

# Bioracism, or, Spiritual Evolutionism

A. Kiarina Kordela

## I. From Space to Race

On November 10, 2004, eight days after the murder of the film director Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam, Etienne Balibar was invited to Radboud University in Nijmegen, the oldest city in the Netherlands, to offer that year's Alexander von Humboldt Lecture in Human Geography. The title of his talk, which was subsequently translated and published in several European languages, was "Europe as Borderland," indicating that far from "being a solution or a prospect," "the issue of citizenship and cosmopolitanism" in Europe must be based on the fact that "Europe currently exists as a borderland."<sup>1</sup> By this, Balibar means that "the question of 'borders'...is central when we reflect about citizenship and, more generally, political association"; and the question of borders itself in turn presupposes "address[ing] the issue of *political spaces*" as a means of representing specifically "European borders" (194).

Balibar classifies the approaches to this latter question under "*four conflicting patterns* of 'political spaces': "the *clash-of-civilizations pattern*; the *global network pattern*; the *center-periphery pattern*; and, finally, the *crossover pattern*, corresponding to a representation of Europe as 'borderland'" (194). These patterns "seem to be largely incompatible," tending to "be associated with *opposite policies* concerning nationality and citizenship, residence and mobility, activity and security" (194).

A comparison between the first and second models makes this apparent. While the clash-of-civilizations pattern always maintains, precisely, a clash of civilizations—however this may be demarcated (e.g., politico-economically, as in the Cold War and the "West and the rising superpower of the East (China)" models, or religiously, as in the Christian-Islam divide)—the global network pattern, in all its "antagonistic" conceptions, is always predicated on the same "common assumptions, 'postmodernist' in the broad sense," which always lead to the same "paradoxical consequence," namely, "the *dissolution of the object* itself" (195–197). In Balibar's paraphrase, for the global network pattern:

'Europe,' in a sense, is a phantom of the past, a name that 'is history' rather than society, politics, or economics, since the flows of capitalization, population, communication, and political action, cross its territory, investing in its cities and workplaces, but do not elect it as a permanent or specific site. Europe is not only deterritorialized, but also delocalized, put 'out of itself,' and in the end deconstructed. It may be part of the imaginary, but less and less of the real (197).

While for the first pattern, there remains always an irreconcilable clash between civilizations, for the second pattern, the global flow of capital renders both clashes and territorial demarcations as imaginary chimeras of the past, thereby dissipating "Europe" as an object.

Let us now turn to the “center-periphery model,” the third pattern which remains essential in Balibar’s attempt to formulate the fourth “crossover” pattern of “Europe as ‘borderland.’” This differs from the first two insofar as it does not ascribe to the dissolution of the object (even as it may no longer be “Europe” in the old sense of the word) and it sustains the notion of the clash (even as it may not be one of “civilizations” at least, again, not in the old sense of the word) (194). This is possible because this pattern conceives of the *clash as internal to the object*. What can then be the object and clash—the rift within the object—indicated by the third pattern?

In the wake of the pioneering work of Fernand Braudel, and as part of neo-Marxist critiques of the notion of “development” in the Third World, Immanuel Wallerstein elaborates the idea of a distinction between center and periphery, aiming at providing a systemic description of the economic and power relations of the capitalist world-system in its successive forms since its first phase of expansion in the sixteenth century.<sup>2</sup> According to this model, Balibar writes that:

[Globalization] is not a ‘late’ product of the transformation of capitalism into imperialism, but it was already there since the great discoveries of the 16th century, which laid the bases for the development of capitalism as a mode of production, the transformation of medieval kingdoms into modern nation-states...and the emergence of ‘universalistic’ ideologies (198).

One advantage of the center-periphery model lies in its pursuit of the concrete historical formations of capitalism—such as its imperialist tendency and its development into what today we call global capitalism—back to “the bases for the development of capitalism,” that is, to those elements *structurally* required for the development of the capitalist mode of production. One such aspect was the necessary “transformation” of small-scale and relatively isolationist “medieval kingdoms” (which were the economic molecules constituting even the largest empires) into more expansive and encompassing “modern nation-states.”

Another major thesis of the center-periphery model is that the distinction in question—between center and periphery—“is not a simple binary opposition (such as ‘North-South,’ or ‘developed-underdeveloped’)”; rather, Balibar continues, “it involves more concentric divisions” (198).

