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Three Reflections on the American Body Politic After 2020

The Family and National Complexes

In the chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks* entitled “The Black Man and Psychopathology” Fanon prefigures the dialectics of racial identity (or lack thereof) in relation to a problem at once more specific and more general in nature. Fanon begins his analysis in this chapter with an affirmation of a basic principle of psychoanalysis – that “psychoanalysis...sets out to represent a given behavior within a specific group represented by the family” (Fanon 1952, p. 120). Quoting Lacan’s early text “The Family Complexes,” Fanon writes that “in every case, the family is treated as the psychic object and circumstance” (Ibid). When an adult comes to develop a neurosis or any other psychopathology, “the analyst’s job is to find an analogy in the new psychic structure with certain infantile elements, a repetition or a copy of conflicts born within the family constellation” (Ibid).

For Fanon, “the family represents the way the world reveals itself to the child” – at least in Europe, since “the family structure and the national structure are closely connected” (Ibid). On the one hand, the family represents a collection of bodies in a set, and the general frame of the child’s life; on the other hand, the “family constellation” is distinctly overdetermined by its constituent role in “the national structure” of a given country (Ibid). How are we to understand the double determination of a child by family and nation? Alternatively, if the family structure is itself determined by the national structure, what is the specific nature of the role that the family plays in the determination of a child’s psychic life, as distinct from “the national structure”?

These questions, which have a long history in psychoanalytic thought, form the background of Fanon’s analysis of the black man and psychopathology in French colonies insofar as “in Europe and in every so-called civilized or civilizing country the family represents a piece of the nation” (Fanon 1952, p. 121). In view of the difficulty of stating the concrete element of the situation insofar as a child’s psychic life is determined by larger familial and national structures, which are themselves in a tension that would seem to render the division of their roles abstract, Fanon effectively posits a particular notion of a body – in particular, a body *politic* – where families represent organs in the larger body that is the nation. One might assume, then, that the same “analogy” (per Fanon’s formulation of “the analyst’s job”) applies to the relation of children to the family, such that the former might constitute organs in the body that is the latter. Yet if “the child leaving the family environment finds the same laws, the same principles, and the same values,” and “there is no disproportion between family life and the life of the nation,” how is one to account for the specific causal power of this “leaving” (Ibid)?

Indeed, Fanon himself states among his “most important point[s]” that “a normal black child, having grown up with a normal family, will become abnormal at the slightest contact with the white *world* [my emphasis]” (Fanon 1952, p. 122). This concept deviates from the idea that “morbidity is located in the family

environment” that Fanon cites from Joachim Marcus because the “normal black child” effectively experiences, in Fanon’s formulation, the puncturing of the boundaries of this family environment by “the white world” (Ibid). In this sense, it is something not physical and embodied, but perhaps even meta-physical and dis-embodied – the world – that causes the problem for the “normal black child” (Ibid). Hence Fanon asks, “how can we explain, for example, that black guy who has passed his baccalaureate and arrives at the Sorbonne to study for his degree in philosophy is already on guard before there is a sign of conflict?” (Fanon 1952, p. 123).

Ironically, the scene Fanon describes would seem to be one where the intrusion of the white world is only experienced *as such* at the culmination of the very process of “total identification with the white man” he describes (Fanon 1952, p. 124). In the first instance, “in the Antilles, the black schoolboy who is constantly asked to recite ‘our ancestors the Gauls’ identifies himself with the explorer, the civilizing colonizer, the white man who brings truth to the savages, a lily-white truth”; later, assuming the situation of the same schoolboy and by virtue of following this very path and “pass[ing] his baccalaureate” and going to the Sorbonne, he ends up “on guard before there is a sign of conflict” (Fanon 1952, p. 123). Fanon notes that “the Antillian *family*” – perhaps as opposed to the Antillean as an atomized individual – “has virtually no ties with the French or European national structure,” and thus the Antillean “has to choose between his family and European society; in other words, the individual who *climbs up* into white, civilized society tends to reject his black, uncivilized family at the level of the imagination” (Fanon 1952, p. 128). For these reasons, “the black man realizes that many of the assertions he had adopted regarding the subjective attitude of the white man are *unreal* [my emphasis].”

