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DENISE FERREIRA DA SILVA, *A Dívida Impagável*, São Paulo, Oficina de Imagem Política e Living Commons, 2019, pp. 198 (ISBN: 9788577156153).

Published in São Paulo by Oficina de Imagem política and Living Commons Press, *A Dívida Impagável (Unpayable Debt)* is the most recent book by Denise Ferreira da Silva. It is a collection of essays or ‘thought experiments’ that aim to reflect on what she calls ‘racial dialectics’: a perverse logic of engulfment and obliteration which has kept the Brazilian author busy for the past 30 years. Currently, Ferreira da Silva is a professor and director of the Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Social Justice at the University of British Columbia, an associate professor at the Faculty of Art, Design, and Architecture at Monash University (Australia), as well as a visiting professor in law at the School of Law at Birkbeck, University of London. Based in Vancouver, in the traditional ancestral territory of the ‘Musqueam’ peoples in Canada, Denise was in Brazil to participate in the cycle of conferences on the Afro-Atlantic Histories exhibition held at Masp (Museum of Art of São Paulo) in 2018. She was also at the Centro Universitário Maria Antônia of the University of São Paulo to teach the ‘Luz Negra’ (Black Light) course in 2020. Considering her own trajectory in retrospect, the author has been surprised to find the same fundamental concern in contexts as different as Brazil in the 1980s – in which she initiated the studies that would culminate in her master’s dissertation *O negro na modernidade: cor e exclusão simbólica na novela das oito (Black people in modernity: color and symbolic exclusion in the soap opera at eight)* – the United States of the 90s – where she conducted the research that would result in her doctoral thesis *Toward a Global Idea of Race* – and the poetic experiments of the past five years, which comprise this volume.

Unpayable Debt: Reflections on Value and Violence was presented for the first time in documenta 14, in Athens, as part of the exercise *The Fabric of Capitalism* executed with the *Apatride Society of the Political Others*. It was included in the exhibition’s public programs by the curator and trans-feminist philosopher Paul B. Preciado. Translated into Portuguese and published with the support of Casa do Povo in 2019, this collection features a *Letter to the Black Reader from the End of Time* written by Jota Mombaça and Musa Michelle Mattiuzzi, a programmatic introduction,

and three other essays written in recent years. In addition, it contains an expanded version of the original text as the fourth and final chapter of the book, *Unpayable Debt: Reading Valuable Scenes Against the Arrow of Time*, designed based on the Afrofuturist inspiration of American Black writer Octavia E. Butler – whose characters «are deeply involved with everything that existed, exists and is still to be or may or may not come to exist» (p. 114).

To elucidate the meaning of the black feminist poetic image of the ‘unpayable debt’, Ferreira da Silva refers to the notion of the ‘dialectical image’ (*dialektisches Bild*) coined by Walter Benjamin in his unfinished *Arcades Project*.

«Because, as an anti-dialectical image, *The Unpayable Debt* does nothing more than register, when trying to interrupt, the unfolding of the perverse logic that occludes the way in which, since the end of the 19th century, raciality has operated as an ethical arsenal together and before of the juridical-economic architectures that make up the State-Capital pair» (p. 33).

While Benjamin employs dialectical images in his epistemological-political critique of the historiography of the victor, Ferreira da Silva uses an analogous device to philosophize about contemporary issues without relying on the tripod of separability, determinacy, and sequentiality – the three onto-epistemological pillars that, according to her, support the construction of ‘legal and economic architectures’ proper to a capitalist, colonial, racist, and cis-heterosexist modernity for which the expropriation of slave labor is (still) fundamental.

According to the philosopher and visual artist born in Morro do Pasmado, Botafogo, the trigger that prompted her to reflect on the persistence of racial subjugation was the resurgence of police violence, whether in the *favelas* and peripheries of Rio de Janeiro since the end of the 1970s, with the entry of automatic weapons and cocaine into the city, in the USA since 1992, where the then-doctoral student witnessed the revolts that followed the acquittal of the Los Angeles police officers who beat Rodney King in 1993; the rape and torture of the Haitian Abner Louima by the NYPD in 1997; as well as the execution of Amadou Diallo with 41 shots fired at close range by New York police in 1999. More recent were the deaths of Eric Garner and George Floyd, immobilized and asphyxiated by white police officers on duty, in 2014 and 2020

respectively. Despite the singularities, common among them is the fact that legal and penal institutions have, in most cases, weaponized the 'Blackness' of the victims or the places where the crimes occurred to justify the situation of 'mortal danger' faced by the police in front of a black body or in black territory.

