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Abstract: This article presents a dialogue between Sabine Broeck and P. Khalil Saucier about Black social death and white empathy in contemporary Europe. It is written as a starting point to speak about black movement, European borders, and social death in the midst of almost weekly shipwrecks in the Mediterrenean Sea; events that Broeck and Saucier read as the constitutive element of the *longe duree* of black genocide in Europe; the consolidation of late European modernity.

Keywords: Black social death, enslavism, European border regimes, modernity

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A Dialogue: On European Borders, Black Movement, and the History of Social Death

Sabine Broeck and P. Khalil Saucier

This joint article came out of a conversation between Khalil Saucier and Sabine Broeck which had started at the CAAR Atlanta conference in 2013, and has continued until the present moment, when we have to acknowledge that reality has by far overtaken our most dramatic anticipations for "Festung Europa," its post neo-liberal backlash of white power against whatever few multicultural advances European societies have made, and the entrenchment of ultra-rightwing movements and parties across the board. Accordingly, this article appears here not for its up-to-date accuracy of latest recordings of voting polls, the escalating change in refugee demography and anti-refugee violence, the political and military recomposition of Europe vis-a-vis what has been called the "refugee crisis," but for what we suggest as apt intellectual-critical analysis of the present and past capitalist-enslavist longue durée of Europe. As for the latest in terms of information currency, we refer readers to various websites like the Calais Migrant Solidarity website.[1]

This essay is a dialogue between us about Black social death and white empathy in contemporary Europe. We thought this format might help convey some of the uncertainty and general disorder of our thinking around the issues, as well as the temporality of the issues at hand, that is, their open-endedness. We write this as collaboration, as a starting point to what is seldom said about black movement, European borders, and social death. We write this in the midst of almost weekly, yet not unsurprising, shipwrecks that have turned the Mediterranean Sea into a nautical graveyard; events that are nothing more than the constitutive elements of the *longe duree* of black genocide in Europe; the consolidation of late European modernity. Our exchanges are organized around a series of questions and musings we developed together via cross-Atlantic conversation in order to highlight the magnitude of racial conceit, namely and most importantly

anti-Blackness, that serves as the bedrock for intellectual discourse surrounding migration, human rights, and policy in Europe. Further, this organized meditation comes out of a sustained effort of being addressed by black epistemology, undertaking, politically and intellectually, black study.

The Beginning: Meeting Point

An open dialogue in which we reflect on what led us to start thinking about blackness and social death within the European context.

SB: When I began working on this, it had just transpired to the German press that the German Landeskriminalamt and the Verfassungsschutz (like FBI and Secret Service) had for years watched (and maybe even aided and abetted) the activities of a militant Nazi cell which, as it turns out, was responsible for at least 12 killings of Turkish and other foreign born German citizens. This is presumably the tip of an iceberg. The number of documented non-white, non-Christian victims of lethal neo-Nazi violence in Germany between the re-unification of Germany and 2011 is a staggering 182, most of them un-mourned and un-mediated. As my local newspaper told me on Nov. 19, 2011. The press and the liberal German public appear to be appalled, but the rhetoric never goes beyond complaints or protest against 'negligence' and 'blindness' in the state apparatus against fascist terror to ask the real interesting question: to what extent might the negligence of the state apparatus be based on the fact that parts of this structure are not blind, but willing to support Nazi cells, because they share their agenda, in organized or not yet organized fashion? Who, at this point, knows how many killing lists are being prepared of Turkish restaurants, Indian grocery stores and African hair shops, or clubs frequented by Afro German, and immigrant youth?

In this sense, I am interested in *connecting* two points that, within the contexts of European philosophical, cultural, and social discourses have been deliberately and with studied innocence, to paraphrase Toni Morrison, kept apart: the question of the constitutive but un- remembered legacy of white abjectorship in the practices of Black enslavement in the hundreds of years of transatlantic enslavement trade on the one hand, and the question of contemporary Black migration to Europe, in some sense a Middle Passage in reverse, reacted to with a vengeance, on the other hand. These two phenomena need to be connected because the overall European intellectual and political denial of the constitutive role of transatlantic slavery for modern Europe as we know it, plays a crucial role in the mainstream acceptance of border politics against the continent of Af-

rica, most massively bodied forth in the creation of FRONTEX. This connection is of course not a transparently visible one, but demands a particular heuristic. It demands to read the construction of Europe not as the culmination of a history of progress in need of constant watch and defense, but as a colonialist product which guards its comparative wealth and guarantees of freedom carefully, sheltered by broad mass approval of its hegemonic white citizenry, and by the support of its intellectual elites. This support surfaces in the lingering mainstream, but also liberal and leftist sense of Europe as a haven of universal rights, which are being heralded as an exceptional achievement.

