

6-21-2007

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Recommended Citation

Woods, Tryon (2007) "The Fact of Anti-Blackness: Decolonization in Chiapas and the Niger River Delta," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*: Vol. 5: Iss. 3, Article 29.

Available at: <http://scholarworks.umb.edu/humanarchitecture/vol5/iss3/29>

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The Fact of Anti-Blackness

Decolonization in Chiapas and the Niger River Delta

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Abstract: This article explores the difference that anti-blackness makes in making linkages between the rebellion in Chiapas and the resistance in the Niger Delta. I use Fanon's insights on blackness and the colonial condition to analyze how these disparate movements are sutured into a global structure of humanity. I argue that the implication of Fanon's treatment of the colonial condition is that while indigenous Americans in Chiapas and Africans in the Delta are similarly situated within the political economy of globalization, they occupy distinct positionalities in the structure of humanity. This simultaneously shared and divergent social positioning is due to the fact of anti-blackness, and can be seen in both the forms of the respective social movements in Chiapas and the Delta, as well as in the different reactions by global civil society to the situations in each location.

*There are so many deaths. One no
longer knows which one to die.*

—S. Labou Tansi¹

*I have no wish to be the victim of the
Fraud of a black world.*

—Frantz Fanon²

This article considers Frantz Fanon's
interrogation of the fact of anti-blackness in

¹S. Labou Tansi, *La parenthese de sang* (Paris: Hatier, 1981), 44, quoted in Mbembe 2001: 197.

²Fanon 1952: 229.

light of the ongoing decolonization struggles in our current historical moment.³ Debt regimes, structural adjustment, neo-liberal military-prison industrial complexes, and corporate impunity are some of the idioms of power through which colonialist legacies and imperialist desires live today. The anti-globalization and anti-war movements have developed eloquent cri-

³This paper would not have been possible without the occasion of the Fourth Social Theory Forum at UMass Boston, March 27-28, 2007. I thank the STF organizers and participants for creating an invaluable learning experience, and I especially want to thank Steve Martinot for engaging my presentation with pointed criticism.

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tiques of the vagaries of neo-liberalism, including the machinations of corporate media and the omnipresence of market relations. By obscuring the black's singular relation to suffering, however, these important challenges serve to reconstitute the anti-black world. To make it plain: when critiques of globalization, such as those proffered by the Zapatistas out of southern Mexico, speak of solidarity with all peoples injured and threatened with extinction by neo-liberalism, they do nothing to undo the Manichean world Fanon shows us. In this "Manichean delirium," the Black is overdetermined from the outside; to use Nigel Gibson's formulation of Fanon, the "Black is body and the body's death *is* death" (2003: 20). In other words, black people experience bodily punishment; they are imprisoned, harassed, beaten, or murdered; criminalized, stigmatized, tortured or killed; impoverished, diseased, exiled, or homeless not because of a particular political economy, nor because of national oppression or underdevelopment. They are not hunted down because they have organized themselves militarily to resist state violence and the designs of capital for the exploitation of their lands, as in the case of the Zapatista Rebellion, the most prominent social movement currently active in Chiapas. Rather, they are subjected to premature death because they are black, and as such, they *are* the violence that must be countered and expunged.

My argument is that Fanon provides us with the conceptual tools to evaluate the role of blackness in differently situated liberation movements. I suggest that employing Fanon's insights on blackness and the colonial condition to consider the linkages between the rebellion in Chiapas and the resistance in the Niger River Delta reveals how these disparate movements are sutured into a global structure of humanity. The implication of Fanon's treatment of the colonial condition is that while indigenous Americans in Chiapas and Africans in the

Delta are similarly situated within the political economy of globalization, they occupy distinct positions in the structure of humanity. This simultaneously shared and divergent social positioning is due to the fact of anti-blackness, and can be seen in both the forms of the respective social movements in Chiapas and the Delta, as well as in the different reactions by global civil society to the situations in each location. This divergence harbors disabling consequences for global human emancipation and underscores the ongoing saliency of Fanon's framework to our present-day struggles.

