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On the poetics of death and the theory of anti-colonialism

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Abstract

To describe this work by way of the Fanonian logic, in its materialist quest, one can say, it tries to establish the conditions necessary for a theory of anti-colonialism which finds its expression in the experience of death, the realm of nonbeing, nonmeaning, and the unnameable. It enquires into the nature of a revolutionary 'political act', 'guerrilla action', or a aesthetic struggle against settler-colonialism which is constituted in the moment or political economy of death. To put it in the words of Fanon himself, it signal a regression or recursion into the "zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an upheaval can be born" (Fanon, 1952:8). We conjure the spirits of the dead, in their materiality or as material categories in order to avoid the usual mistake of locating revolutionary and emancipatory practices within the categories of self-reflexivity or Ideality or transcendence. Hence, the thesis takes it that, through an awareness of the psychotic and deathly formations which constitute the concrete historical reality of the colonised black subject under colonial modernity, one should see that, it is only from 'the place of that which is not' qua the '*not-all*' or the unnameable substances of the historical-material-past which informs our understanding of the present stratum of socio-political reality with all its antagonisms and contradictions that we can develop a comprehensive theory of a revolutionary and emancipatory liberation subjectivity. Taking into consideration the tensions, contradictions, and antagonisms manifest at the level of the material and social 'real' qua the present earth we habitat, the condition of the colonised black subject cannot be theorised from the domain of reflexivity or self-reflexivity, transcendence, truth, ideality, knowledge or science, gnosis or logic, because there is no unified singularity for such a subject to reflect upon or to subtract from. The material realm or 'womb of space', as per Wilson Harris' notion of underground fictitious imaginations, in which the colonised black subject is forced to subsist – as a site of (deathly and non-objective) drives, energetics, desires, and anxiety – is what enables it to function as the foundation or operative medium for all forms of transgression and transformation that can help us overcome the present structures of subjugation and the phallocentric notions of human emancipation that they prescribe. Hence, as a materialist insight, the thesis, through the concept of death, tries to establish the conditions for a theory of the subject of resistance and liberation that can take up the project of anti-colonialism by considering the centrality of colonial antagonism and how its structures are still reproduced in our present situation. In its extensive form, the project draws from complementary, although at times opposing or contradictory theoretical and philosophical traditions, namely, Black Radical thought (what we can refer to as the avant-garde of social

theory today) and Continental philosophy in Western social theory, in order to re-assert the importance of the theory of colonialism and the theory of anti-colonialism in our evaluation of the present forms of coloniality. With that said, we argue that colonialism, although mediated by democratic practices and principles, it is still immediate to our present real conditions of existence. In the same manner, the historical or mythical African past, the realm in which the limits of colonialism continued and still continue to be stretched in various political and aesthetic forms is retrieved to support our call for a theory of anti-colonialism that draws its paradigms from the perspective of a materialist logic, or rather, materialist alogicity. Thus, through a reading of the black aesthetic tradition, myth, which is a property of the 'the living-dead-unconscious', is read as a category of materiality or the conflict-ridden ground or the historic past which is central to our understanding of the present and conceptions of strategies for a revolutionary form of '*political* action' and '*guerrilla* action'. Hence, to qualify the grounds for a reading of the theory of anti-colonialism through the concept of death, the thesis moves through the contours of what can be identified within neuroscience, epigenetics, mathematical logic, mythical logic, or psychoanalysis as either a speculative-materialism, a dialectical-materialism, a historical-materialism, a Real-materialism, or a logical-materialism, but which ever angle it may be read from (which however should never be a positivist or reductive or deductive one), the concept of materialism as *groundlessness* still remains a key conceptual category. That is, the thesis takes the subject as immanent in the kinematics, drives, or energetics of the Real material conditions of its existence: which means that, and as we mentioned above, the subject it imagines is a subject who is neither of the nature of the self, nor reflection, nor consciousness (in both their scientific and transcendental terms).