PKS: "When I was a teenager here, kids used to shoot dogs in the head. It was a way of gaining confidence with a gun, of venting your rage on another living creature. Now it seems human beings are used for target practice" (Saviano n. pag.). These are the opening lines of award winning author Roberto Saviano's op-ed piece entitled "Italy's African Heroes" which was featured in the *New York Times* in January 2010. Saviano goes on to tell how immigrants in places such as Britain and France have "real and tangible rights," but not Italy where "bureaucracy and corruption make it seem as if the only guarantees are prohibitions and mafia rule, under which rights are nonexistent." Frustrated with what he sees as the destruction of Italy's *bella figura* (beautiful image) and inspired by the African resistance toward Calabrian and Neapolitan mafia violence, Saviano writes his op-ed to implore those African immigrants who have broken the *omerta* code of silence "don't go—don't leave us alone with the mafias" (n. pag) (Mafias to be understood as both organized crime and bureaucracy.) Similar sentiments can also be heard in the work of Calabrian writer Antonello Mangano, who recently stated that Black migrants have "introduced into daily life […|] antibodies necessary to confront the mafia, antibodies that Italians seem to lack, antibodies that are born from the basic desire to live" (n. pag). What I am interested in doing is to map cognitively onto Saviano/Mangano's pronouncements. That is, I want to measure the limits of their humanism and the potential value of their antiracism; to begin to understand how their comments mystify white power and anti-Blackness. In other words, I'm interested in pursuing a praxial question of utmost concern; what is the relationship between anti-racism and Black liberation, or what is the relationship between anti-racism and anti-blackness? Black migrants arrive daily on the shores of Italy, many trafficked to the country through organized syndicates, namely by the 'Ndrangheta and Camorra, leaving them enmeshed in the throes of the brutal Mafia-run cheap-labor system, the *caporalato*, and the violently anti-Black neofascist context in which it functions with impunity. To this, anti-racists like Saviano and Mangano have responded.

SB: In real life, the edifice of Europe is crumbling, and the hitherto privileged white middle classes of Europe who have been smugly content and contained within their more or less functioning welfare states, have seen their entitlements (and many of their understood rights!) slowly but irrevocably eroded. European political and intellectual elites, however, have largely refused to enter into decolonial conversations, which might take their prompt from Césaire's 1950's admonition that "Europe is spiritually and morally indefensible" (13). One of the implications of my argument, on the contrary, is that before going into forward defense, and rallying around the 'idea of Europe' as a model of universalist democracy, the minor faults of which will disappear with time and goodwill, we should step back to learn our history lessons.

The first of the contemporary interfaces to the European border is the so-called 'ominous East,' and the panic that keeps being stoked by the populist media and politicians most massively against Roma and Sinti settlement in North-West Europe may just be a foreboding of a reactionary turn in European politics what with parties like the French Front National and similar organizations gearing up to winning substantial votes in national and the European parliament. The second interface is the Eastern Mediterranean land mass—with more and more migrant refugees coming in through the arduous land passage; the third, and most conspicuous is the Mediterranean itself. This in-migration to Europe has been growing exponentially in numbers because of the fact that the South Eastern Mediterranean has become a war zone, a death corridor for its civilian citizens. The debate about these recent war refugees would deserve an article of its own. Suffice it to say here that—even though racism, maltreatment, indifference and lack of social support are obviously being dealt out to war refugees (e.g. from Syria), there is a telling split in the popular response between reactions to war refugees (and therefore also in the willingness to support their claims!) and to African "boat people"—the latter having 'only economic motives' (which are of course base motives in the media representations) to drift towards Europe, or so the fable goes.

The intercontinental sea basin has become a veritable frontier security industry, massively resembling a military, or a prison industrial complex. The aims of this industry: to 'protect' the Southern European border against what is being dubbed 'irregular and illegal migration flows' from the African continent, has been subject to a general political European consensus, with minor internal differences, and with only scattered grass roots protest against all too atrocious intricacies of border patrolling. What I am suggesting is to spend considerably more critical attention to the history and present of how the legacy of the white European early

modern production of Black *social death*, and the philosophical disappearance of the white European role in modern transatlantic enslavism has created a kind of perverted frame for the discourses of Black migrations to and within Europe. Europe is, in those contemporary discourses, constituted as a white homogeneous borderland of post-Enlightenment democracy that has to respond to contradictions, differences, and an aggressive impact from without; and not as a social, cultural, physical and virtual space for which enslavism and colonialism have acted as, and produced constitutive contradiction within. Beyond suggesting this theoretical perspective, I also offer some thoughts on the urgency of decolonial, de-enslavist transdisciplinary research and institutional pedagogy, because the abjection of Blackness is closely tied—in political, cultural, social and philosophical terms—to the European politics of white identity, of which the European academic landscape is one of the remaining bastions, at least outside Britain. This politics involves the exclusion of the so-called ethnic, and social Others, and the ethnographic gaze on those Others who have for the longest time participated in the making of Europe, but have not been acknowledged as agents in their own rights. This means that—in our institutions which regularly draw to instruction rather uneven numbers of eager Black European students and benevolent but more or less naive white European students—a research-oriented pedagogy needs to be put in place that works by way of teaching white humans to live with the unaccustomed and unexpected urgency of loss, or surrender, of European white entitlement, beginning with questioning their ownership of History, Culture and Philosophy, which needs to be the prerequisite for transcultural, transracial, and decolonial discourse on and in Europe, and its academies.

PKS: Here is where anti-racism works its way into the conversation. As I understand it, anti-racism is a political discourse and form of collective social action. It means many things and is practiced many different ways. It is pro- and at times anti-state. That is there are official state-endorsed projects, and those anchored in civil society with little or no connection to government. Anti-racism often espouses principles such as the rule of law, democracy, tolerance, and human rights whether tethered to the state or not (however the discursive register turns slightly at times to include ideas like empowerment, emancipation, and liberation). Anti-racism on a conceptual level is about constructing a new European citizen, which highlights what I believe to be a struggle between good whiteness (tolerant) and bad whiteness (mafioso-fascist sensibilities). A good whiteness strives for an integrated Italy, an Italy that accepts and properly integrates Romas, Africans, and most importantly southern Italians into the polity. Bad whiteness is represented by fascists and conservative Catholics wor-

ried about the presence of non-Christian migrants. Anti-racism is simply the latest manifestation of good whiteness; a European reclamation project (much like abolitionism and civil rights). At the political level, anti-racism seeks to blur the boundaries of Europe, to decenter it in order to re-signify democracy. The end result is that anti-racist discourse and action is divided along state-non-state lines with the latter often being considered the more genuine and authentic of the two and as a result the more effective.[2] The former being largely depoliticized. Anti-racism has been condemned by both the European Right and Left, setting the stage for a wide array of critiques against anti-racist. Some critiques include the difference between anti-racism and anti-fascism;[3] the primacy of and overreliance on race that anti-racism assumes; the overreliance on US-American models of anti-racism that lead to a facile equation of multiculturalism (i.e. promote diversity rather than oppose anti-Blackness); and the shift from race to cultural, that is, culturalizing structural problems of power.[4]