What is the nature of this “unreality” implied in the “subjective attitude” Fanon describes, especially given the “unreality” – or more precisely, the meta-physical status – of the aforementioned “white world” and its constitutive role in determining the two moments of the black boy’s subjectivity (first a naive and “total identification with the white man,” and then the loss of the consistency of this identification)? The trajectory of Fanon’s Antillean schoolboy is uncannily reminiscent of a story featured in BBC documentarian Adam Curtis’ 6-part series *Can’t Get You Out of My Head*, in which he describes the *Bildungsroman* of Michael de Freitas, later known as Michael X. In an interview shown in Curtis’ film, de Freitas describes how he was born in Trinidad at the time it was a British colony, and in a manner almost identical to those Antillean children Fanon describes pledging to their “ancestors the Gauls,” speaks of singing and chanting “God Save the Queen!” and “Britannia rule the waves!” with naive enthusiasm growing up. However, upon adulthood, de Freitas immigrated back to the imperial core in London, hoping to return to the heart of a glorious empire he had been told about, only to find he was a second-class citizen as a black man from a colony. Subsequently, the now-disaffected de Freitas changed his name to Michael X.[1]

What became of Michael de Freitas’ old dreams of the English empire when he decided to effectively undergo a metamorphosis (perhaps of the purely traumatic kind described by Catherine Malabou, inasmuch as the “X” in his chosen name reflects a certain pure loss) and become Michael X?[2] Since Trinidad was a colony of the United Kingdom, they had no substantive rights as compared to citizens in the imperial core, but nonetheless participated in military service in World War II – just like the Martinicans, Senegalese, and Antilleans about which Fanon writes – and in some sense, felt a connection (however illusory or “unreal”) to the empire into which they were incorporated. In both the case of Michael X and Fanon’s analysis of European colonialism, it was the discrepancy between the fact that colonial subjects fought and died for their empires but were not seen as equal citizens in any substantive way that gives rise to a kind of *dysphoria* that gives consistency to racial identities, and in turn, the fantasies they precipitate that Fanon goes on to analyze for the remainder of the chapter.

Like the colonial empires in France and the UK, the United States’ military conscription during the second World War effectively constituted what Fanon calls “the family structure”; one might even go as far as to claim that it was this conscription, per Freud’s group psychology, that instantiated the Oedipus complex, insofar as it was almost exclusively young men who were being conscripted.[3] The US’ equal conscription of black and white citizens during World War II might be seen to have brought about the apparent

contradiction that black soldiers conscripted to fight alongside white ones in the war were still living in Jim Crow states, and at least in retrospect, arguably contributed to bringing about the end of segregation in the US – and perhaps a similar contradiction also contributed to the anticolonial revolutions for whom Fanon’s work was so influential. Yet this reality is not only complicated by the pervasive sense that segregation persists in the US (and globally) in *de facto* forms beyond the abolition of *de jure* segregation and colonization, but perhaps moreover by the fact that military conscription no longer exists in the US, the UK, and France (which was incidentally the first to introduce conscription as a criterion for citizenship).[4]

In other words, “the family structure and the national structure” are no longer “closely connected” in the manner Fanon describes. In view of this severance, might the trauma the black child experiences upon contact with “the white *world*” that Fanon writes about inhere in a *gap* between “the family structure” and “the national structure,” rather than their affinity or overlap? And per the example of Michael X, if this national structure is found to be absent even at the core of a colonial empire, is “the national structure” just the gap, inconsistency, or symptom in “the family structure” itself (a question to which Freud’s *Group Psychology, Civilization and its Discontents*, and “Overview of the Transference Neuroses” would seem to answer in the affirmative)?