This idea constitutes the bridge to the fourth model of “crossover, ‘overlapping folds,’ or *nappes superposées*,” which reverses the meaning of the old theories of *Mitteleuropa* [Middle Europe] to argue that “in the very ‘heart’ of Europe all languages, religions, cultures are coexisting and mixing, with origins and connections all over the world.” Therefore, if the “middle of Europe” is at all “a ‘middle,’ then,” as “Edward Said put it in one of his last interviews speaking about ‘major’ and ‘minor’ literatures,” it “is not a center, but, rather, ‘a series of assembled peripheries.’”<sup>3</sup> The thrust of this line of argument, as Balibar comments, is that:

There is no ‘center’; there are only ‘peripheries.’ Or, better said, each region of Europe is or could be considered a ‘center’ in its own right, because it is made of overlapping peripheries, each of them open (through

‘invasions,’ ‘conquests,’ ‘refuges,’ ‘colonizations,’ and ‘postcolonial migrations,’ etc.) to influences from all other parts of Europe, and from the whole world. This creates a potential for ethnic and religious conflicts, but also for hybridity and cultural invention (200).

Therefore, according to the crossover model, as Balibar argues, it is:

...impossible to represent Europe's history as a story of pure identities, running the danger of becoming progressively alienated. Its history can be represented only in terms of constructed identities, dependent on a series of successive encounters between ‘civilizations’ (if one wants to keep the word), which keep taking place within the European space, enclosing populations and cultural patterns from the whole world (200).

Having arrived at this conclusion, however, it is crucial to sustain its difference from both the fashionable conceptual sloppiness of misunderstood “postmodernism” and the traditionalism of essentialized civilizations. To speak of a coexistence of and encounters between elements “from the whole world” taking place “within the European space” is not in the least tantamount to either the (perceived) dissolution of the object or the perpetuation of a clash between (perceived) unalloyed fixed objects—whereby “object” refers to both “space” and “elements” (i.e., quasi-civilizations). Thus, we are returning to our initial question: What is the object and what is the split and clash within it? What are the two struggling sides of the same coin which is our world (the global and multiculturalist capitalist world-system of almost the last five centuries) if it is not a clash of civilizations or nation-states or even a class struggle, yet again, in the old sense of the word?

To respond to this question, I turn first to Balibar’s summary of another of the major theses of the center-periphery pattern:

[A] world system of economies and states also means an international division of labor: not only a specialization of certain regions and countries around certain types of products (industrial, raw material, agriculture, etc.), but, above all, a hierarchization of the labor force, with or without compensatory migrations, and corresponding ideological representations of ‘different humankinds’ (which explains, at least in part, why racism, in general, is ‘structural’ in such a world system) (198).

The world system of global capital entails an “international division of labor,” in which the “hierarchization of the labor force” is predicated not so much on the “specialization” of labor around “types of products,” but on “corresponding ideological representations of ‘different humankinds.’” Balibar concludes that this division of the world-system into “different humankinds” reveals that, next to the aforementioned expansive or imperialist structural tendency, racism is yet another “structural” constituent of the world-system of capitalism. In raising *racism* to a structurally necessary component of the modern world-system of the capitalist mode of production and nation-states, Balibar partly concurs with

a thesis central to *biopolitics*—the path-breaking reconceptualization of political power advanced by his compatriot, Michel Foucault.

## II. From Race to Biorace

In the 1970s, Foucault linked *bios*—the life and body of human beings—to political power to indicate a transformation in the mechanisms of power, beginning in the seventeenth century (i.e., with the consolidation of the capitalist mode of production as mercantilism and its corollary, imperialism). In this shift, political control over “juridical” matters extends to include and focus primarily on the “biological existence of a population.” The old sovereignty as “the right of seizure of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself,” gradually yielded to “the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life,” with its various “disciplines of the body” and “the regulations of the population” as to its “propagation, births...mortality...health, life expectancy and longevity,” all of which are functions pertaining to the biological bodies of individuals and populations.<sup>4</sup> With this transition—in which the power of the sovereign is supplemented by and becomes primarily biopolitical power, so that the central object of power becomes the administration and normalization of life under the ultimate banner of its protection—the question emerges, in Foucault’s words:

How will the [sovereign] power to kill and the function of murder operate in this technology of power, which takes life as both its object and its objective?...It is, I think, at this point that racism intervenes...What in fact is racism? It is primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life...the break between what must live and what must die...a relationship between my life and the death of the other that is not a military or warlike relationship of confrontation, but a biological-type relationship: ‘The more inferior species die out...the more I—as a species rather than individual—can live, the stronger I will be...’ This is not, then, a military, warlike, or political relationship, but a biological relationship...We are dealing with a mechanism that allows biopower to work. So racism is bound up with the workings of a State that is obliged to use race, the elimination of races and the purification of the race, to exercise its sovereign power...Nazism alone took the play between the sovereign right to kill and the mechanisms of biopower to this paroxysmal point. But this play is in fact inscribed in the workings of all...modern States...And so, quite naturally, we find that racism—not truly an ethnic racism, but racism of the evolutionist kind, biological racism—is fully operational (254–262).