Some experts believe the utility of anti-racism has run its course because race no longer matters, which is further evidence that the post-racial is global, and more hopefully post-black, while others believe that it has yet to emerge, but within this becoming there is an amalgamated Europe which is antithetical to Blackness.

SB: We need a term. It is really urgent that we find a term that puts the theoretical thinking about modernity as a regime of slavery (to turn Saidiya Hartman upside down) on an 'equal footing' with the Greco-Latin terms that we have for colonialism etc. — if we care, that is, at all to make it visible within the system of education that we are embedded in. I think it is entirely telling that humanist education, including recent so called avantgarde theory, has so utterly abjected slavery from its purview to not even have a generalizable term for it. Slavery, from "slavus" which identifies the 'victim' of the deed, not the deed itself, and also relegates the practice against him/her to the phenomenological particular which may or may not be included in versions of 'history,' but if retrievable at all, then again only as event, as 'come and gone,' not as a structure-generative systematic practice, with a by general agreement necessarily theorizable genealogical function; history, that is, which is by definition, not theorizable, because it is a string of particulars. So we have militarism, so we can theorize wars. Without that frame, capital investments, psychology of war etc., and much more, how else would we be making theoretical statements about, say, Vietnam? We can theorize colonialism, because the practice existed in the modern arsenal, so we have a term, even though it has to be re-appropriated critically and agonistically. And only because

we have that generalization, can we successfully critique specific events, like the first landing of the English on the West African coast, which would otherwise mean nothing, or entirely different things. Slavery, that is, exists in our imaginary only as an isolated event, since our very language, as psychoanalysis has told us, has axed it from our inner and outer world of *modern critical thought*. The 'event' can be ever more described, and historiography, at this point, fills libraries, but it does not automatically translate into theoretical critique, and that is not happenstance, but has method, and purpose. The humanist subject is supposed to remember, address, articulate, empathize with, rejoice in, question the brutality and elicit other particularly emotional responses to the situation, the imagined 'event' of being in slavery (and that phenomenon, that limit event—in an act of perverse theft—has helped to theorize human suffering and bondage but never its own practice of putting a Black sentient being (Wilderson, "Biko" 1-23) in that situation. So, in German, we have Sklaverei, which is the state, the history, the event, the phenomenon without an agent, but not *Versklaverei*; in English ditto: slavery, not *enslavism*; in French esclavage, but not *esclavagism* (or whatever they could have come up with). Does that mean we only have theoretical, generalizable terms for things that have already existed in positively invested terms in the modern humanist arsenal as in colonialism as civilization, as in patriarchy as the biblical golden rule, and we have those terms, because we were sort of gracefully 'permitted,' in the universities, to twist them to our ends— because that entailed staying within the frames erected for us?

New Ways of Thinking: Black Study in Europe[5]

Our conversation moves on to the idea and importance about creating a hermeneutics of absence and a pedagogy of the trace.

PKS: Scholars often deal with the African migrant or Black European (yes, an oxymoron) in one of two ways. First, they enclose him/her within history, the past. In doing so, they are unable to confront him or her with the external world and thus can only deal with historical, not existential, problems. Second, scholars far too often understand anti-Blackness in Europe within the parameters of political economy; a conflict over economic position. For example, the "Charter of Lampedusa" is solely economic in its orientation, that is, Fortress Europe is namely the result of economic interests that serve late capitalism. More specifically, the Charter understands "colonial relationships" only in economic terms. The Charters constitutive language is made up of "market rules," "inequality," "exploitation," "marketization," "class division," "outsourcing," "labor market

needs" and much more.[6] Although this reading is productive, at times, it does not explain what underwrites the structural positionality of Black European suffering. Political economy does not explain why Black people have no, and never have had for that matter any juridical, political, civil standing within the EU. To work from the sole standpoint of political economy, is working at the expense of not being attuned and attentive to the libidinal economy of anti-Blackness—that is the ways in which antiblack animus is distributed throughout Europe. In many ways, horrific acts like those that have happened in Lampedusa and elsewhere are embedded in a desire and pleasure to punish, which continues to facilitate the ongoing positioning of some sentient beings outside the realm of the Human. As Charles Mills has observed, "If the white workers have been alienated from their product, then people of color, especially Black slaves, have been alienated from their personhood" (xviii). Or as Frank Wilderson III has cogently observed, "The world is unethical due to its subsumption by the slave relation […] not between the worker and the boss but between the Human and the Black" ("Biko" 104). In short, this assumptive logic is predicated upon the authority of Europeanness/whiteness; the European that is "overrepresented as the generic, ostensibly supracultural human" (Wynter 288) and therefore precludes any understanding of the substantive gravity and impact of antiblackness.

