Articulating the Colonial Relation, a Conversation between Afropessimism and Anti-Colonialism

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Abstract: As Decolonialism becomes an important topic in Political Theory, the rupture between the colonized and the coloniser has lost attention. Focusing on the anti-colonial activist Madhi Amel, we shall consider his attention to the permanence of the colonial relation and how it preempts Frank Wilderson's formulation of (white) culturally necessary Anti-Black violence. Both projects draw attention away from empirical accounts of oppression, instead focusing on the structural relation which precipitates them. As Amel says that we should stop thinking of the 'underdeveloped' as beyond the colonial relation, Wilderson says we should stop think of the Black rights that have surpassed the role of the slave. However, Amel moves beyond his idol Althusser's Structuralism toward a formulation of the colonial relation as source of domination. Our analysis will take a Lacanian turn in considering how this non-relation was formulated as a relation how this space of negativity became a ideological opportunity for Colonial domination. Wilderson’s work shall problematise this as we conclude with his criticisms of Structural accounts for the failure to consider how Black social death exists as more than necessity but a cite of white desire. Amel, a Lebanese activist and scholar (re)discovered by Hicham Safieddine, argues colonialism is more than the theft of land, but instead a privatization of collective property and form of investment which (re)produces the status of the capitalist in spaces ‘outside’ the market. Although Amel was a true Marxist-Leninsist, who exposited the economic determinacy of the Colonial Mode of Production, we are reading this account through Alenka Zupančič’s reformulation of the ‘invisible hand job of the market’. Amel points to the signifier ‘underdeveloped’ as buttressed on a pre-colonial epistemic break, as the Western investor (debt collector) sees the (post?) colony narcissistic image. However, the colony can never become site of class conflict, as the workers are not unified but existing between two countries. In industry, they are paid in Colonial subjectivisation, the promise of market (self)pleasure, at home, they are refugees. They are not, as Wilderson states, in the permanent social death of the slave, but they are less than the white worker. This is formulated as citizen (white), non-citizen (colonized), anti-citizen (Black/slave). Here we may also think of how indentured Indians were used as instruments of colonial violence. Wilderson’s aphorism “there is no analogy to anti-Black violence” lays bare his fundamental opposition between colonial and specifically anti-Black violence. It is not only that the debt collector, landowner, or other owners of production pleasures themselves as if their hand is invisible. The absolute negativity between colony and colonized provides a new frontier for desire, the development of a colonial mode of production. An invention inside the colonial structure that is generative of class substitution. We shall explore how Amel ignores the role of the slave but how Wilderson forecloses the history African anti-colonial.

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