated - dominate all types of class and race positions, proving that this disentanglement, while lessening in magnitude and severity over time, remains far from perfect.

Although capitalism does continue to consistently find itself in congruence with racism, that relationship alone cannot prove racism as having played an elementary and fundamental role in the construction of capitalism as an ideology, only that historical contingencies have allowed them to coexist and closely associate thus far. Notwithstanding that such a contingent association continues to present-day forms of capitalism, the argument of racism as a fundamental necessity cannot justify expropriation as operating on an indiscriminate basis. Moreover, racism in its individual, ideological form is the root cause for the historically disadvantaged positions racial minorities have occupied over time, capitalism being merely the vehicle by which contingent associations of racism materialize as racial oppression. This, ultimately, does not prove its necessity in the economic system, but only its contingent, historical association.

## References

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