SB: Black Diaspora Studies have produced a wealth of historiography of Euro-American modernity with respect to the productive function the transatlantic enslavement trade and New World slavery took on in their constitution, development and constant economic, social, cultural and philosophical (re)articulations. This relatively recent critical discourse has only of late slowly trickled into adjacent humanities' disciplines and—to a surprisingly hesitant degree—into European philosophy, and critical theory. Thus, even though slavery as an object of historiography has become one of the best researched phenomena of the Western world, other disciplines have been largely resistant to engage the connection between slavery, modernity's Enlightenment and its transatlantic history. By way of carefully maintained disciplinary boundaries, an examination of this connection has hardly reached beyond scattered admissions of modernity's so-called 'paradox.' An interdisciplinary field able to address the manifold political, cultural, and epistemic questions arising from an observation of this intricate interdependency, beyond national canons and boundaries marked by area studies and their linguistic limitations, still awaits its realization. It is within this imagined interdisciplinary field of inquiry that I want to situate my address of the (post)-Enlightenment concept of the European modern subject, its reign and its borders.

Contemporary Borderlands of Black Death

The conversation proceeds with a discussion on the current debates about Black migration to Europe.

PKS: In thinking about borders, I'd like to make a quick comment on the physical borders as a compliment to the epistemic borders you are evoking. I think what is interesting are the ways in which the southern borders of the European Union have been extended through a process of externalization. In many respects, neighboring countries such as Libya and Morocco have been incorporated, once again, into FRONTEX in order to manage and police African migration and control the EU border. This has largely been accomplished by the externalization of detention centers in these countries. This phenomenon is what Nicholas Mirzoeff called the "empire of camps" ("The Empire"). To this end, the borders of Europe, particularly in the Mediterranean basin need to be conceived as a militarized apparatus; spaces of preclusion/exclusion, containment, and death. Yet, it must be made clear that this apparatus is not new; the border militarism of Europe does not belong to a new order of terror, epistemic, physical, or otherwise.

SB: From here I want to move back to the contemporary "borderland" that has been produced by the European subject as a late consequence of these kind of abjectorship practices. Active mainstream ideology these days, ranging in its proclamations from so-called leftists, as the former '68 intellectuals in France, through many factions in European white feminism to the advocates of the far right, hinges on the imperative to defend European borders—culturally, socially, economically, politically and by various means of war fare—against degenerative and oppressive impact from without. My point, on the contrary, requires learning to read Europe as the 'afterlife of enslavism,' and thus its internal fictions and practices as always already compromised, contestable, and dispensable.

The production of movable thingness re-occurs in the Mediterranean today: a new, necro-political entity has been put, in the most literal sense, into circulation: crucially NOT a recognized Other to the European self, it is entirely abjected by the categories of European borderland subjectivity: a transportable, politically and economically usable, but also dispose-able self-generative item. The African fugitive, both in the metropolises and in the hinterland, has been denied any dwelling in the realm of 'difference,' and 'other' (postcolonialism's key signifiers) but has become registered only as abandon-able item-ness. We need a language to talk about the material, political and cultural interests of the postmodern European bor-

derland subject in this white production and circulation of the Black 'fugitive's' social and, as Wilderson (*Red*) suggests, "civil death"—not to indulge in paradox, ambivalence, alienation and the like repertoire. To return the attention, as Toni Morrison said years ago, from the server to the served will be the challenge: to interrupt the white gaze on the pitiful suffering fugitive, even to disturb the waves of white empathy, washing up when things get all too obviously horrible for Black so-called illegal migrants—something that Aki Kaurismäki's wonderfully made film *Le Havre* (2011) staged so touchingly in his magical fable of small people solidarity across race. Paraphrasing Spillers, a protocol needs to be produced in an academic world largely resistant to that kind of self-examination, of the white European practices of re-abjection of Black life, mechanized, propelled and organized by state apparatuses, institutions and media. Attention needs to be directed to anti-racist, anti-fascist investigations into the discourses and practices of a white continuum that connects seemingly far extreme ends of a spectrum. That spectrum connects the dangerous political mainstream populism raging across European metropolitan cities, and the only seemingly random mob and state violence, oftentimes lethal, against dark-skinned migrants all across Europe, including lynch murders in Southern Italian villages, street violence in Moscow, no-go areas for Black Europeans in Berlin or Kopenhagen, with the FRONTEX policies of Fortress Europe designed and carried out with high and prioritized budgets, military cooperation arrangements on the highest level of command, and a keen media savvy to promote Europe's sanctity against the uncontrolled hordes from poor and Black countries (Mbembe). In my reading of the situation, without an analysis, *and a naming* of white abjectorship, the structural European violence against the fugitive cannot become fully cognitive. And again, let me stress once more that I would like to turn away from an ethnographic documentation of those incidences from the point of view of benevolent, almost proto-abolitionist feeling for the victims of such violence—a stance that white people are most likely to assume if left unchallenged—towards a Black critique of the white subject's position whose well-being has been conditioned, and for some people, staked, on just such practices of abjection. We need to learn *how* to go beyond ethnographic benevolence, as white European teachers, students, intellectuals, and to develop that disloyalty against civilization, that Lilian Smith asked for over 60 years ago.

PKS: Again, the recent forms of gratuitous violence and xenophobic responses by the state and civil society are frequently explained by antiracists as a result of labor tensions, new labor configurations, and the decomposition of national citizenship. Such explanations I do not deny, but

they are only part of a fuller and more robust understanding that features Blackness as impossibility within the Italian state; political economy is only one modality.