Although Ferreira da Silva recognizes the specificities of the social and geopolitical circumstances that mark each of these events, when analyzing these and so many other operations of raciality from a global perspective, she concludes that they have acted as central tools for the development of Capital – both at the local and transnational level. To corroborate her hypothesis, the author draws attention to seemingly unrelated confrontations that have occurred in different parts of the globe in the past 20 years: the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq at the beginning of the century; the conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Nigeria, and Ethiopia; the war of Syria and Yemen, as well as many other clashes which garnered less media appeal located in Haiti, Jamaica, Colombia, Venezuela, and Mexico, but also in impoverished communities in Brazil and the United States. According to Denise, alongside global warming and the neoliberal policies implemented by the respective governments, such wars are at the root of one of the most severe problems that Europe faces today: the so-called refugee crisis, which has been accompanied by a drastic increase in the security and policing apparatus at the borders, in addition to the escalation of hate speech and nationalist identity policies which are mainly aimed at non-white populations from the global South.

In this framework, Ferreira da Silva positions herself critically, but also creatively, aiming not only to expose and recognize the injustices historically directed against black and non-white people, but to activate a mode of intervention or recomposition capable of drawing another image of the world, as well as the possibility of conceiving of it in different ways.

«Instead of providing an analysis of specific cases or a critique of law enforcement institutions, what I do in other texts, my maneuver here is to start by accepting the fact that justice fails in the face of black bodies and territories, which it can only conceive of it as excessively violent, and from then on proceed with an exploration of the possibilities sheltered by such a construction. In this recomposition, this book (*Unpayable Debt*)

also activates a mode of intervention, the black feminist poetics, which not only exposes the perversity of the logic that transubstantiates the results of the total violence characteristic of colonial architecture in natural attributes signified by black bodies, but it identifies and mobilizes the excess that sustains logic as an index of another image of the world and the possibilities it holds» (p. 36).

Beginning with Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* and Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, the chapter *To Be Announced: A Radical Praxis or Knowing (in) the Limits of Justice* aims to reframe the violence against the 'racial other'. It uses as a starting point the claim for justice vocalized in urban uprisings resulting from the death of a black man by the police. However, as the author notes, no justice can, in effect, be done in these circumstances as long as the explanations for its occurrence are still based on traditional categories of analysis such as race and class, exclusively. A critical reader of historical materialism (Marx, Luxemburg), post-structuralism (Foucault, Irigaray), critical theory of race (Gilroy, Fanon), and decolonial studies (Quijano, Spivak, Wynter), Denise «starts by situating the question of justice at the moment of knowing, but in a movement contrary to that of modern knowledge» (pp. 46-47).

Thus, her epistemological-critical proposal bears an ethical promise and a radical praxis simultaneously: a mode of knowing that realizes that every model of knowledge based on the apprehension of objects produces to some extent the precise results it intends to acquire. Therefore, when the tools of racial knowledge are used to understand phenomena such as the London revolts in 2011, they not only explain but also produce and reproduce the same subjects of violence associated with the representation of the inhabitants of these territories, located, for this reason, on the threshold of justice. Willing to «shake this symbolic set-up of the theater of difference, with its stage of Freedom and Necessity» (p. 58), the author suggests a strategy for returning to 'The Thing' (*das Ding*), that is, to Hegel's 'worthless object'.

«The Thing hosts all possibilities, including those not contemplated (announced or deferred); once named, it becomes an object, for example. It is not possible to try to describe the treasures hidden by The Thing. It hosts the possibility of violence, which threatens to dissolve any and all resolutions (symbolic or legal); as a mediator, it necessarily shakes the limits of justice itself» (p. 58).

In short, Ferreira da Silva presents the sexual body of the native/en-slaved black woman as the very incarnation of The Thing – in all its supposed chaos, indifference, and passivity. However, it is precisely there, in the very core of the raw material, from which the ethical promise for the end of (a) world comes, that is, the collapse of a certain onto-epistemological configuration of reality that Denise designates as the Ordered World – as opposed to the Implied World as *Corpus Infinitum*, inspired by Leibniz's description of the universe as *Plenum*. To validate another horizon of referentiality beyond or below the agency of a subject of universal reason, Ferreira da Silva dialogues with Walter Benjamin's *Critique of Violence* and George Bataille's *Accursed Share*. In these two critical essays, written in opposition to certain legal, economic, and political forms engendered by Western modernity, both authors, despite the singularities and limitations, would have, according to Denise, offered perspectives to explore the female black body as a referent of unregulated and not representable desires, due to the excess that manifests itself through eroticism (Bataille) and violence (Benjamin).