Both Balibar, in pursuing the logic of the center-periphery analytical model, and Foucault, following the logical consequences of biopolitical power, arrive at the conclusion that *racism is a structural*—i.e., indispensable—*operation in our world-system*. Yet, *each thinker emphasizes a very different aspect*. Foucault emphasizes that the racism in question—properly modern or biopolitical racism—is not “ethnic” but of an “evolutionist” or “biological” kind (as we know it from Nazism, in its extreme form). Balibar instead speaks of a racism neither ethnic nor biological, but one predicated on an

*international division and hierarchization of labor force and a corresponding division in the ideological representations of different humankind*s. In other words, according to Balibar, the core racist distinction—the “break between what must live and what must die”—is not constituted on the basis of (to be sure, ideological) evolutionist-biological criteria, but on the ideological representations of different humankinds, which are correlative with the (real) new international division and hierarchization of labor forces, beyond the old divisions of labor according to kinds of products.

Given its international or global character, this division of humankinds and labor forces must, therefore, be conceived in terms that revise the old conceptions of both “space” and “civilization.” To this end, Balibar expands further the afore-cited description of Europe according to the crossover model as follows:

[Europe’s] history can be represented only in terms of *constructed identities*, dependent on a series of successive *encounters* between ‘civilizations’ (if one wants to keep the word), which keep taking place *within* the European space, enclosing populations and cultural patterns from the whole world. Just as it is necessary to acknowledge that in each of its ‘regions’ Europe always remains heterogeneous and *differs from itself* as much as it *differs from others* (including the ‘new Europes’ elsewhere in the world) (200).

This passage indicates that the crucial gesture in grasping the logic of the international division of humankinds lies in gaining insight into the “successive *encounters* between ‘civilizations’...taking place *within* the European space,” as a result of which we do not have a Europe differing from some non-Europe, but European “regions,” each of which always “*differs from itself* as much as it *differs from others*.” Equally crucial is the observation that the said “*encounters* between ‘civilizations’” are “enclosing populations and cultural patterns from the whole world,” that is, both from without and within Europe. It is this latter, the clash of “civilizations” *within the object* (Europe) that makes Europe *differ from itself* in the first place, and provides the mold for its difference from anything without Europe, including the “new Europes” elsewhere in the world.

Indeed, when Max Weber undertakes the task of explaining the preconditions for the establishment of capitalist economy by means of a methodology that goes beyond simplistically understood materialism, his primary innovation consists of reformulating the question in terms of “civilizations.” The issue, Weber argues, is how is it possible, *not* for capitalist *economy*, but for the *spirit* of capitalism to dominate the world? And his answer begins with the realization that the “spirit of capitalism...had to fight its way to supremacy against a whole world of hostile forces”—by which he means no fleets, be they military or merchant, but the forces of the “state of mind,” what we here loosely call “civilizations” (56).<sup>5</sup> For the first centuries of capitalism, the “most important opponent with which the spirit of capitalism...has had to struggle, was...traditionalism,” that is, “that type of attitude” or civilization in which a man wants “simply to live as he is accustomed to live and to earn as much as it is necessary for that purpose” (58-60). By contrast, the “civilization” of capitalism lives on the “wish to earn more and more money ...an attitude [that] is by no means a product of nature...but can only be the product of a long and arduous process of education” (60, 62). The dominance of capitalism

presupposes a “process of education” through which the traditionalist “attitude” that is concerned with “continual calculations of how the customary wage may be earned with a maximum of comfort and a minimum of exertion” has to be replaced with a “civilization” for which “labour must...be performed as if it were an absolute end in itself, a calling [*Beruf*]” (61–62).<sup>6</sup> In identifying the clash between the two civilizations as a “process of education,” and specifically as a religious (Protestant) education, Weber also indicates that even as violent outbursts are never excluded, the clash in question is primarily cultural, ideological, and hegemonic.