Antiblack violence in Italy is not at all a new phenomenon. Rather, it has its roots in Mediterranean racial slavery, Enlightenment thought (i.e. humanism that has relied on the provision of a dehumanized other), the colonial North-South relationship,[7] its colonial legacy, as well as in its fascist and imperial worldview. What we are facing today is a new declination of an older repressed issue. We need to take seriously the constitutive role of Mediterranean racial slavery for modern Europe; the 'Black Mediterranean' as an important unit of analysis, for it is "Europe's aquatic threshold to Africa" (Saucier and Woods, "Ex Aqua" 60). Any look at the account books of the Cambini bank would show that Italy received Black Africans regularly and in significant numbers from the mid-fifteenth century onwards, to labor, but also to serve as a necessary counter-image in the construction of European whiteness and 'civilization.' This we can also get from the halls and iconography of the Aragonese kings of Naples or the ruling houses of Ferrara, Mantua, and Milan. Visual depictions of Black Africans appear with special frequency and ideological and aesthetic power during these decades, and play a leading role in European constructions of difference at a highly charged moment when both colonialism and Catholic evangelization begin to assume more familiarly modern forms. To this end, the Mediterranean Basin is a new and old frontier of Black suffering; a precondition of modern Black suffering in Italy. Put differently, the African migrants of Italy are part of that "rupture" that Brand has observed, "a rupture in the quality of being" (5). The ways in which Blacks are constructed and positioned is both a new and old 'problem.

With this as our frame/backdrop, I want to return to Saviano's op-ed piece, for one begins to realize that the piece is not about Africans and their resistance at all, but a call for Italians to defend their natural and universal rights as humans. I want to recognize the power dynamics at play and the emotional investment involved in the representation of and the identification with the "Other," specifically the Black African in Italy. In her formulation of the difference between watching a violent scene as a spectator and as a witness, Hartman talks about "the violence of identification" (20). Hartman argues that unlike a witness of violence, that is, one who retains a degree of distance between him/herself and what is seen, the spectator of such a scene sees in the pain of the objectified image an image of him/herself. In other words, the spectator's identification with the victim of violence takes place as a process through which a suffering other becomes an object, which then is replaced by the spectator's own self. As result, the Black African becomes invisible and/or recedes into the

background—the suffering body becomes the screen on which the spectator's pain (or loss, and in Saviano's case a loss of focus and rights) is projected. Here, David Marriott is instructive when he states:

> Let me suggest provisionally that fetishism (or at least its structure) always has to do with repudiation and loss. That it commemorates a loss, but a loss that is simultaneously recognized and denied (perhaps it is recognition that is denied?), by substituting a sign, a sign that preserves the loss it effaces like ice preserves the muddy footprints of passersby. And that, reciprocally, the knowledge and belief that sustain fetishism always run the risk of falling prey to doubt, so that as soon as the subject ventures into it, it runs the risk of finding itself somewhere it would rather not be. (215)

Saviano's appeal for Africans not to leave implicitly confronts the rhetorical division between intention and effect in identification. I would argue, pace Hartman, that identification does not always offer an easy way of understanding the "Other;" the structural antagonism is always present. Therefore, there is no way of identifying where the motive to identify, to empathize, ends (or even begins). If empathy is wedded to precarity, then the violence of empathetic identification must be explicated and thought through, rather than unthought. The simple and banal replacement of anti-racism for racism (or even fascism) cannot be taken for granted. The violence of empathetic identification that Saviano experiences is similar to the violence Hartman identifies in the letters of John Rankin. The humanity that Rankin extends to the slaves in his abolitionist letters "inadvertently confirms the expectations and desires definitive of the relations of chattel slavery" (19). In other words, the violence in Saviano's identification is as much due to his 'good' anti-racist intentions as it is to the accessibility of the Black body. Black Africans are deployed in order to illustrate the tension between good and bad Italianness. Thus, rather than a problem of anti-Blackness it becomes a problem of Italianness. It becomes a means of elaborating a positive Italian identity, that is, to reconstruct a positive, anti-racist Italian identity and by extension state; a new multiracial/multicultural Italy. Saviano wants to liberate the isolation of the southern Italian. Black African struggle and resistance become a tool for psychic transformation, which will eventually lead to symmetry for the Italian and reorganization of the human, but not the Black African.

Modernity as a regime of slavery (turning Saidiya Hartman upside down)

Here we muse on the construction of modernity and the violence of empathetic identification as part of the new Europe.

SB: Europe as an empowering fiction, and the free and *bordered* European subject as humanist telos, rose to prominence in early modernity as a tool of political, and epistemic self-empowerment of European white men and eventually also white women. This process itself was structurally contingent on the enslavement trade and slavery which constituted African populations, under that European subject's reign, as a fundamental category of thingbeings categorized as outside human-ness, which fitted neither collectively, nor individually, within the European humanist scheme of sociability. Enslavism (and we do need a word for it!), that is, provided the foil, which enabled the white European subject to "invent the n*****," as James Baldwin so aptly phrased it: that "n*****—in a valid one-for-all signification of abjection—which the human has kept struggling successfully not to become. The breakthrough of poststructuralist skepticism in academia, and the ensuing academic discourse about the subject as constituted in social practices, as an effect of interpellation and as "always out of step with itself" notwithstanding, the European subject's universalist reign keeps re-surfacing, e.g., in much of the recent feuilleton and academic discourse about Europe and its legacy of Enlightenment as a haven of freedom, entitled subjectivity and human rights. This enduring discourse has been kept alive not only in the face of hundreds of years of enslavism and colonialism, but also in our presence of European civilization's massive neo-liberal and global capitalist erosion, as in contemporary Italy, Spain, Greece or Great Britain, for that matter. Derrida, Habermas, Ulrich Beck, Joschka Fischer, are named here as examples to list just a handful of intellectuals who have made it their prerogative to post and defend the idea of Europe as the, however flawed, space of free and human 'Vergesellschaftung,' of a sociability which needs every progressive intellectual's affective response and political and theoretical bolstering.

