**1. Political, not libidinal economy. Particular racial formations and political affiliations better explain anti-Blackness than collective unconscious.**

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What compels the suspicion of Afropessimism is the underlying antiblackness informing any attachment to the “human.” To be invested in humanity is to be anti-Black. Prior critical frameworks fail to attest to the historico-ontological specificity of antiblackness. With a Marxist focus on political economy, there is a visible remedy to the worker’s exploitation and alienation (better working conditions, the destruction of capitalism). But in the case of antiblackness no such relief is available. Living under constant suspicion, “perpetual onticide” (Warren 2018, 129), subjected to “gratuitous violence” (Wilderson 2010, 11), Black people find themselves in a state of permanent alienation. Afropessimists are keen to displace (Sexton 2019, 103) political economy with libidinal economy, underscoring the extent to which antiblackness “naturally” springs from society’s collective unconscious. Explaining further the mechanisms and logic of antiblackness, Afropessimists define the notion of libidinal economy as

the economy, or distribution and arrangement, of desire and identification, of energies, concerns, points of attention, anxieties, pleasures, appetites, revulsions, and phobias—the whole structure of psychic and emotional life—that are unconscious and invisible but that have a visible effect on the world, including the money economy. (Wilderson et al. 2017, 7 n. 1)

Simply put, the libidinal economy regulates the production and circulation of antiblackness.

The problem of blackness lies, then, in the collective unconscious of Palestinians (and other non-Black people). What makes Blacks a threat greater than the Zionist regime is that blackness terrifies Palestinians at the core ontological level.12 Ferguson—as a project of Black resistance—is antithetical to the Palestinian cause. Ferguson challenges Palestinian reliance on the human, the Black struggle against civil society being irreconcilable with the Palestinian struggle for (human) recognition, since the latter is predicated on antiblackness. Wilderson offers an anecdote about his disillusionment with Black-Palestinian solidarity: “Eradication of the generative mechanisms of Black suffering is not in the interest of Palestinians and Israelis, as my shocking encounter with my friend Sameer, on a placid hillside, suggests; because his anti-Black phobia mobilizes the fantasy of belonging that the Israeli state might otherwise strip him of. For him to secure his status as a relational being (if only in his unconscious), his unconscious must labor to maintain the Black as a genealogical isolate. ‘The shame and humiliation runs even deeper if the Israeli soldier was an Ethiopian Jew’ ” (2020, 251–52). One can definitely see how Sameer’s words troubled him. For Wilderson, his Palestinian friend’s observation attests to Palestinian antiblackness. Wilderson registers a legitimate objection: who gets to decide who belongs to Palestine? And yet there is something unsatisfactory about his gloss of his friend’s statement. Wilderson offers a simple causal explanation: the libidinal economy of Palestinians, their collective unconscious, is shot through with antiblackness. His comment about the Ethiopian Jew is proof of that antiblackness. It is as simple as that. Wilderson does not consider that it might be the Ethiopian Jew’s complicity with settler colonialism that is provoking his friend’s reaction. As a newcomer, an outsider, the Ethiopian Jew possesses absolute power over the land’s indigenous population. In Wilderson’s recounting, the Ethiopian Jew is made to appear as a passive subject, or even a victim—it is true that white Israelis lure African Jews to come to Israel to do their “dirty work” (2020, 12). He is a victim who just happens to be an IDF soldier as well. Love thy neighbor, love thy Palestinian, falls on deaf ears. In performing his military duties, the Ethiopian Jew fully identifies with the nation-state, declining the refusenik option. Is this decision really beyond reproach? Indeed, we might ask Wilderson: Are Black soldiers enforcing the Occupation any less objectionable than white soldiers enforcing the Occupation? Are Black police officers any less responsible than white police officers for perpetuating and legitimizing antiblackness in the United States?

Black exceptionalism clouds Wilderson’s judgment. Being Palestinian can only point to a failure to attest to the condition of Blacks. There is no recognition for Blacks, but Blacks are needed for others to be recognized, to be redeemed and folded back into the plenitude of humanity.13 To be human means that I am not a slave/Black. In seeking to disturb this definition of the human, Black activism represents a bigger problem for Palestinians than political Zionists eager to annex more Palestinian land. Human redemption remains a possibility, however remote, for Palestinians regardless of Israeli mistreatment

**2. Mythologizing whiteness as representative of being reproduces the desire for it. Only investigating the institutional and political mechansisms that assert this libidinal drive enables a new desires and political outcomes.**

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[M]any lives were destroyed in the name of whiteness… the structural repetition of past sufferings in the present is beyond any reasonable doubt. Whiteness … [is] a necrophiliac power structure and a primary shaper of a global system of unequal redistribution of life chances … But to properly engineer its death—and thus the end of the nightmare it has been for a large portion of humanity—we urgently need to demythologize it. If we fail to properly mythologize whiteness, whiteness … will end up claiming us. (Mbembe, 2015)

Mbembe’s above characterization of whiteness as “a necrophiliac power structure” has much in common with other conceptualizations—such as we find in the literature on Afropessimism—that highlights whiteness as terror, as perverse, as violence, as death-bringing (Warren, 2018; Wilderson, 2020). And yet Mbembe clearly breaks ranks with many critical conceptualizations in suggesting that whiteness might function—paradoxically—as a libidinal investment, an “erotogenic object”, not only for whites, but also for those upon whom its lethal excesses are directed:

[F]or whiteness to properly operate its destructive force … it needs to capture its victim’s imagination … As a poisonous fiction that passes for a fact, whiteness seeks to institutionalize itself as an event by any means necessary. This it does by colonizing the entire realms of desire and the imagination … To puncture and deflate the fictions of whiteness will require … a different regime of desire, new approaches in the constitution of material, aesthetic and symbolic capital. (Mbembe, 2015)

It is not hard to see why many were angered by these remarks. Yet there is something Fanonian about them, even indeed, a quality of Black Consciousness critique, insofar as they warn us about the inherent risks of monumentalizing whiteness as an eternal and incontestable edifice that continues, despite—or because of—intensive critique, to implicitly provide the co-ordinates of cultural value and desirability.