As for the spaces or regions of Europe that clashed (and sometimes continue to clash) with one another throughout this process, Weber mentions many—from Italy and South Europe versus Germany, and North versus South Germany, to various specific regions in Germany and other Western-Central European territories. Whatever their concrete historical and geopolitical circumstances, they are always subsumable under two “civilizations” or humankinds. These correspond to the formation of a division between two inter-European (and, given the various waves of immigration throughout this history, international) classes of labor force and humankinds that transgress and cut across all “types” of labor: the race of the “conscientious” ones with “a developed sense of responsibility” and a “professional calling” that lies above and beyond any other obligation, as well as personal pleasure and leisure—in short, the race of the spirit of capitalism—and the “traditionalist” race (61).<sup>7</sup> Whatever encounters, intersections, hybridizations, and clashes of other “civilizations” that the European geopolitical space may have experienced in the past (and continue to experience in the present), *it is fundamentally in terms of the encounter between these two primary “civilizations” that it forms a “borderland.”*<sup>8</sup>

Weber’s ultimate point is the assertion that, although the spirit of capitalism, the “rational conduct on the basis of the idea of the calling,” was “born...from the spirit of Christian asceticism,” its “essential elements...are the same” as those constituting “the content of the Puritan worldly asceticism, only without the religious basis, which by [Benjamin] Franklin’s time had died away” (180).<sup>9</sup> Toward the very end of his seminal work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904–05), Weber dares to extend his findings into a vague prophecy worth citing extensively:

The Puritan *wanted* to work in a calling; we are *forced* to do so. For when asceticism was carried out of the cells into everyday life, and began to dominate everyday morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order...In Baxter’s view the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the ‘saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment.’<sup>10</sup> But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage....In the field of its highest development, in the United States, the pursuit of wealth, stripped of its religious and ethical meaning, tends to become associated with purely mundane passions....No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether...entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals....For the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: ‘*Specialists without spirit*,

*sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved* (181–182, emphasis mine).

The entailed culmination of Weber's thesis is that the ascetic principle evolved into the "everyday morality" of capitalist "everyday life," in other words, the "pursuit of wealth" for its own sake. The "spirit of capitalism" can reach its full realization only when this "everyday morality" becomes fully "stripped of its religious and ethical meaning" or "spirit," and is instead concerned with purely "mundane passions." At this point, the new obstacle or inimical force that the spirit of capitalism has to struggle against for its dominance becomes *spirit* itself qua *religio-ethical meaning*. The rift within the object "capitalist world-system" is one between the spiritless spirit of the endless accumulation of capital and a spirit motivated by any other meaning or purpose, which is thus automatically experienced as "religio-ethical." In the constellation of this at once internal and international struggle, religion becomes the site *par excellence* in which all forces opposing the spirit of capitalism are condensed, in the same stroke as humanity is divided in two humankind: the secularists and the religious.

The criterion of racial difference operative in the capitalist biopolitical world-system, therefore, turns out to be, *pace* Foucault, not biological evolutionism, but what deserves the name of *spiritual evolutionism*. Accordingly, the state of total subjection to the spirit of capitalism and the elimination of any other spirit constitutes the highest form of life, the race of those who have "attained a level of civilization never before achieved." Any other form of life represents an inferior "civilization" or race. In the process of defending the perseverance of the "superior" race, the "inferiors" must be eliminated, preferably through a renewed "process of education"—but also, if necessary, and, as we shall see below, as some people argue today, with force.

*Properly, biopolitical racism, bioracism, therefore reveals that bios, the body, and life in question, is spirit.* At this point, we must turn to the greatest Dutch (and Marano) philosophical figure, Benedict de (Baruch) Spinoza, whose specter retroactively reveals itself as subtending and informing the core of the entire thesis advanced here. I am referring specifically to Spinoza's path-breaking persistence against Descartes on the "union of Mind and Body," or *a fortiori*, that from the metaphysical perspective, the "*Mind is the Body*."<sup>11</sup> Today's revelation of bioracism as spiritual racism (between secularists and religious) seals Spinoza's foresight.