PKS: I couldn't agree more that antiblack conceit is central to this philosophical corpus. Take for instance, Habermas, who by no means is central to debates on Black migration, but is emblematic as well as symptomatic of the problem you have just expressed. Habermas, without specificity, is often concerned with the erosion of the European state in particular and social solidarity (read white solidarity) in general. However he comes to this understanding via an anti-black orientalism that is anchored in the

prosaic terminology of "underclass;" the degenerate underclass is extremely productive in unsettling the postcolonial European project and hindering its completion. There is always an anti-black impulse that animates Habermas's work (not to mention Zizek's), especially *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory* (1998), for Habermas never attends to the onto-slave or onto-colonial formations of Europe, thus by way of omission colludes with explicit nativist and neo-fascist projects.

SB: The trajectory for this reaches back for decades. Critical theory's affective and epistemic liaison with post-enlightenment theory resulted in an avoidance of a radical historiography of Europe's and the Enlightenment's splitting of the world into humans and Black/slaves, and of their own historical position on the side of white abjectorship, within this split. The assumption of freedom, that is, the creation of a European human subject as the owner of an individual right to freedom and agency, was the self-authorizing gesture of modernity par excellence, just as it provided the philosophical foundations for emancipatory ethical, political and intellectual authorities such as critical theory, Marxism and/or white feminism. Yet this assumption required a massive break within cultural memory. It required a self-inscription, a collective memory, of European modern subjects as not-enslaved and, by automatic and unexamined extension, as opponents to slavery at a historical juncture at which white modernity was in most profitable ways, on all kinds of cultural, social and of course economical levels, articulated with the enslavement trade in surprisingly intimate and effective ways.

To come into being, the European subject needed its underside, as it were: the crucially integral but invisible part of the subject has been its *abject*, created in the European mind by way of racialized thingification—the African enslaved—an un-humaned species tied by property rights to the emerging subject so tightly that they could—structurally speaking—never occupy the position of the dialectical Hegelian object as other, and remained therefore outside the dynamics of the human. Hegel's idea of the struggle between self/master and other/slave, when travelled through the transatlantic realm, and particularly in its post-Kojevean reception in white philosophy, allegorized slavery into a seductive model of ongoing mental hold over European cultures, by idealizing the opposition, by severing the signifier from any New World referent. Thus, it celebrated the modern European subject as "former Knecht/slave" who has overtaken his master (that is, feudalism), who has mastered mastery, as it were. This argument eschews the fact—detectable only from a Black post-slavery angle—that the previous "Knechte," as modern free subjects, had enabled themselves to become masterful subjects not only by their suc-

cessful struggle for "liberté, egalité et fraternité" in Europe, but also by way of the colonialist regimes of enslavism abroad. As the popular English hymn has it: *Brittania rule the waves, we Englishmen never shall be slaves*—the fact that in order to rule the waves, *owning* slaves became an instrumental, useful and productive way of ordering affairs, has become covered over by the enduring legacy of the Hegelian master allegory. The free subject of Europe gained this very freedom, this 'mastery' of his (and eventually her) destiny by the creation of a mental, physical, political and social border around the free human, which was marked and maintained by the existence of the Black/slave, by the free subject's 'n*****' In an entirely undialectical relation to the free subject, this thing-species was *structurally severed from human subjectivity* and abjected into what Patterson famously called the state of "social death" (Vergès, Patterson, Wynter).

PKS: Might we call this, pace Hesse, an onto-slave formation?

SB: Certainly, in the sense that European subject formation has been intricately connected to notions of property, including property of enslaved being. Possession (of self, and other) was the sine-qua-non for human freedom; which meant that the ones who found themselves possessed, could by reverse definition not access free European subjectivity nor even Europe as their proper realm. Thus, the Enlightenment, with its impetus for individual self-ownership, self-responsibility, subjective and objective rights to freedom and productive self-realization, learned to operate within a system of a large-scale racist parasitism. Seen from a post-slavery perspective, from the position of the enslaved, that is, the modern European subject is as much the subject of revolution, as it is the product of enslavement—no slave, no human, as Wilderson (*Red*) would say; the regime of enslavement, to paraphrase Hartman, was essential to the formation of modernity, not its somehow paradoxical excess, not an unwanted, shameful, and disowned by-product.

This dis-ownment has reached far into contemporary theory, and here I want to give but one example. If one needs to maintain that the enslaver ship seems to be at least the necessary correlate to the *Lager* as the prototypical modern paradigm as far as the white affordability of unchecked violence is concerned, it becomes a theoretical problem that Agamben's influential refusal to engage in the early modern history of enslavism effectively hides the Black/slave from view. Thus, in a lecture delivered at the *European Graduate School* a few years back, Agamben describes the eclipse that politics has undergone in the state of exception. Instead of leaving a space between law and life, the space where human action is possible, the space that used to constitute politics, he argues, politics has

"contaminated itself with law" (n. pag.). Because "only human action is able to cut the relationship between violence and law" (n. pag.), it becomes increasingly difficult within the state of exception for humanity to act against the State. From the point of view of the Black/slave it appears that this constellation of law, on the one hand, the state of exception aggressing bare life, on the other hand, and politics in the 'space between,' the diminishing cracks of possibility—could be recognized philosophically as valid description of a threat to the human, so that speaking of an eclipse in the late modern world might indeed be descriptive. The sentient thingness of the early modern Black/slave—by contrast—has entered neither zoe, nor bios—since as shippable item, the Black/slave never even made it to the status of belonging to an oikos, and transgression against 'it' does not exist in the modern register. For the "n*****" as Ronald Judy has also argued, the absence of even a possibility of "rights" has been the constitutive mode of being, and not the shock of an eclipse (88-107).