Insofar as “proximity is not the opposite of alienation, but rather the form of its appearance...intensely discussed cultural differences function more and more as a handy and colorful veil that masks a much more disturbing *sameness*,” such that while on the one hand, ideas of race fill in for the uniformity, sameness, and extension of an imperial core to its colonies, on the other, this sameness itself obfuscates the gap between family and national structures (Zupancic, “Love Thy Neighbor As Thyself?!”). Here we might refer to Lacan’s “prophecy of the rise of racism” (as quoted in Zupancic [Ibid]):

When asked: “What gives you the confidence to prophecy the rise of racism? And why the devil do you have to speak of it?” [Lacan] answers: “Because it doesn’t strike me as funny and yet, it’s true. With our *jouissance* going off track, only the Other is able to mark its position, but only in so far as we are separated from this Other. Whence certain fantasies—unheard of before the melting pot.” (Lacan 1990, p. 32)

To the American ear, Lacan’s invocation of “the melting pot” stands less for the intersection of nations and peoples across the globe than precisely a name American children learn to describe the US “national structure” itself. If “the melting pot” constitutes for Lacan a historical moment or event – namely, the age of American Empire since the end of WWII – after which “certain fantasies” about the status of the Other proliferate, whence the distinct character of *American* fantasies where “the melting pot” stands instead for a state of things?

The 14th Amendment and its Vicissitudes

Lacan’s evocation of this “melting pot” inside which all particularity and separation dissolves is consonant with his controversial musings in *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* that the “one single origin of brotherhood[...] – human, always human brotherhood” is “segregation” (Lacan 2007, 114-115). Noting that he is “not a man of the left” and later situating himself to be “half-saying” as if he was a patient (or a somewhat guilty orientation toward these very comments...), Lacan laments that “there is no longer any segregation anywhere” for the reason that “no other brotherhood is even conceivable or has the slightest foundation, as I have just said, the slightest scientific foundation, unless it’s because people are isolated together, isolated from the rest” (Ibid). Even in shirking away from this statement, Lacan insists that there are “drawbacks” to “acting as if” this proposition is not true (Ibid). How are we to apprehend the importance Lacan attributes to these particular thoughts in light of their obvious and troubling clash with the moments that Americans (rightfully) generally consider to have been moments of historical progress toward freedom,

equality, and fraternity?

Of course, the signifiers “segregation” and “melting pot” are themselves directly linked within American history insofar as the actualization of American society as a “melting pot” even *in principle* was finally achieved only with the legal triumph over the former.[5] The last substantial purported victory for civil rights in the US was the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which was finally enshrined into law after the 1957 *Brown v the Board of Education* opposition to the 1896 *Plessy v Ferguson* ruling, the latter expressed in the slogan “separate but equal.” In *Brown*, Chief Justice Earl Warren argued:

“We conclude that, in the field of public education, the doctrine of “separate but equal” has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment” (Transcript of *Brown vs. the Board of Education*)

Warren’s qualification that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” was supported by striking examples of disproportionate public funding between black and white schools.[6] Here, as is usually presumed in popular American consciousness, “separation” itself was interpreted to have meant “not really equal,” and therefore, the 1957 *Brown* ruling led to the end of separation, and the advent of true equality under the banner of non-separation. *Philosophically*, one might wonder why the Warren court could not have just as well taken a very different route of interpretation toward ending Jim Crow segregation where the issue with the *Plessy* ruling was not “separation,” but that “equality” was further tacked onto “separation.” Instead, the legal reality was the other way around: “separation” was not articulated “as such,” but considered to be a further modification or corruption of “equality.”[7] Problematically, it is through this very situating of black schools into a relation of *equivalence* with white schools that we not only find a logic of patronage not unlike that which allowed for the determination of slaves (“other persons”) as equivalent to 3/5 of a non-slave (“Persons”) in the Constitution in 1787 (<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript#toc-section-2->).