### **III. Dutch Bioracism: The Reappropriation of the Enlightenment**

Notorious for its resilience as it is, the world order of capitalism has for centuries avoided a direct confrontation with the religious order, even as such a confrontation follows with structural necessity from the preceding line of thought. In fact, the more advanced the development of the capitalist mode of production in a region of the world has been, the greater has been its tolerance toward *otherness*, religious or otherwise. Already in the seventeenth-century Dutch republic (now the Netherlands), Spinoza stated, not without an admixture of marvel, gratitude, and pride:

The city of Amsterdam reaps the fruits of this freedom in its own great prosperity and in the admiration of all other people. For in this most

flourishing state, and most splendid city, men of every nation [or race, according to other translations] and religion live together in the greatest harmony, and ask no questions before trusting their goods to a fellow-citizen, save whether he is rich or poor, and whether he generally acts honestly, or the reverse. His religion and sect is considered of no importance: for it has no effect before the judges in gaining or loosing a cause, and there is no sect so despised that its followers—provided that they harm no one, pay everyman his due, and live uprightly—are deprived of the protection of the magisterial authority.<sup>12</sup>

The motto and (at least ideal) *modus operandi* of the capitalist world-system has always been to neutralize *practically* its *structural* opposition with its *other* (nations, races, religions, or sects), not by attacking it but precisely by considering it “of no importance”—“provided,” of course, that its members “harm no one, pay everyman his due, and live uprightly,” the latter being defined by no other standards than those of the spirit of capitalism.<sup>13</sup> It is, in fact, only at so-called moments of crisis that the spirit of capitalism, rather reluctantly, allows itself to get involved in direct confrontation with its *other*. Evidently, since the 1970s and 1980s, several regions of the global economy, the Netherlands eminent among them, have been experiencing a kind of crisis that was drastically intensified by the events of September 11, 2001. As a result, they cannot avoid experiencing a shift from the discourse of multicultural tolerance to direct confrontation—that is, a regression in the exercise of power from biopolitics to the exercise of sovereign power.

Not unlike biopolitics’ difficulty in justifying its explicit interventions of sovereignty, the spirit of capitalism meets its most intractable task at such moments of crisis in its attempt to justify its recourse to directly confrontational discourses and practices. In its current conjunction, the Netherlands, among other European countries, has discovered its most appropriate and amenable means in an old movement: the Enlightenment. Ian Buruma succinctly recapitulates this turn:

Until recently not much attention was paid outside the universities to the currents and crosscurrents of the Enlightenment and the Counter-Enlightenment. It was the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001...that brought the Enlightenment back to the center of political debate, especially in Holland, one of the countries where it all began more than three hundred years ago. Not just academics but politicians and popular columnists saw the Enlightenment as the fortress to be defended against Islamist extremism...[which now is] seen...as our contemporary Counter-Enlightenment.<sup>14</sup>

Both Western intellectual and public voices *and* Muslim critics of Islam claim the philosophical tradition of the Enlightenment as their ally in the fight against what is now clearly perceived as the common enemy, religion. In the May 6, 2005, issue of the Amsterdam-based Dutch newspaper *Trouw*, one can read the Dutch “philosopher” and publicist Yoram Stein commenting on two sensationalistic best sellers:

Does a civilized society need religion? Historian Jonathan Israel wrote *Radical Enlightenment* about the philosophical current which has no room for God. He says: “Hirsi Ali is an heir to Spinoza.”<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, the worldview of the Iranian scholar and columnist of a harsh critique of political Islam, Afshin Ellian, is summarized in Buruma’s recapitulation as follows:

Citizenship of a democratic state means living by the laws of the country. A liberal democracy cannot survive when part of the population believes that divine laws trump those made by man. The fruits of the European Enlightenment must be defended, with force if necessary. It is time for Muslims to be enlightened too....The Dutch government must act to protect those who criticize Islam. No religion or minority should be immune to censure or ridicule. The solution to the Muslim problem is a Muslim Voltaire, a Muslim Nietzsche—that is to say, people like ‘us, the heretics—me, Salman Rashdie, Ayaan Hirsi Ali’ (25).

All this rhetoric is unsurprisingly accompanied by an anti-European and Philo-American spirit that condemns the former’s welfare social system while propagating and justifying the latter’s practices of unbridled capitalism and militarism:

European intellectuals, in their self-hating nihilism and utopian anti-Americanism, have lost the stomach to fight for Enlightenment values. The multicultural dream is over. The West, except for the U.S., is too afraid to use its power. The European welfare state is a disastrous, patronizing system that treats people like patients (25).