With the title *Toward a Black Feminist Poetics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World*, the second chapter of *Unpayable Debt* resignifies the body of the female native / slave as an 'exile of representation', as well as a locus of abundance, creativity, and disruption. Early on, Denise borrows from the African-American poet Barbara Christian the question that is at the root of many of her shared reflections: «What are the philosophical presuppositions that support my praxis?» (p. 85). In delineating what is referred to as black feminist *poethics*, the author attempts to find a means to free the Category of Blackness (Negritude) from the modes of knowing proper to instrumental science (Descartes, Bacon) and universal history (Kant, Hegel) that created it.

«While the Category of Blackness, as an index of a consistent social situation and repeatedly never fails to signify slavery, I propose that it also exposes how the expropriated productive capacity of enslaved Africans continues to produce surplus in the global present. Most significantly, despite its continuous expropriation, black (symbolic and economic) work has not disappeared (as the scientists of man predicted and expected). In addition to the Capital – and its colonial, national and imperial architectures – Blackness signals the creative capacity, a quality

that is only noticeable when the World is contemplated as a *Plenum* and not as a Universe (ordered totality)» (pp. 95-96).

In this journey, resumed in the fourth and last chapter of the book, she refers to the affections, crossings, and transubstantiations suffered and described by the characters of the award-winning science fiction writer Octavia E. Butler. In *Kindred*, the African-American protagonist Dana is vertiginously transported from the present – California in the 1970s – to the past – Maryland from *Antebellum* – and vice versa. Over six ‘quantum’ trips, she is invoked by Rufus – her white great great-grandfather and slave master – whenever he finds himself facing a mortal danger. Thus, in each of her displacements through space-time, Dana saves her slave-owning ancestor and thus her own existence as well – as if the fate of the two were connected in some manner. However, it is not a natural or supernatural bond of karma and redemption, as nothing that she suffers or makes happen will serve to pay off old or contracted debts in a ‘previous life’. In addition, in each return to 19th-century Maryland, her life and body are in danger. She is persecuted, violently beaten, and almost raped and killed on more than one occasion. On her last trip back to the present, the heroine loses an arm. After all, what is the point of risking your life to pay off a debt that cannot be paid?

«By staying alive Dana is not free of debt to her ancestors because once again, nowadays, due to linear time, they are responsible for her existence. When Rufus, her father / owner, threatens her with total violence (rape and death), she pays the debt – getting rid of the obligation to keep him alive and, paradoxically, breaks the relationship because of the need for self-preservation. Ethically, Dana’s debt is an unpayable debt: a moral obligation that she carries, but that she should not settle, since the relationship reconfigured by it is mediated by a legal form, a title, which does not apply to relationships between people (kinship or friendship), that is, modern (equal and free) moral entities. Economically, Dana’s debt is unpayable because the legal form of the title that governs the economic relationship (property) master-slave authorizes the use of total violence in order to extract the total value created by slave labor, which results in descendants of slaves living in scarcity or economic privation. So, yes, Dana has the debt (ethically), but it is not for her (economically) to pay it» (pp. 152-153).

As Ferreira da Silva suggests, each time she reverses the arrow of time, Dana challenges the linear, progressive, and homogeneous chronology in which what obligatorily ‘came to be’ is determined by what ‘has already passed’. By subverting the triad of separability – which guarantees the autonomy and independence of the transparent ‘I’ – of determinacy – which attributes value and property to things – and of sequentiality – governed by Aristotle’s efficient cause principle – it offers a ‘model’ for what should be accomplished – or, at least, *imaged* – by an ethical-political program of decolonization guided by the collective effort to restore the value extracted from slave labor and expropriated native lands – an effort that is not itself divorced from risk, pain, or failure.

Thus, what the philosopher proposes with *A Dívida Impagável* is nothing more than a performative exercise of political imagination, which voluntarily or involuntarily does not reproduce the great narratives that support the Ordered World; instead, it reads and (re)interprets the dialectical images of a ‘fractal thought’, in which the parts and the whole are mutually involved – and affected. Significantly, Denise ends her thought-provoking po/ethical *tour de force* without a conclusive proposition, leaving open not only an invitation, but even an obligation (a debt?) that is heard and that resonates every time her words are read and shared, as they are now.

«Like everything else in the Implicated World, the essays that make up *A Dívida Impagável* are nothing more than a moment, which registers a certain configuration of an endless process. I stop here, before this moment, in this version of a text that I started to write more than thirty years ago; a text that continues to be written every time I share or other people share the proposals, exercises, and formulations that compose it» (p. 48).

(Aléxia Bretas)

JENNIFER C. NASH, *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality*, Durham-London, Duke University Press, 2019, pp. 184 (ISBN: 9781478000594).

Quella proposta da Jennifer Nash in *Black Feminism Reimagined* non è una storia o un bilancio degli usi e degli abusi della categoria di