The following section briefly describes the current situation in Chiapas and the Niger River Delta, summarizing the similar effects of globalization across the planet. In terms of the political economy, the vast differences in history, culture, neo-colonial relations, and geo-political positioning between Mexico and Nigeria matter little when it comes to the subjugation of life to capital in Chiapas and the Delta. What does matter, however, is how each location articulates with the global structure of humanity, with Fanon's Manichean world. In the second section, I chart the relevant dimensions of this historical formation for evaluating the relationship between Chiapas and the Delta. The main question is *how* these differences matter. The final section considers in brief the Zapatista rebellion and its international solidarity movement in light of the situation of living death in the Delta.

GLOBALIZATION IN CHIAPAS AND THE NIGER DELTA

The situation faced by indigenous peasants in Chiapas and Africans in the Delta during our present globalizing era is a crisis in social reproduction. Capitalist class relations need to be continually revitalized through the renewed separation of humans from the means of reproduction in

order to be able to exploit and appropriate their surplus labor (Caffentzis 1995: 18). The extended family and communal relations in land-holding and family life in both Nigeria and Mexico threaten the principle of private property and allow for a great deal of resistance to the disciplinary regimes capital seeks to impose upon labor through the wage system. Social reproduction, then, becomes a critical arena of resistance and therefore a primary target for social control.

Two related features of globalization reveal this assault on social reproduction in Africa and indigenous America: the global energy industry and structural adjustment programs. Oil exploitation has been the primary means of integration with the international system for both Nigeria and Mexico. The boom in oil production spurred by the oil price increases of the early 1970s, followed by the price collapse of the 1980s, revealed deep social dislocations in both societies. In both Nigeria and Mexico, agricultural production declined as oil production expanded, and both nations turned increasingly towards export economies and away from food self-sufficiency (Okonta and Douglas 2001; Collier 1994). Oil production in Nigeria is exclusively monopolized by foreign capital, to the extent that some have applied the concept of the “rentier state” to Nigeria’s political economy (Turner 1980). The rentier state is not sustained by what it produces, but rather on the “rent” it charges for production by others. In this perspective, the entire Nigerian state apparatus becomes a commodity for rent to the highest bidder. Every aspect of the oil extraction process exacts a high toll on the Niger Delta ecosystem, and thus on the human beings who make their survival off of the environment. The Delta is effectively being strangled to death, with environmental destruction, unemployment, disease, crime, and police brutality signaling the reduction of existence to bare life, an illus-

tration of how the post-colonial African is kept in a state of permanent injury akin to slavery (Mbembe 2001).

In Chiapas, the large energy development projects drew peasants and other agricultural workers away from the declining plantations and into the construction sites. Energy development thus changed things dramatically in the Chiapas region: the glut in the global oil market put thousands of Mexican laborers out of work again—the same workers that had previously left the declining agricultural sector caused by the earlier oil boom. The oil price collapse left both Nigeria and Mexico with extraordinary external debts and thus vulnerable to international financial institutions. The inability to meet foreign debt payments led eventually to the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the various international development banks. The privatization policies attached to the SAPs are a primary method of striking right at the heart of the communal systems of social reproduction in Africa and the Americas.⁴ Land privatization has raised the price of food, creating hunger crises for people in both Mexico and Nigeria. In both countries mortality rates and crude death rates have

⁴ Structural adjustment programs (SAPs) are fairly widely understood by now, thanks in part to the anti-globalization movement. In brief: When a so-called developing nation, heavily in debt and structurally ill-equipped to repair itself economically (as a result of colonialism), applies to the IMF for a development loan, the IMF, in turn, provides funds designed only to service that nation’s outstanding debt. The conditions of the loan include structural adjustment: decrease social spending, reduce tariffs, devalue currency, increase spending for police and security, and the privatization of everything from land to water, as well as public services and institutions. The general consequence of SAPs is that the developing nation becomes further indebted, further impoverished, and mired in violence and instability. This overall process is known as control through debt, or “debt regimes.” For a good illustration of this process see the film by Stephanie Black, *Life and Debt* (New Yorker Video 2003).

risen and birth rates have fallen during the period of structural adjustment, with malnutrition-related causes of death most prominent (Cecena and Barreda 1997; Ihonvbere 1994). Energy production and monetarist policies together serve as capital's assault on social reproduction, the central meaning of globalization for people in Chiapas and the Delta.