In their basic denial of the generative impact of transatlantic slavery, critical philosophies of modernity have been marked by repetitive configurations of split white consciousness, and ethical avoidance. Social critique has used the slave trade and slavery only in metaphorical ways. In the abstract, slavery provided the modern symbolic with an intricate apparatus for the formulation of privilege, liminality and abjection. But critical theory has avoided searching for the traces of its own historical rootedness within this philosophical and political *regime of* European *freedom of and as ownership*. It entered an exclusive dialogue with the cultural history and philosophy of European (post)-Enlightenment, rather than with critical approaches generated by Black knowledge not always posing as "theory"—ranging from 18th-century slave narratives to recent Black interventions—which have questioned the naturalized universality of the European subject's epistemic reign, by way of putting enslavism at the center of their investigation of modern Europe (see Hesse). Neither Marxism, psychoanalysis, nor Foucauldian theory, nor the Frankfurt School, nor poststructuralism and gender theory have extensively addressed the genealogy of Europe and its subjects created within human practices of enslavism. To understand the intricate psychic, social and intellectual mechanics of European modernity's culture of self as ownership, and the role the human European subject has played in its articulation and (re)production, thus becomes the aim of much needed thick description.

PKS: I think because of this elision certain social movements fail to understand what is at stake and get seduced by the affective positioning of activists such as Saviano and others. Rather than deal with the human/slave distinction, empathy with 'other' humans is used as the access point for

many European activists. It is at this point that Hartman is valuable because her work illustrates the double-edged nature of empathy, as in, sentimentalism's punitive humanization of the slave/African. In this sense empathy must be seen as an extension rather than the reversal of dehumanization; embedded in anti-racist work is an omnipresent negation of the Black subject. Again, similar to Rankin, Saviano attempts to bring suffering near in order to create a shared experience of suffering. I think Saviano is attempting to make an affective relation, that is, to create empathy, so as to generate action. Here is the rub: an affective relation does not need to be established for a relation already exists due to racial slavery, but the relation is not affective; instead, it is "acquisitive" (Fanon 128). But affect can only turn to events and events cannot by definition elicit cognition of the structural antagonism that underwrites the lived African experience in Italy, that is, social death. Implicit in Saviano's call for Africans not to leave is "a calculus that requires black death" (Sharpe, "Three Scenes" 146). A subtractive empathy is co-created.

To engage with a structure of inquiry is to cut through thick and deep layers of a dominant cognitive machine that suggests a benevolent all-accepting Italian state; a new Italy that has shed its Fascist skin once and for all. However, in order for Blacks to be part of the Italian state and civil society this requires a paradigmatic shift similar to that which was experienced in Italy in the 1400s. We might do well to keep in mind Joao Costa Vargas' observations about Brazil, "the optimistic national project and its attendant ontology […] are deceptive inasmuch as they consistently produce black social death" (5).

To this end, the reaction of anti-racism in Italy should concern itself less with turning fascist and xenophobic thoughts and practices on their head and become more concerned with the ways in which the human, read universal western subject is constructed within the contradictory tradition of modern European Enlightenment philosophy and daily thought and behavior. As Balibar has remarked, "who you are in a certain *social world*" matters (200), a fact Fanon pointed out decades earlier. Similar to antislavery and civil rights ideology and practice, anti-racism targets the effects of anti-Blackness rather than the process, the act(s) that have made sentient beings into receivers of violent gratuity. To this end, anti-Blackness is not simply derivative of organized crime or fascist elements, but rather is constitutive to multiculturalist and Leftist iterations of the European project. Again, we might recall Césaire's cogent/brilliant observation, "Europe is spiritually and morally indefensible" (32). Similar to Robert Gooding-Williams, pace Nietzsche, I think we need to be careful not "to flatter European culture, but represent it as the […] overdetermined product of slave morality, cruelty, decadence […]" (132). Let it not be lost that the African resistance to Mafia violence and disavowal is an illustra-

tion of a Black Radical Tradition that constantly seems "to live through subjection" (Sharpe, "Response"). There are counter narratives that suggest possibilities. However, this can only be fully understood if oriented toward ethically confronting anti-Blackness. Otherwise we fall back into what Saidiya Hartman emphasizes as the "slipperiness of empathy" (39). Hartman posits that empathy with Black people is rooted in imaginings of their white body in the place of a Black body. This type of empathy this "phantasmic slipping into captivity" (21), deletes the Black subject resulting in objectification; indeed, so long as the white Italian subject occupies the position of humanity.

SB: An archival textuality of the suppressed and dis-remembered controversies in (early) modern societies will have to be recuperated, dating back to the 17th century, around who could emerge as a European human subject—in order to extend existing protocols in various disciplines of how European freedom has been articulated as white self-possession and agency, and in order to position *an ethics of bearing witness* over and against critical theory's narcissism. How to re-think freedom and human articulation in terms other than as 'bordered in' by self-possession, undeservedly read as a universal opposition to the possession of beings? This has become urgently important now that the Enlightenment has become vivified within the discourses of European superiority, no matter how 'weak' that alleged superiority seems to have become. Theory needs to account for its own groundedness in the "rotten" (Césaire 32) character of Enlightenment, otherwise it will not be productive and useful for reading the post-postmodern globalized European moment. Even a radically critical self-reflection of a modernity however much shaken to its foundations by 20th-century fascism, has mostly chosen to ignore the split subtext of its own history, the access to which was laid open most obviously in the moment of the Haitian revolution—which is tellingly the one moment that has gone missing from European memory of Enlightenment. The absence of this moment in European white self-critical reflection dominates even postmodern critique and still binds white European thinking to taking recourse to an *innocent* modernity, as it were. By contrast, we need a reading practice, particularly with the next generation of European students, which enables them to understand the *constitutive, pervasive* and *ongoing* European trajectory of the abjection of being, which precisely keeps affording the accumulation of rights and agency for the white European subject.