In the immediate sense, though, it is for a *legal* reason or precedent that the Warren Court took the route of interpretation where they opposed the term “separate” and not the term “equal,” which can be quite simply grasped in terms of the constitutional articles invoked to support their argument – specifically, the 14th amendment, and in particular, its Equal Protection Clause. Along with the 13th amendment that abolished slavery, the 14th was added to the Constitution just after the Civil War as an attempt to bolster the federal government’s power to enforce the protection of freed slaves and their white comrades in the former Confederate states. Setting aside the question of why, precisely, the federal government needed an additional law (14th amendment) to enforce another law (13th amendment)[8], it is worth noting the radical ambiguity of the 14th amendment. In the first instance (*Plessy*), the “equal protection clause” served to *justify* segregation on the basis that despite the separation implied by segregation, the segregated, “separate” populations were nonetheless “equal” insofar as they were “equally protected under law” (14th Amendment to US Constitution). In the second instance, it’s not that a law instantiating segregation was repealed or struck down, but that the Warren Court offered a different *interpretation* of the 14th amendment that gave way to the conclusion that separate institutions were “inherently unequal,” and thus in violation of the 14th amendment.

For this reason, one could argue that we have remained within the juridical horizon of the 14th amendment – along with the other two Reconstruction Amendments, 13th (as the recent popular documentary film *13th* also argues, apropos this amendment’s exceptional permitting of slavery or involuntary servitude as punishment for a crime) and 15th – since its passing just after the Civil War, through segregation and its elimination with the Civil Rights Acts.[9] More specifically, without the 14th amendment, the abolition of slavery with the 13th amendment still left former slaves not yet eligible to claim any of the rights or

privileges given to “citizens” by the Constitution. Associate Justice Thurgood Marshall once went as far as to argue that the 14th amendment brought about a new constitution:

“While the Union survived the civil war, the Constitution did not. In its place arose a new, more promising basis for justice and equality, the 14th Amendment, ensuring protection of the life, liberty, and property of all persons against deprivations without due process, and guaranteeing equal protection of the laws” (Marshall, “The Bicentennial Speech”)

In effect, the 14th amendment served to nullify the ruling of the pre-Civil War 1857 *Dred Scott v. Sanford* case, where the Chief Justice Roger Taney ruled that black people were a “subordinate and inferior class of beings” who were not included, and were not intended to be included, under the word “citizens” in the Constitution, and can therefore claim none of the rights and privileges which that instrument provides for and secures to citizens of the United States” (*Dred Scott v. Sanford*). In supporting this claim, Taney merely invoked examples of racist laws from several state constitutions (including older laws from “free states” like Connecticut) that were meant to attest to the *relation* between one’s being black and being a slave (Ibid). This conceptual cheating whereby Taney sought to locate retroactively in “black-ness” the biological foundation of the symbolic relationships of domination and servitude also introduced the category of race into US *Constitutional Law*.

As such, the *Dred Scott* ruling has long been criticized almost universally as the worst Supreme Court ruling in American history. Nonetheless, while the 14th amendment negates the notion that black people are “not included, and were not intended to be included, under the word “citizens” in the Constitution,” it maintains from the *Dred Scott* ruling the very category of race or black-ness through which the disenfranchisement of Scott – a former slave who had reached free territory, and was thus no longer a slave – was legally instantiated. Even after the 13th amendment’s abolition of slavery, *the category of blackness that was introduced into constitutional law with the Dred Scott case as a justification for slavery has persisted un-nullified to this day*. It is in this way that one can see tangibly how, as a consequence of these juridical decisions, we remain in the shadow of slavery’s rationalization today. Insofar as the *Dred Scott* ruling involved the invalidation of Scott’s claim to have reached freedom by crossing into a free territory through the invocation of slave state laws as the basis for Supreme Court decisions on federal governance, the 14th amendment and its “equal protection clause” can be seen to entrap us in the political horizon of the US in 1857.