THE GLOBAL STRUCTURE OF HUMANITY

In *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon makes clear the distinction between domination and colonialism. The difference is that being dominated racially is not the same as having one's humanity expunged. In the colonial condition, the humanity of the colonized becomes the thing that requires justification: as Fanon puts it, not only must the designated inferior race ask who am I, but also, *what* am I? The universe of meanings that colonialism has created, that lexicon of endlessly repeating and entangled opposites, is therefore qualitatively distinct from the structure of the political economy. Although both levels structure the lived experiences of Africans and indigenous Americans, Fanon reminds us that the materiality of the colonized subject cannot be found in labor exploitation or national oppression. Rather, violence provides the materiality of the colonial subject (Judy 1998). The historical circumstances of being "locked in thingness by non-recognition," as B. Marie Perinbam puts it, or in Fanon's words, fixed into the position of the thing-slave, as one who "is condemned to bite himself," means that consciousness is predicated on violence (Perinbam 1982: 20). This section briefly considers, then, the violence that colonialism produces.

As a result of slavery, the concept of freedom in the West developed through its negation, unfreedom. Since to be human is to be free, the emergence of Western mo-

ernity came about through the production of "races." Knowledge about human freedom in the modern world thus needs to be grounded in the historical production of slavery (Patterson 1982). One of the significant meanings of the African slave trade, then, is that violence against the black body is the precondition for the formation of the modern bourgeois state (Wilderson 2005). Africa as a concept remains the metaphor through which the West sees itself—or as Achille Mbembe puts it, Africa is a mediation for the West's self-deception (Mbembe 2001: 3). Africa thus becomes the site of lack, or absence, of non-being, for the West, going all the way back to Hegel, for whom Africa was the place where all that is foreign to humanity is to be found. This non-being-ness is precisely the essence of a slave formation: the slave (the Black) and the slave formation (Africa) are figures and places without history. Being socially dead, expelled from humanity altogether, the slave's central value lies in his or her usefulness: he or she has nothing but an appearance, only a body that the colonizer/master can seize and use as needed. The constituent elements of slavery are thus not exploitation and alienation, but accumulation and fungibility—the condition of being owned and used. The relationship between humanity and slavery is therefore a structural positionality marked by its usefulness for the master/settler. In short, the world uses the black to establish what is not human. Fanon puts it succinctly: "The white man slaves to reach a human level" (1952: 9).

When Fanon writes about how the modern world was formed first through the sadistic aggression towards blacks (slavery and colonialism), he makes it clear that this sadistic aggression is structural because without it white would not be white. But the official sanction against this violence in bourgeois democratic culture turns this structural violence into impermissible knowledge: the awareness of the

necessity of black social death for white civic life must be repressed. This dual terror—the violence and its denial—also reveals the double movement that is at the heart of the colonial project. Fanon explains this double inscription at the level of ontology, of being-ness. “A feeling of inferiority? No, a feeling of nonexistence. Sin is Negro as virtue is white” (Fanon 1952: 139).

[E]very ontology is made unattainable in a colonized and civilized society... Ontology—once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside—does not permit us to understand the being of the black man. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man. Some critics will take it on themselves to remind us that this proposition has a converse. I say that this is false. The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man... In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty... On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. (Fanon 1952: 109, 110, 112)

Here Fanon reveals a number of things about the double movement of the desiring machine of colonialism. First, in linking “colonized and civilized society,” he is making clear the imbrication of each in the other. Second, this imbrication is also an intimate coupling in which civilized society consumes colonized society through a

violence that turns the body into flesh, desired and despised, “seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship’s hole, fallen, or ‘escaped’” (Spillers 1987: 67). Third, this sadistic aggression, writes Wilderson, “is violence that destroys the possibility of ontology because it positions the Black within an infinite and indeterminately horrifying and open vulnerability, positions her/him as an object made available (which is to say fungible) for any subject” (2004: 4.8). What has been stolen is the flesh, reducing the captive body to a thing, “becoming *being* for the captor” (Spillers 1987: 67).

