

BLACK IMAGININGS

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There is no possibility of beginning an oppressive world regime using ‘nuanced violence’. The psychological violence of colonialism today only exists as a re-enactment, or a reframing of the original physical warfare between colonialist and colonized bodies, this being the most basic kind of physical violence and theft.

We might understand that the discourse of images, writing and symbols is a parallel colonialism, one that served as culpable accompanier to the central violent interaction of colonisation. However, as we understand this notion, we must observe that the classic colonial process of inflicting first physical violence, and then psychological violence is, in the image-world, impossible, because symbolism’s original scope for violence is, and has always been in the psyche. Thus we must recognize the idea that in the contemporary world, symbolism continues to operate in its original form.

So although at this point in time, white supremacist capitalist patriarchal structures psychologically violate the black body, the way these structure are *represented* in the world (through symbolic gestures) has managed to retain this historic lack of nuance and complexity. What I mean here, is that contemporary images and representation still repeat the profound violence of a colonial regime because these entities have always occupied the space of the psychological- and the space of psychological violence under white supremacist patriarchal rule, remains wholly intact and fully protected.

The kind of symbolism that black people are forced to exist between, and on the outside of, continues to reflect the violence of colonial occupation. Here, I refer to a multitude of symbols- yes, the Rhodes statue, for instance, but also the symbolism inherent within every other space of existence- within popular culture, within academic curricula, literature, mainstream music, art, architecture, theatre, etc. White supremacist patriarchal representative culture pervades the contemporary world in ways that appeal to binaries, as Mbali Matandela mentions in ‘Stagnate Debates’ (2015), in ways that continue to be unimaginative.

SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE: LOCATING THE BLACK IMAGINATION

As humans- fluid individuals who create discourse through our daily lives- the ability to self-imagine is essential to our existence. We must be able to consistently see ourselves and understand ourselves in spaces different to those we occupy in the present. This idea of self-imagination is necessary to every sphere of our daily lives, as well as to our lives in a larger context. Imagination allows us to progress, to have vision and to make decisions.

So if we can concur that in order to progress, and even to exist, the individual needs the capacity to self-imagine, then the implications of the world-dominating white supremacist patriarchal symbolism for the black mind, are incredibly interesting. Within blackness, the lack of representation of women and queer bodies makes these positionalities especially interesting. We find ourselves in a unique position- permanently existing in the in-betweens, operating around white patriarchal symbols but, as humans, still having always to create, to imagine, and to progress. If we understand the role that symbols play



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in shaping imagination and spurring thought, then we must ask the question- where is it that blackness, that black femaleness, or black queerness, finds its reference point for imagination? Or is it, in fact, that these imaginations lack the possibility of owning and claiming reference points- that even the origin of our imaginations is uncertain?

When we think about popular platforms of self-imagination, for instance books and movies, we must acknowledge that these forms originate in white hetero-normative patriarchal foundations. In these spaces, we are used to, are mystified by, and are bored of white male protagonists. Confronted by white males in our every encounter with mainstream imagination spaces, we are constantly excluded from seeing ourselves coming of age, falling in love, having mid-life crises, being heroes, being the ‘chosen ones’, trying and failing, trying and succeeding, having families, getting married, defying our parents in favour of our true passion, making friends, taking part in epic car

chases and in epic war scenes, and so on. From an early age, we are forced into symbolically empathizing with our oppressor, for he is represented as the quintessential *human*. While we ourselves understand that our bodies consistently carry out these ‘activities of whiteness’, this action is made invisible through mainstream culture’s consistent strategic failure to represent blackness, queerness, and femaleness. We do not have the privilege of sharing in ‘popular’ imagination.

I am intrigued, therefore, by black imagination. It is an essential human feature that exists despite the un-transformed symbolism in which it is immersed. It does not get its cues from popular movies, music, literature and art. It likely does not get cues at all. In fact, black imagination has always to be an improvisation, a dance in an obstacle course, a performance inside a burning room. It is impermanent and has no binaries to hide behind. In knowing that the symbolism given to us does not include us, we are forced to occupy the many gaps in the canon. Our imagination consists of transitory fragments that piece together to form the most complex of narratives; narratives that cannot ever be represented in the stark and simplistic manners adopted by whiteness. And importantly, narratives that are fluid and difficult to define.

It is no surprise therefore that Intersectionality arose from a situation involving black females. It is in using this approach that we can allow space for the ‘in between’, or the intersections of oppressed individuals, and furthermore, we can acknowledge that in mainstream representation, oppressed individuals *only* exist in these in-between. So however violent the existing symbolism we are exposed to is, I think it is pertinent for us to revel in

the infinite possibility that exists in the undefined, in-between spaces of our own black imaginations. These spaces are inevitably more complex, more potent, more interesting, and more intelligent than the tired mainstream representations of white supremacist capitalist hetero-patriarchy that we have grown so used to.