Today, no formal separation – or, *de jure* segregation – would seem to exist other than the *de facto* separation of races into categories. Yet, again, we witness all the more an inequality that inheres within the nominal “equality” of races – or, *de facto* “segregation” – in the form of disparities in life outcomes for black Americans so deep and pervasive that they cannot but be apprehended as “systemic” in nature.[10] From another angle of analysis, it would appear at least in retrospect that the annulment of the US’ foundational *separation into states* in the *Dred Scott* ruling – the federal government taking up the laws of particular states apropos their division into “free” and “slave” states at the time, respectively, and “melting” the division between the two – is precisely the repressed element of conflict between states and the federal government that returns in the forms of segregation, (*de jure*, but more fundamentally *de facto*), that the US has witnessed since the passing of the 14th amendment. In other words, the separation of “the People” into categories – the very groups “protected” by the 14th amendment – is substituted for the separation of states, and “the Union” of states itself develops organs of control and repression in excess of the states it unites, yet preserves them in their very *dis-unity*.[11]

It is no coincidence, then, that the struggles of black people and fellow comrades against “law enforcement” who “serve and protect” would become the site of contemporary civil rights struggles. Like “separate but equal,” the attempt to unite two concepts and disavow their disjunction makes the second term in the phrase coherent at the expense of the first (hence “separation” would imply the movement beyond even a shared frame of reference, i.e. like a country within which states exist). The 14th amendment introduces the notion

of “equal protection” and the reified separation of the People into “protected classes” into Constitutional law. Simultaneously, the issue of the legal status of *servitude* also persists in this frame beyond the abolition of slavery insofar as the 1857 *Dred Scott* ruling – which the 14th amendment only ever negated abstractly – expanded the logic of servitude and patronage from slave states to US federal law. This is to say that while the 14th amendment may have negated the *Dred Scott* ruling abstractly in the sense of striking down the conclusion derived from the logical proposition “Dred Scott is black, therefore he was not meant to be a citizen,” it did not negate the premise of the notion of blackness, and its consequent introduction into federal law, in the first place.

The events of 2020 have made clear that we encounter today with police, as the *polis* operating under what Kant called “the private use of reason,” the perverse reality of a protector class that posits itself among the groups it protects (hence the logical possibility of a slogan like “blue lives” matter”) (Kant, “What is Enlightenment?”). It is from this angle that one can see that a resolution to the ongoing power struggles of American society requires nothing less than subjecting police in the form they currently exist – as a private caste protecting their own interests – to a kind of servitude at the hands of the general populace. Paradoxically, this means that the “abolition of police” frequently proposed by leftists can only be conceived as a total *expansion* of the boundaries of the *polis* in the manner of “the public use of reason” (Ibid).

The Church and the Army in America

Freud famously distinguished in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* between the church and the army as the most basic forms of artificial groups. Frederic Jameson expands on this distinction in his (strangely overlooked) 2016 essay “An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army,” arguing that the Left[12] has treated the “church” (i.e. ideological communities) as its privileged form of conceiving utopian communities since the Cold War, declaring rather that “the army by all means!” ought to stand as the basis for thinking that elusive formation of socialist (or communist) community (Jameson 2016, 314). For Jameson, the possibility of *mandatory conscription* into the army raises important questions that have up to now remained unthought with regards to the actuality of any socialist mode of governance.

In spite of the premise of this experiment, the very distinction between the state or military on the one hand and civil society on the other would seem to have already been abolished in the contemporary United States. At the earliest, this can be said to have happened with the advent of cybernetics and the invention of communications technology. If we consider the proposition that total mobilization of the national population during the Second World War, which Jameson proposes as the ground for any future socialism on the basis of “full employment,” at the latest, the abolition of any clear distinction between civilian and military life can be found in the post-9/11 “state of exception” militarization of society.[13] It might be said that whatever remains of civil society proper – intuitively like the domain of the “church” for the civic life of the nation – is now *fully* “militarized” (fragmentation, culture wars, “everything is political”...except politics itself, we might add). The experience of total division that this militarization generates is ostensibly counterposed by the unity of the army proper in its sovereignty, in relation to “the People.” In turn, though, this necessitates that one thinks “the army” as itself functioning in a totemic capacity; the army ensures the continued existence of the conflictual space of democratic ideology, and the constitutive principle of this ideology itself is the foundational role of “the army.”