For anyone who has the slightest idea of what ideas the tradition of the Enlightenment has represented (beyond its pop versions), it is conspicuously evident that such invocations are utterly preposterous and misleading—which, alas, is not to say any less effective. Buruma himself takes at face value as one “of the main claims of Enlightenment’s philosophy...that its ideas based on reason are by definition universal” (29). If one has read Hegel’s *Philosophy of History*—with its determined march from the “Oriental” to the “German World,” and the concomitant trajectory from the pagan and Judaic religions to Christianity and further to the Reformation and the Enlightenment (not to mention Nietzsche)—one would know what Buruma mistakes for a critique of the Enlightenment, namely, that “its values are not just universal, but more importantly, ‘ours,’ that is, European, Western values” (29). Or to put it in the properly understood universal idiom of the Enlightenment, Nietzsche expounds:

Even the body within which individuals treat each other as equals...if it is a living and not a dying body, has to do to other bodies what the individuals within it refrain from doing from each other: it will have to be an incarnate will to power, it will strive to grow, spread, seize, become predominant—not from any morality or immorality but because it is *living*

and because life simply *is* will to power. But there is no point on which the ordinary consciousness of Europeans resists instruction as on this: everywhere people are now raving, even under scientific disguises, about coming conditions of society in which the “exploitative aspect” of society will be removed—which sounds to me as if they promised to invent a way of life that would dispense with all organic functions. “Exploitation” does not belong to a corrupt or imperfect and primitive society: it belongs to the essence of what lives, as a basic organic function; it is a consequence of the will to power, which is after all the will of life.<sup>16</sup>

To give credit where it is due, Afshin Ellian’s argument is indeed very close to this Hegelian/Nietzschean Enlightenment, under the precondition that one admits two points. The first, as Buruma rightly puts it, is that:

The war between Ellian’s Enlightenment and...[the representatives of the Islam] is not a straightforward clash between [a particular] culture and universalism, but between two different visions of the universal, one radically secular, the other radically religious (32).

It is, therefore, a matter of the will of each vision of the universal to “strive to grow, spread, seize, become predominant” over the other. Of course, the question remains open as to whether the best means of fighting in this struggle is militarism or cultural hegemony. In either case, it must also be added that, as follows from the previous line of argument, the spirit of capitalism *today* sides with the “radically secular” vision of the universal. This is why, to quote Buruma again:

[T]here is a difference between the anticlericalism of Voltaire, who was up against one of the two most powerful institutions of eighteenth-century France, and radical secularists today battling a minority within an already embattled minority (33).<sup>17</sup>

This incommensurable difference in the needs and demands of the spirit of capitalism between the two centuries brings about yet another profound distortion in the reception and interpretation of Enlightenment philosophy. Apparently, one wants today to invoke Voltaire without also recalling that, far from being a secularist, he was not even an atheist but a deist, who notoriously also said that, “*Si Dieu n’existait pas, il faudrait l’inventer* [If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him].”<sup>18</sup> Also, in their multiple invocations of Spinoza, the secularist militants evidently forget that, far from arguing that a “civilized society” has “no room for God,” Spinoza argued that the whole world is one substance which is “God, or Nature [*deu sive natura*].”<sup>19</sup>

The specific historical struggle of the Enlightenment against the oppressive institution of the Christian church today is resuscitated as the struggle against God and religion *tout court*—in the name and support of today’s most dominant source of oppression, the spirit of capitalism. And given that “God” and “religion” are now perceived in the Western imaginary as exotic products imported from “elsewhere,” once again our (all of us) internal clash is perceived as one between “us” and “them.”

## Notes

1. Balibar 2009, p. 190.
2. Drawing on dependency theory for the concepts of “core” and “periphery,” Immanuel Wallerstein developed his theory primarily in the three volumes of *The Modern World-System*, which appeared in 1974, 1980, and 1989.
3. Balibar 2009, p. 200; referring to Katz and Smith 2003.
4. Foucault 1990, pp. 136–140.
5. It does not hurt to stress that Max Weber’s use of the term “spirit” throughout his work is to be distinguished from the Hegelian notion of the “Spirit of History” (though it is a much more complicated issue, left unexamined here, whether the various Hegelianisms do justice to Hegel’s concept of the “Spirit of History”). Far from implying any teleological necessity in the emergence and domination of capitalism, Weber stresses the precarious and contingent character of the processes that gradually allowed for its establishment. Moreover, Weber introduces the concept of the spirit of capitalism as a propaedeutic and undefined operative device, to be gradually defined through the process of his investigation, thereby eventually reversing any hitherto assumptions as to the character of the spirit in question (notably through his thesis that, instead of some worldly, cynical, and profit-oriented state of mind, capitalism is motivated by an “unworldly” spirit that strives for salvation and is guided by ascetic principles).
6. Of course, the etymological linchpin of Weber’s entire thesis lies in this German word, *Beruf*, meaning both “profession” and “calling.”
7. Forming the fundamental division organizing the world-system of capitalism, the distinction and clash between the spirit of capitalism and traditionalism underlies, and provides the explanatory scheme for, other recent events in contemporary Europe, such as the financial crisis in the Eurozone due to the economic deficit of Greece (as well as Ireland, Italy, Spain, and Portugal) and the need for bailout packages. As the Philomila Tsoukala, op-ed contributor to *The New York Times*, writes in (what to my knowledge is) the sole profound analysis of the situation, that measures such as “rising taxes,” “budget cuts,” other “cuts in public spending and civil service wages and pensions,” and the overall “weakening [of] rules protecting workers,” “overlook the basic organizing principle of Greek society—the family—and its stultifying influence on the economy.” Tsoukala continues:

Welfare programs like unemployment benefits and housing subsidies are already significantly smaller in Greece than in the rest of Europe; Greeks rely instead on government jobs and their families for support...Upward of 75 percent of Greek businesses are family-owned. Most are small and

rely on family labor, which is as flexible as it gets—in practice, no minimum-wage or maximum-hour laws apply. Women often work for their husbands without salary, and divorce laws don't effectively ensure the divorcing spouse's stake in the family business or remuneration for the work she put into it—meaning it's very difficult to leave a marriage. Young people are similarly constrained. The lucky ones land government jobs through family connections or work in a family business, 'helping out' with no pay while formally unemployed. The unlucky ones toil for meager wages at someone else's family business, where they have almost no chance of advancing into management. Many live with their parents up to the age of 35 because they can't afford to live on their own... Young people also depend on their families to supplement their wages and pay the 'tips' necessary to get decent health care... Until Greece can find a way to disentangle the private sector from the family and find another way to allocate resources—free from the intergenerational, class and gender inequities of the family unit—no amount of reform will make a difference" (Tsoukala 2010).

In short, only a restructuring of Greek society that eliminates its traditionalist organization (around the family) can result in an economy capable of surviving within the world-system of late capitalism.

8. Due to different historical developments that cannot be pursued here in detail, within the Global North it is Europe that today embodies at its most advanced and in its most conspicuous form, the "borderland." Comparing Europe to the other long-standing great power of the Global North, the U.S.A., cardinal among the reasons for Europe's contemporary unique state of affairs is considered to be what some scholars refer to as the "friendly" and the "hostile" separations between the church and the state, pertaining to the U.S.A. and Europe, respectively—a distinction largely due to the specificities of the European Enlightenment (see Maier 2004, p. 109). Indicative of the profound difference between the models found in France and the mid-twentieth century United States are the comments of the French philosopher and one of the drafters of the 1948 [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), [Jacques Maritain](#). He considered the U.S. model of that time to be more amicable because it had both "sharp distinction and actual cooperation" between church and state, what he called "an historical treasure," and he admonished the United States: "Please to God that you keep it carefully, and do not let your concept of separation veer round to the European one" (cited in Carson 2008, p. 189). Another more recent major factor accounting for the differences between the contemporary U.S. and Europe may, of course, be the formation and subsequent collapse of the "Communist Bloc" within European territory, with all its consequences on both the development of the European Left and inter-European migrational movements since the 1990s.

9. Benjamin Franklin's two texts—*Necessary Hints to Those That Would Be Rich* (1736) and *Advice to a Young Tradesman* (1748)—being Weber's starting point of comparison between the "spirit of capitalism" (to be defined through the process of the comparison itself) and the credos and life-philosophies of various Protestant denominations.

10. Weber is referencing *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (1650), the most important work of the English Puritan church leader and theologian, Richard Baxter (1615–1691).

11. Spinoza 1985, pp. 457–58; *Ethics*, part II, proposition 13 and scholium.

12. Spinoza 1951, p. 264; *TPT*, chapter XX, par. 14; punctuation modified.

13. Even scholars who intend to foreground the discriminatory practices of the advanced capitalist regions of the seventeenth century against their *Other*, admit as much. Read, for instance, Debra Nails's commentary on Spinoza's afore-cited passage:

The description may have been more or less accurate when Spinoza published it in 1670, but had not long been so; and Amsterdam, while more progressive than other cities of the republic, found its policies of tolerance under constant attack from the Calvinist consistory of the Reformed Church. Thus the Jewish community there, primarily Marrano Jews whose ascendants had fled the Inquisition in Spain and Portugal, but many of whose religious practices had been affected by forced conversions and proximity to Roman Catholicism, were always on their guard, self-policing their community to prevent any appearance of sacrilege or scandal that might draw the unwelcome attention of authorities. Jews were not subject in the Dutch republic to such 'blood purity' laws as had prevented even converses—Jews who had converted willingly or not to Christianity—from attaining offices of authority in their home countries, but some of the guilds were still closed to Jews, and isolated acts of discrimination were not unknown. However, Jewish expertise in trade and connections with the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the New World ensured for the Jews of Amsterdam, including Spinoza's merchant family, a share in the great Dutch prosperity of the seventeenth century" (Nails 2005, p. 58).