If we were to draw on a relevant Lacanian concept here, we might sug- gest that whiteness has often functioned not merely as a potent signifier— and a master signifier, as Seshadri-Crooks (2000) memorably argued in her own Lacanian analysis—but also as a phallic signifier. That is to say: if whiteness as a signifier is phallic—has, in other words, come to stand for the ‘fullness of being’, for potency, power, permanence, etc.—then we do well to remember that any such aspiration is necessarily corrupt, under-written by falsity. As Jacqueline Rose stresses “the status of the phallus is a fraud … [t]he phallus can only take up its place by indicating the precariousness of any identity assumed by the subject on the basis of its token” (1985 p. 40). This gives us the opportunity to highlight Sheldon George’s (2016) important psychoanalytic conceptualizations in this area.10

George is concerned with the US context, with the history of slavery, and, more precisely, with how “the master signifier, whiteness, and its accompanying discourses of race are rooted in slavery” (2016, p. 24). What slavery made possible, for whites, was a type of repatriation of lost being or wholeness; the embodied slave “buttressed the master’s fantasies of being” (p. 24). To grasp this argument, one needs to appreciate that for Lacanian psychoanalysis all speaking beings have needed to sacrifice a sense of wholeness, that is, to give up a form of primal enjoyment or jouis- sance (this is what, in Freudian, terms we would refer to as castration). What was afforded whites, and white slaveholders particularly, during the historical period of slavery was a means of fantasmatically restoring this lost being via the ownership of enslaved people who were, psychically, a kind of replacement for sacrificed jouissance. In George’s own words:

[W]hite slaveholding Americans not only sought to transform the slave from subject into commodity but also shored up white fantasies of being, employ- ing slaves themselves as signifiers of this being; indeed white Americans were able to purchase and display their illusory being through the very procurement of slaves. (2016, p. 25)

And so, while whiteness thus certainly achieved a formidable “discursive dominance as the representative of being” (p. 25), this status remained— like any such phallic attribute—in a significant sense, illusory, which is to say premised on imaginary belief or desire, fantasmatic, which is not in any way to deny or minimize the regimes of violence, brutality, and dehu- manization that, in the historical era of slavery and beyond, its representa- tives have brought about.11

This connects interestingly with facets of Mbembe’s later comments on whiteness. In his landmark (2017) Critique of Black Reason, Mbembe again makes strategic recourse to psychoanalytic terminology in qualifying how he thinks we need approach whiteness. There are, in his view, several crucial historical determinants that explain the power of “the fantasy of Whiteness”, the first of which is the factor of belief:

[F]ar from being spontaneous, [this] belief was cultivated, nourished, repro- duced, and disseminated by a set of theological, cultural, political, eco- nomic, and institutional mechanisms … In several regions of the world, a great deal of work went into transforming Whiteness into a dogma and a habitus. Such was … the case in … countries with slavery … [and in] settler colonies … [and wherever] racial segregation became a semiotic that was simultaneously a right, a faith, and a doctrine, any transgression of which could result in a range of punishments, including death. (Mbembe, 2017, p. 45)

There is much of value here. Mbembe’s alloys a psychological factor (belief) to a Foucauldian array of concerns (institutional mechanisms, material practices, epistemic formations) and does so by, in addition, pin- pointing both crucial events in the history of anti-blackness and their impact on the legal fabric of the societies concerned. He continues, adding to the psychical dimension of his analysis:

[S]uch mechanisms often functioned to transform Whiteness into common sense as well as a form of desire and fascination … [If such] a belief does not become desire and fascination … it cannot operate as an autonomous and internalized power … this view … of Whiteness involves a constellation of objects of desire and public signs of privilege that relate to body and image, language and wealth. Fantasy … seeks to anchor itself in the real in the form of an effective social truth. In this, the fantasy of Whiteness succeeded … it became the mark of a certain mode of Western presence in the world, a certain figure of brutality and cruelty, a singular form of predation with an unequaled capacity for the subjection and exploitation of foreign peoples. (Mbembe, 2017, p. 45)

While many would object to whiteness being understood as fantasy—not- withstanding the psychoanalytic qualification that fantasies are often more determining in their impact than ostensibly ‘objective’ versions of reality—Mbembe is clearly focused here on how whiteness as libidinal investment (as a form of “desire and fascination”) is increasingly materialized in forms of discursive practice and bodily violence (brutality and cruelty) which stretch across historical periods and geographical regions (in exter- minations, genocides, the slave trade, colonial conquests, in apartheid, in forms of structural violence). The reason I have spent so much time dis- cussing Mbembe’s work is that it is clearly inspired by Foucault’s analytical priorities even while it draws on a more Fanonian, or psychoanalytically inflected, vocabulary. It both highlights historical specificity and the brute realities of racializing embodiment and physical violence, on the one hand, and the psychical register of desire, libidinal investments, erotogenic objects and fantasmatic imaginaries, on the other.