Fourth, along with the flesh goes the very semantic field upon which one can be imagined to be human. Ontology, the world’s semantic field, is sutured not simply by white supremacy. More specifically, it is held together by anti-black solidarity. The distilled meaning of Fanon’s meditations, then, is that in an anti-black world, two principles of value prevail: (1) it is best to be white and (2) it is worst to be black. As Lewis Gordon (1997) explains, when one fails to achieve principle one, then at all costs avoid “falling” to principle two, embodying blackness. To be black in an anti-black world is to be subhuman, making normativity a function of distance away from blackness (Gordon 1997: 76-80). The combined force of Fanon’s treatment of racism is that the colonized world, the world of Western civilization, the world slavery constitutes, the anti-black world, is one of everyday absurdity. As Fanon puts it in *Black Skin, White Masks*, when the black enters the space, all reason immediately evacuates.

HEGEMONY’S SUBJECTS VS. THE POSITION OF THE UNTHOUGHT

The imposition of neo-liberal structural adjustment policies in both locations connects Nigeria and Mexico on the basis of a

common suffering under the force of capital. The violence necessary for the extraction of resources in a global capitalist system means that death is a daily feature of life in the Niger Delta and in Chiapas. Shared experience in the realm of the social, however, is not necessarily indexical of a shared position in the realm of the structural; in other words, while black Africans and indigenous Americans may be both exploited by the relations of capital, they do not perform the same usefulness in the structure of humanity. But were not Native Americans slaughtered and used towards the purposes both of Spanish imperial conquest (European civility) and the modern bourgeois nation-state of Mexico (modernization, revolutionary nationalism)? Do not the Zapatistas themselves emerge from precisely these ongoing relations of genocide, in which the Mayan Indian is the sacrificial host on which the parasitic nation-state feeds? Is there a difference between enslavement and genocide—that *matters*? I turn to Fanon's conceptual framework, elaborated in the previous section, to bear on this set of problems.

Indigenous Americans were incorporated into a world already formed through anti-blackness. Through the centuries-old trading and cultural relationships of the Mediterranean, the Moors in Spain, and then Portugal's predatory journeys down the coast of Africa in the early fifteenth century that inaugurated the Atlantic slave trade and brought dark-skinned Africans to Europe, Iberians in particular had long become familiarized (in their way) with blacks by the time they encountered the indigenous peoples of the Americas. The Spanish arrival in the Caribbean and the Mexican mainland was the occasion for a protracted and tortured conflict within Spanish society regarding the Indians. The problem for the Spaniards was how to morally justify enslaving and killing the Indians. This dilemma produced the famous debate between the Dominican

friar Bartolome de Las Casas, who argued that the Indians were free subjects of the Crown, entitled to the full rights of its protections, and the Spanish jurist Juan Gines de Sepulveda, who claimed that the indigenous people were not human beings and could therefore be enslaved or killed according to Spanish prerogative.

This discourse on the humanity of the Indian is revealing when read in terms of its violent juxtaposition with the African slave. Whereas the Indians gave the Spanish pause—ethically, morally, and ontologically—there was no such pause in relation to Africans. As Saidiya Hartman puts it, the black body constitutes “the position of unthought” (2003). Indeed, while Las Casas and Sepulveda were engaged in heated debate regarding whether the Indians could be enslaved, enslaved and killed, or just killed, the African slave stood by, his or her brethren having already been extensively enslaved, killed, and profited from in order to make possible the conquest of the Americas in the first place—in other words, posing no ethical dilemma for the Europeans.