Scholars, whatever the intent and purpose of their search, admit, as Nails puts it, the "monetary and eschatological reasons behind such tolerance as the Jews enjoyed" (see also Simon Shama, particularly chapter 8, "Inside, Outside").

14. Baruma 2006, pp. 28–29.

15. *Trouw* (6 May 2005), cited in Buruma 2006, p. 24.

16. Nietzsche 1989, p. 203, section 259.

17. This reconfiguration of the role of (pop-)Enlightenment ideals revamped as secularist ideals, as the main contemporary ideology of the spirit of capitalism, also explains the at-first-sight surprising switch of credos and political lines between Left- and Right-wing parties in the Netherlands during the last decades. The traditional positions of the Right (e.g., belief in (our) culture and tradition) and the Left (e.g., universalism, scientific socialism) are gradually yielding to the Leftist commitment to “culture and tradition, especially ‘their’ cultures and traditions, that is, those of the immigrants,” while now the Right argues “for the [so-called] universal values of the Enlightenment” (Buruma 2006, p. 30; see also Russell Shorto). A similar logic is evidenced in the current appropriation of debates around issues of sexuality and their exploitation in the struggle against or for Muslim immigrants (see, for instance, Gert Hekma).

18. Voltaire’s aphorism is contained in his 1768 verse epistle to the anonymous author of the controversial work, *The Three Impostors*. Crucially, far from being the cynical remark it is often taken for—i.e., as intending to represent God as a sheer product of human fiction—it was meant as a retort to the atheistic clique of d’Holbach, Grimm, and others. When, in 1761, d’Holbach’s *Christianisme dévoilé* [Christianity Unveiled] appeared, in which he attacked Christianity and religion in general as an impediment to the moral advancement of humanity, Voltaire made known his aversion to d’Holbach’s philosophy, writing that it “is entirely opposed to my principles. This book leads to an atheistic philosophy that I detest” (Voltaire, *Oeuvres*, pp. xxxvii, p. 23).

19. Spinoza 1985, p. 544; *Ethics*, part. 5 preface.

## Bibliography

Balibar, Etienne. “Europe as Borderland.” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27 (2009): 190–215.

Buruma, Ian. *Murder in Amsterdam: Liberal Europe, Islam and the Limits of Tolerance*. New York: Penguin Books, 2006.

Carson, D. A. [\*Christ and Culture Revisited\*](#). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.

———. “*Society Must Be Defended*”: *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-6*. Trans. David Macey. New York: Picador, 2003.

Hekma, Gert. “Queers and Muslims: The Dutch Case.” Faculty Development International Seminar commissioned essay, 2010.

Katz, C., and N. Smith. "An interview with Edward Said." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 21 (2003): 635–651.

Maier, Hans. [\*Totalitarianism and Political Religions\*](#). Trans. Jodi Bruhn. Routledge, 2004.

Nails, Debra. "Metaphysics at the Barricades: Spinoza and Race." In *Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy*, edited by Andrew Valls, 57–72. Cornell University Press, 2005.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1989.

Shama, Simon. *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*. Vintage Books, 1997.

Shorto, Russell. "The Integrationist." *The New York Times* (24 May 2010).

Spinoza, Baruch (Benedict de). *A Theologico-Political Treatise and A Political Treatise*. Trans. R. H. M. Elwes. New York: Dover, 1951.

———. *The Collected Works of Spinoza*. Edited and translated by Edwin Curley. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

Tsoukala, Philomila. "A Family Portrait of a Greek Tragedy." *The New York Times* (24 April 2010). Available online at [nytimes.com/2010/04/25/opinion/25tsoukala.html](http://nytimes.com/2010/04/25/opinion/25tsoukala.html).

Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet). *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire/Completed Works of Voltaire*. Edited by Ulla Kölling, et al. Genève: Banbury and Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1968.

Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Trans. Talcott Parsons. New York: Dover, 1958.