I want to think about early modern enslavism as that which—if one could do something like a socio-psycho-gram of white capitalist empowerment—needs to be analyzed as the major propeller of modern capitalist

mental and psychic constituencies. If the practices and discourses of commodification and propertization (post Locke), the learning, grasping and materializing of the "world" as *ownable* have been generally acknowledged as the characteristics of (post) modern capitalist societies, then the violent making of "sentient beings" (Wilderson, "Biko" 104) into package-able, shippable, transportable, and possess-able and as such voluntarily transgress-able, financially accountable items becomes paradigmatic. As the primary site of financial networking, crediting, speculation, insuring, of profit and calculation—as we know most graphically from Ian Baucom's work—the practice of enslavism must also be considered as the primary psychosocial and cultural, collective and individual training site for capitalist human sociability. To learn how to commodify an always already resistant sentient being might have to be considered the primary threshold exercise to become 'modern' in this white empowerment—because if a human society could achieve that kind of transport (in the physical and metaphorical sense) of 15.000.000 sentient beings as things, and then could manage to abject this practice successfully from a collective memory of its history of human freedom, it must have passed the test of its own emerging system's demands in the most generic way, and nothing could stop that sociability from further world commodification. This must be considered, with Wynter and Wilderson, as the founding practice of the human subject: the global transactioning of a shippable sentient species. It—pace Patterson—differs fundamentally from other traditions of slavery; it not only created social death, but also the globally negotiable, transferable and competitive profitability of social death for the human in a *generative* way. The crucial difference between, say, warlords that kept prisoners as slaves on their grounds, bound to them by "paternalistic" control, and the modern production of social death was the achievement of an abstraction of non-personalized property, item mobility and thus global marketization, and the capitalist inheritability of social death. One could inherit social death as capital, as one could inherit other forms of wealth, which of course entailed a constant and structural reproduce-ability of socially dead sentient beings. I am interested in finding out what capacities the human, as a group, trained him/herself to exert, to be able to carry out such historically crucial endeavor. What I mean to stress, therefore, is the structural difference, the impossibility of analogy, as Wilderson would say, between modern enslavement and other forms of colonial subjugation, domination, or conquest of "the other" people, and peoples by which their respective humanity was called into question, and suppressed. That difference lies in the purposeful and concerted production of *accumulation* and *fungibility* (to use Hartman's terms) of Black flesh, in practices of abstract and concrete marketable separation of this *serviceable flesh* (Spiller's term) from the sentient being of the African. That differ-

ence worked in enslavement, as well as it has been working in slavery's afterlife.

If one acknowledges enslavism as a white supra-individual practice, what has it meant for white European empowerment, not just in the economic, political or social sense, but also in the psycho-cultural, and psycho-historical sense? The problem is how to figure that out in retrospect, particularly, if it has functioned as something of the best kept inner sanctums of white (postmodern) consciousness? What we need is a psychoanalysis of the meaning of abjectification (in the sense of the race-fiction-based itemization of sentient beings) for *the white European subject* who has used the very results of his/her own practices of abjectification, perversely, as the threatening border of his/her own entitlement to self-possession. Thus the most ubiquitous European post Enlightenment liberation metaphors: "We don't want to be slaves!" or "I am not your n*****" mark that white horizon precisely. What I mean to get at is the challenge to think about such white self-possession as learned, trained, acquired, and (ac)knowledged not only in a process of defense and advance against feudal interpellation by the powers of the aristocracy and church rule, that is, as a cluster of ideologies emblematizing the European subject's liberation from overwhelming and restrictive powers— which translates in the 19th and 20 century into further rebellions against subjectivation by the state, the factory, patriarchal power and the tyranny of the symbolic. Instead, from a post-slavery perspective, these discourses and practices become visible as learned, trained, acquired and (ac)knowledged in the collective direct and indirect production of sentient Black social death.

PKS: We must remain vigilant about the ways in which *serviceable flesh* as you just pointed out, sustains the European project, that is, how this *flesh* is simultaneously constitutive of FRONTEX policies and anti-racist movements across the European continent; it is what once and for all the European. In dealing with this feedback loop, the time of European politics is a space of terror; a space that has always been terroristic on the Black body. Thus, any justice if it is to be had, "remains unethical until and unless it is blackened, accountable to and authorized by the slave's grammar of suffering" (Saucier and Woods, *On Marronage* 13).

Concluding Thoughts

It is clear that what signifies Europe in the past and present is anti-Blackness as manifested in both state practices and in civil society; the chronos of Europe is one of Black social death. The slave underwrites six centuries of modernity, yet, few scholars acknowledge this social fact or ontological

reality. Slavery or enslavism is written out of theoretical analysis; if ever, it only comes in at the descriptive level.

Notes

1   See https://calaismigrantssolidarity.wordpress.com (This site links to a whole host of other pertinent websites).

2   See, for example, Gilroy's *Between Camps* (2000).

3   See Gilroy, There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack (1987)

4   See Balibar.

5   See Black Study Group, "The Movement of Black Thought – Study Notes" (2015)

6   See "Charter of Lampedusa." http://www.lacartadilampedusa.org/

7   See Niceforo.

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