As the American empire approaches a point where its *raison d’etre* becomes only that it exists (and must keep on existing for its own sake[14]), it would behoove us to think about “the church” and “the army” in relation to political parties in their mediating position between the two. The Democratic and Republican parties still provide the ground for political identifications despite the insistence of many “left-leaning” or “independent” Americans, at least, on the illusory character of their opposition (“together they merely serve the interests of the same broken system,” et al.). Indeed, until recently, one would have been pressed to find somebody who does *not* primarily understand the names “democrat” and “republican” in a *nominalist*

manner.[15] Ironically, this is exactly the opposite of how Americans think of the governing parties in nominally communist countries: a party is Communist because it is *the* party. In a vulgar sense, whereas political divisions in somewhere like China might seem to Americans to take standing with or against the Party as their highest referent, Americans more commonly think of their own identification with parties in a more voluntarist manner, as a matter of (correctly) choosing or matching the party that stands for the principles America *itself* (should) embody. Yet executive power would not be endowed with its sovereign-like qualities without the reflexive looping of a “balance of powers”: the presidency endows the Congress endows the presidency, as authorized by the Supreme Court, and so on. As we saw in the critique of “separate but equal” above, the application of the democratic principle of equality, to disparate levels and all aspects of American life, with its equilibrilizing function that reconceptualizes representation in an aggregate or proportional manner collapses the differences between presentation and re-presentation; totemism and belief proper, in Freud’s terms (Freud 1912-1913).[16]

In this sense, Freud’s “army” paradigm functions on the basis of conscription, which in its literal etymological meaning, means to write down *together* or enroll, which in a further extension of this logic, stands for preparation for the introduction of what we might call, in Lacan’s terms, “symbolic law” (but is of course also related to the later Lacanian topic of “the sinthome”). Prior to becoming the architect of free market economic policies in the 1980s, Milton Friedman’s first and perhaps most significant political victory was to successfully argue against mandatory military conscription on the grounds of a conception of freedom wherein every act ought to be a voluntary one (Friedman, “Why Not A Volunteer Army?”). Americans live today with the consequences of this notion of desire, which has led to not only the end of military conscription, but also the determination of social life by opaque market mechanisms. The end of military conscription coincided with both the proliferation of ubiquitous security, mass surveillance on the basis of private interest, and the permission granted by the market for anyone to freely choose the subject of their own “church,” but no power like that of an army’s by which to affect the basic terms of social life.

Slavoj Zizek already pointed toward this problem in his book *Less Than Nothing*:

“First, Freud fails to clearly distinguish between the church model and the army model of the artificial crowd: while the ‘church’ stands for the hierarchical social order which tries to maintain peace and equilibrium by making necessary compromises, the ‘army’ stands for an egalitarian collective defined not by its internal hierarchy but by its opposition to an enemy which is out to destroy it – radical emancipatory movements are always modeled on the army, not the church, and millenarian churches are really structured like armies. Second, ‘regressive’ primary crowds do not come first, they are not the ‘natural’ foundation for the rise of ‘artificial’ crowds: they come *afterwards*, as a kind of obscene supplement that sustains the ‘artificial crowd,’ thus relating to the latter like the superego to the symbolic Law. While the symbolic Law demands obedience, the superego provides the obscene enjoyment which attaches us to the Law. Last but not least, is the wild mob really the zero-level of the unbinding of a social link? Is it not rather a panicky *reaction* to the gap or inconsistency that cuts across a social edifice? The violence of the mob is by definition directed at the object (misperceived) as the external cause of the gap (the Jews, exemplarily), as if the destruction of that object will abolish the gap” (Zizek 2012, 966)[17]