What we should glean from this and other moments of ethical juxtaposition is that this black stand-by, *the position of the unthought*, offers the condition of possibility for European ethics. Las Casas' “compassion” for the Indians is much celebrated. In fact, Las Casas is seen as the “father of human rights” and the originator of liberation theology in the Americas. In 1989, the current bishop of San Cristobal de Las Casas in Chiapas, Don Samuel Ruiz Garcia, a prominent supporter of the Zapatista uprising, established the Human Rights Center Fray Bartolome de Las Casas, a non-governmental organization dedicated to addressing the human rights violations suffered by the indigenous peoples of the region. The existence of a human rights center in Chiapas named for Las Casas is ironic for the present study of the relationship between the Niger Delta, historically a

major port of departure for African slaves to the New World, and Chiapas, given the fact that Las Casas was himself an owner of several African slaves. Las Casas, in fact, proposed the introduction of African slaves to the Caribbean islands as a mechanism to spare the Indians the heavy labor which was destroying them (Hanke 1975: 9). Although the friar later repented his position on African slavery, he never crusaded against the mistreatment of the African as he did for the Indian. Seeing no appropriate replacement for the black slave other than the Indian, Las Casas failed to propose an alternative and thus effectively condoned the Atlantic slave trade to the Americas. *If you cannot be white, at least do not be black.*

The Indians of the Americas were subjected to genocide, of course, despite the presence of the unthought to provide the basement of humanity to which the indigenous could not sink. In this register, then, genocide signifies an antagonism comparable to that which positions the slave because genocide of the Indian is a precondition for the idea and empirical reality of Mexico, much as the slave permits the emergence of the modern subject. The presence of the black, however, means that there are two distinct grammars of suffering available to the Indian: sovereignty and genocide. The sovereignty modality of suffering is an acceptable category of legibility for Western civil society: white supremacy can comprehend Indian subjectivity in terms of sovereignty because treaties are forms of articulation, discussions between two groups recognized as possessing the same kinds of historical currency: civility and sovereignty (Wilderson 2005: 12). The treaty relationship captures Indian communities in a clientele status, as a subordinate and powerless member of civil society. In Mexico, the indigenous communities of Chiapas must compose their imaginary and articulate their political demands through the hegemony of the nation-state. The resultant mutual recognition enables

connections, transfers, and displacements between settler and Indian, between civil society and indigenous “nation.”

It is through this bifurcated ontology that the Zapatistas of Chiapas become intelligible to the Mexican national body politic and to global civil society, while the black subject generates no recognition in the socio-political order of the New World. Blackness remains the position of captivity, a status that generates no ontological resistance in the eyes of global civil society, as Fanon explains in *Black Skin, White Masks*. The indigenous peasants of Chiapas are surely engaged in a struggle for their lives, but they do so within a subject-to-subject relationship of domination with the Mexican state, and as such they historically occupy a clientele status with the state. It is this status of citizen and rights-bearing subject—however marginalized—that they currently experience as a loss and are seeking to reclaim. For example, the Mexican state discourse of revolutionary indigenismo produced Indian difference in order to finally absorb it:

Indians may live *in* the nation—indeed, they are the very precondition *for* the nation—but they will never be *of* the nation unless they undergo a process of admixture themselves, forgoing their Indian identities for this national mestizo ideal. Thus we arrive at the heart of indigenismo as a strategy for minority rule...to inoculate the modern Mexican nation, to prevent the nation of minority rule from becoming Indianized by the majority ... Indigenismo facilitates minority rule by placing the ideological onus of racial assimilation squarely with the Indian majority. (Saldana-Portillo 2003: 211-212)

The relations of genocide are thus deepened as national identity for revolu-

tionary Mexico becomes biologized through the metaphor of *mestizaje*. Although the Indian was used to authenticate various national projects, including modern development, only the *mestizo* is capable of producing national culture by virtue of his mixed blood. The indigenous are thus incapable of national belonging, a status clearly reflected in their fungible role in national development. Once displaced from the land through massacre, *encomienda*, and privatization, the annihilation of native ontology ensures that Indians confront the relations of force within which they are captive in terms that reproduce the relations of genocide. The modern state uses the land against them, as a mode of estrangement, deepening the fundamental imbalance with the land wrought through the original violent encounter with the Spanish conquistadors. This state of affairs, in fact, would seem to recall Fanon's analysis of the binary world of the colony: the large landowners in Chiapas use violence to objectify the Mayan Indians for personal gain, while at the same time the nation-state treats them as a constituency through land reform and patronage in the national political party.⁵ Upon closer inspection, however, we see that Fanon is in fact referring to conditions where hegemony does not apply at all, even in a schizophrenic way.