It is worth noting, however, that conscription is exactly the thing to which Freud attributes the traumatic nature of the experiences of shell shock patients that first led him to formulate his speculative mythology of the death drive. “The precondition of the war neuroses, the soil that nourishes them,” Freud writes, “would seem to be a national [conscript] army; *there would be no possibility of their arising in an army of professional soldiers or mercenaries*” (Freud 1917-1919, 209). In these words, Freud seems to be suggesting a certain freedom from compulsion, a position wherein one’s choice to join the army freely, as in the case of “professional soldiers and mercenaries,” would not give way to a conflict in the ego. This freedom is that of consent and contract in liberalism – and for Freud, the recompense for a child’s transcendence of “the anal stage.”[18]

But it is worth asking about the precise limits of the very notion of conscription, given the misery wrought by the historical reality of Friedman's proposal of precisely an army of "professional soldiers or mercenaries." In the time of the biggest wave of unemployment in US history, to be de-conscripted is to be *even more conscripted*, and thus even more subjected to the psychic conflict Freud so aptly described. Perhaps the "crisis" or "division" in American life today, often invoked but usually never described, is a "panicky reaction" to a gap that Žižek described above, which itself can be represented as the gap between the church and the army, which further stand in homology to Fanon's "family" and "national" structures. In a sense, the new distinction that emerges with the loss of any meaningful grounds for the church/army distinction in a post-conscription world is that of "essential" and "inessential" populations, which amounts, metaphysically, to nothing less than a choice between being and *non-being*.^[19] Yet if we are to move beyond the catastrophist and survivalist discourse embodied in "the private use of reason" (and those who practice it in their "self-incurred immaturity" [Kant, "What is Enlightenment?"]), "the public use of reason" must be understood in terms of the centrality of this non-being or nothingness itself to our shared existence – incidentally, one of the major teachings of the psychoanalytic tradition.

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Notes:

[1] X's life is an archetypical example of the fascinating figures in Curtis' films through which he sets up his eccentric histories of power. Michael X became the apprentice of a well-known gangster until assuming the mantle himself, propounding black nationalism to wealthy white London liberals, having an affair with Princess Margaret that led to a high-profile bank robbery, returning to Trinidad, and finally being executed there on murder charges.

[2] Slavoj Zizek analyzes the same phenomena in Michael X's namesake, Malcolm X, in his text *Absolute Recoil: Towards A New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism*.

[3] The Soviet Union, incidentally, conscripted by far the most women of any country involved in the second World War.

[4] Richard Rothstein's text *The Color of Law* adds another potential complication to this reality, arguing that the abolition of *de jure* segregation in the US was not even substantively enforced insofar as segregation continued in various forms of housing discrimination. Rothstein's argument consists in the notion that the contemporary wealth gap between black Americans and other Americans follows from decades of discrimination barring black families from acquiring family homes that would have accumulated value over the years. As I will argue later in this text, this fact attests further to the necessity of enacting what Kant called "the public use of reason" in view of these issues.

[5] One might also add that along with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 was also a hugely significant moment in the actualization of the American "melting pot," as it abolished a quota system for immigration that enacted *de facto* discrimination against Southern and Eastern Europeans, as well as Asians.

[6] "For example, in the [1930 census](#), black people were 42% of Florida's population.[2] Yet according to the 1934–36 report of the Florida Superintendent of Public Instruction, the value of "white school property" in the state was \$70,543,000, while the value of African-American school property was \$4,900,000. The report says that "in a few south Florida counties and in most north Florida counties many Negro schools are housed in churches, shacks, and lodges, and have no toilets, water supply, desks, blackboards, etc. [See [Station One School](#).] Counties use these schools as a means to get State funds and yet these counties invest little or nothing in them." (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Separate_but_equal)

[7]Incidentally and consistently with the above quotes from *Other Side* about segregation, "separation" also stands for one of Jacques Lacan's names for the psychoanalytic cure.

[8] One of the more puzzling aspects of US history is why, at various points, the Northern states did not simply repress or override the power of the Southern/former-Confederate states, even if there was a certain degree of economic dependence of the former on the latter. Perhaps the lack of historical ties to anything else prior to their union together as states in the American War of Independence (1776-1783) accounts for this dependence in terms of the country's relative isolation at the time.

[9] The 13th and 15th amendments abolished slavery and banned the denial of the right to vote on the basis of race or ethnicity, respectively.

[10] See, for example: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-07-18/five-charts-that-show-the-extent-of-the-black-wealth-gap-in-u-s>

[11] Psychoanalytically, we might interpret this problem in terms of the very name “United States.” Paraphrasing Freud – and subsequently, Deleuze and Guattari’s – reflections in his “Wolfman” case, we might ask: one or many/several countries?

[12] By this term, I simply mean those who identify with it, insofar as I think there are serious problems with the “left-right” distinction’s expansion beyond its original context in 19th century French politics, insofar as the effectively *nominalist* nature of this naming distinction lacks the precision of a compelling political orientation.

[13] See Giorgio Agamben’s *State of Exception*.

[14] In the last decade or so since the 2008 financial crisis, the motif of “survival” has been prominent in American culture. The tagline for the 2015 film *Jurassic World*, “life finds a way,” is one paradigmatic example.

[15] By nominalist, I mean treating names as purely a matter of convention. The linguistics of Saussure are more or less nominalist in their orientation, and Lacan’s move beyond Saussure in his later life, for example, can be seen as an attempt to move beyond nominalism as well (Lacan eventually even opposes Althusser’s avowed “nominalism” to his own “dialectical materialism” [from Marx]). However, there increasingly seems to be some evidence toward the idea that “democrats” and “republicans” might fundamentally oppose the ideas that stand for the names of the opposite party!

[16] Freud, Sigmund. (1913 [1912-13]) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIII (1913-1914): Totem and Taboo and Other Works*.

[17] Following Žižek’s claim that “radical emancipatory movements are always modeled on the army,” one is tempted to ask, contra Jameson, whether the Church has ever actually been taken as a model for utopian community.

[18] See Webster, “Manzoni and Anal Alchemy” (<https://www.hauserwirth.com/ursula/32422-piero-manzoni-anal-alchemy>) and Gherovici, *Transgender Psychoanalysis*, Chapter 14.

[19] Thus far, the Republican Party has made more direct appeals toward being the representors of this “non-being” (i.e. Donald Trump’s “forgotten men and women” of America); Democrats, by contrast, usually seek to locate a universal dimension in the particular experiences of certain marginalized groups (i.e. “we are all (X)”). The difficulty for both consists in rendering the common dimension of this particular forgotten-ness or alienation. In both cases, I am reminded of Alenka Zupancic’s words in *The Odd One In: On Comedy*: “The problem is, rather, that success is becoming almost a biological notion, and thus the foundation of a genuine racism of successfulness. The poorest and the most miserable are no longer perceived as a socio-economic class, but almost as a race of their own, as a special form of life. We are indeed witnessing a spectacular rise of racism or, more precisely, of “racization.” This is to say that we are no longer simply dealing with racism in its traditional sense of hatred towards other races, but also and above all with a production of (new) races based on economic, political, and class differences and factors, as well as with the segregation based on these differences. If traditional racism tended to socialize biological features—that is, directly translate them into cultural and symbolic points of a given social order—contemporary racism works in the opposite direction. It tends to “naturalize” the differences and features produced by the socio-symbolic order. This is also what can help us to understand the ideological rise of the theme of private life, as well as of lifestyles and habits” (Zupancic 2008, 6). It would seem, though, that this new naturalization of symbolic differences Zupancic describes is actually logically and chronologically prior to the previous “sociali[zation of] biological features.”

Bio:

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