Hegemony and sovereignty are essentially cultural processes, and Fanon makes clear that the "cultural situation" of colonialism is based on naked force: "Colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state" (Fanon, quoted in Gibson 2003: 106). Once a space—Africa—has been forged through over five centuries of violent dispossession where the world can go to turn people into objects, then that

place ceases to exist as a place of sovereignty. "I moved toward the other...and the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. Nausea..." (Fanon 1952: 112). The Niger Delta is a slave formation, therefore, a space where hegemony is structurally absent, while Chiapas is an exploited and alienated space within the social formation of Mexico.

This difference is evident in the forms of resistance animating both locations, and in the different responses by global civil society to each situation. The Mexican state's unwillingness to honor the claim for indigenous rights had the effect of pushing the Zapatistas further towards this ground as a primary site of struggle (Speed and Reyes 2005: 56). As a result, they increasingly defined the movement in terms of rights and autonomy. This development in the movement is noteworthy for our purposes here, in two respects. First, laws, treaties, and constitutions—from the EZLN's Revolutionary Law for Women to the San Andres Accords between the EZLN and the federal government—reference the grammar of civility that the European settlers initially used to construct the Indian as "savage." For the Zapatistas, then, to deploy the discourse of the nation-state in this manner is to become legible as subjects within that social formation. The Zapatistas are immediately translatable into Western consciousness through their mastery over its form of literacy, the technology of writing and politico-juridical discourse. With this tactic, the Zapatistas were "heard," but more importantly for the social formation in which they sought to intervene (the nation-state of Mexico), by making their challenge *through* the law and the legal discourse of rights, the EZLN affirmed the interlocutory life of Mexico as a coherent (albeit genocidal) idea (Wilderson 2005: 12). In other words, the Zapatistas accessed, or fell back on, the code of sovereignty with which to make their position intelligible to the nation.

⁵ I do not have the space to treat this dynamic adequately here. For starters, see Rus, Mattiace, and Hernandez Castillo (2003).

In effect, the Zapatistas have scaled down the structural antagonism of genocide to a social conflict within the discursive space of the nation. Civil society cannot be ethically restored, however, simply by shifting its paradigm of resource accumulation and distribution; to produce, as Fanon would have it, a world of mutual human recognition, also requires adjusting the society's epistemological and ontological foundations. The living death of genocide for the indigenous figure, as with enslavement for the Black, can only be grasped by way of a narrative about something that it is not—sovereignty. The point, however, is not that the Zapatistas have retreated from the only ethical stance that genocide demands. Zapatismo is nuanced enough that what appears at one juncture to be a disabling contradiction, turns out to have carved a space for singular life-forms otherwise threatened with extinction in the homogenizing world of the market.⁶ The point is that there was an alternative option available to them at all. This availability is the primary and enduring distinction between the Niger Delta and Chiapas. Although Zapatismo represents profoundly troubling possibilities for the nation-state and international capital, it is *not* an ethical restoration of humanity because it rests upon this silent disavowal of the suffering of the slave and of the genocided indigenous. While Zapatismo may not be an *active* form of anti-blackness, it nevertheless *activates* its ontological structure by articulating with the nation through the nameable loss of sovereignty.

The gritty reality of this situation is that

⁶ For reasons too numerous to identify here but well documented elsewhere, the Zapatistas do present a radical alternative way of doing life. The scholarly production on Zapatismo is extensive. For starters, see the *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, special issue on "Zapatismo as Political and Cultural Practice," 29(1): 2005, available online, <http://www.humboldt.edu/%7Emc92/accionzapatista/ZapASPpoliticalPractice.html>.

as the Zapatistas access the universal language of liberal political community, the logos of modern humanity, the Niger Delta recedes further into non-existence. In contrast to the Zapatistas, the discourse coming out of the Delta has not prominently featured calls for greater rights and inclusion within the Nigerian political body. Instead, it has explicitly linked the struggle against a neo-colonialist state and multinational corporations to a longer history and broader picture of imperial conquest. A leader of the Ijaw-based Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force recently explained: "We were forced into Nigeria by the British colonialists. We are not Nigerians—there is no such nation as Nigeria" (*Al-Jazeera* 2004). Direct challenges to the social order in the Delta have taken the form of kidnapping or killing foreign oil workers, attacking and disabling oil production infrastructure, and sabotaging pipelines for the illicit market in fuel. Military repression is intense, regular, and extensive—the historical timeline is dotted with numerous massacres of Delta communities and constant clashes between the state, the security forces of the oil companies, and various private militia groups.

The spectacle always obscures the mundane, however, and it is the banality of violence that marks the post-colony in Africa. The form of power that governs this space is carnivorous: killing a human being proceeds from the same logic as killing an animal.

Like that of the animal whose throat is cut, the death inflicted on a human being is perceived as embracing nothing. It is the death of a purely negative essence without substance, the emptying of a hollow, unsubstantial object that, falling back into loss, "finds itself only as a lost soul." In other words, the hollow object dies of its own accord. (Mbembe 2001: 200)

The neo-liberal carnivore delegates the killing to the colonized themselves, the negated subject who already experiences death at the very heart of his existence (Mbembe 2001: 201). Under structural adjustment, debt is the ideological mechanism through which the delegated killing in the Delta is understood: the black becomes the “locus of blame” for the inarticulable violence of colonialism and “the site of aberrance” for the repressed violence of the post-colony (Hartman 1997: 133). It is an inversion through which genocide appears as suicide.⁷

Irrespective of similar positions in the political economy of global capital accumulation—“leaving existence by the wayside,” as Fanon puts it—the structure of the world’s semantic field is bound together by anti-black solidarity. Whereas the Zapatistas have generated an enormous transnational solidarity network—“We are all Zapatistas!”—there is no analogous identification by global civil society with the situation in the Delta.⁸ By the same token, whereas the taking up of arms by the EZLN effectively created a space for the Zapatista claims to be heard, the specter of mass black violence in Africa generally elicits shock or revulsion from global civil society. Black violence is illegible because it emerges as if from a void, the place of absence, where loss cannot be named.

My argument has been that Fanon helps us see how the fact of anti-blackness constructs a world, a context for legibility, if you will, in which the Zapatista cause is recognizable, whereas the struggles in the

Niger Delta are not. In conclusion, however, I must take pains to note that this analysis is more a critique of the anti-black world in which these movements arise, than it is an attempt to undercut the Zapatista struggle from the comforts of distance. Although much has been written about them, the Zapatistas are pushing beyond presently documented forms of social organization with a creativity that offers a profoundly radical challenge to the dominant structures that seek to consume humanity. Fully comprehending this process requires being on the ground in the Zapatista communities themselves; I merely offer a deconstruction of the context in which people are struggling to create a new world. In this regard, the unsettling subtext of both the violence in the Niger Delta and the appeal of the Zapatista cause to global civil society is the fact of ongoing black captivity connecting and simultaneously disarticulating the Niger Delta and Chiapas. Anti-globalization, anti-war, anti-neo-liberalism movements and the like will not be successful in creating human emancipation until and unless they choose solidarity with blackness.

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⁷ This insight reached me personally through George Lipsitz, who related that George Rawick once observed that suicide is the last stage of genocide. This analysis is essential for apprehending violence and power on the African continent today, and for the meaning of human emancipation in an anti-black world generally.

⁸ This global solidarity network can be readily seen on the Internet. Also see Olesen (2005).

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